

Elizabeth George Speare's  
*The Bronze Bow*

Questions for Socratic Discussion  
by Missy Andrews



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*THE BRONZE BOW*



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## QUICK CARD



<b>Reference</b>	<p><i>The Bronze Bow</i> by Elizabeth George Speare</p> <p>ISBN 10: 0395137195</p> <p>ISBN-13: 978-0395137192</p>
<b>Plot</b>	<p>18-year-old Daniel, orphaned in childhood as a result of 1<sup>st</sup> century Roman oppression of the Jews, struggles against his enemies for liberation.</p>
<b>Setting</b>	<p>1<sup>st</sup> century Judea, the time of Christ, among zealots and dissidents. The young manhood of the main character.</p>
<b>Characters</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Daniel bar Jamin, the protagonist</li><li>• Leah and grandmother, Daniel's family</li><li>• Joel and Thacia, Daniel's friends</li><li>• Rosh, Samson and the other zealots</li><li>• Jesus</li></ul>
<b>Conflict</b>	<p>Man vs. Society</p> <p>Man vs. Himself</p>
<b>Theme</b>	<p>Bitterness</p> <p>Forgiveness</p> <p>The power of love</p> <p>Redemption</p>
<b>Literary Devices</b>	<p>Imagery</p> <p>Metaphor</p> <p>Simile</p> <p>Allusion</p> <p>Foreshadowing</p> <p>Symbolism</p>

## QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: SETTING



### **Where does this story happen? (1)**

The action of the story ranges from the countryside of ancient Judea to the bustling city of Jerusalem, where political factions struggle for control of the city and plot the overthrow of the Roman regime. The flashing sunlight and sultry heat for which the region is known mirrors the fiery spirits of the main characters. At the same time, the cloudless sky and serene scenery of the area give no hint of the fomenting rebellion:

“Just below them the village clung to the rocky slope, the dark block of the synagogue showed clearly among the clustering flat-roofed houses. Around it circled the gay-green olive orchards and the fresh, clear green fields of grain, banded by purple iris and shining yellow daffodils. To the south lay the lake, intensely blue. To the north, beyond the line of hills, through the shimmering, misty green of the valley, the silver thread of the Jordan wound up to the shining little jewel that was the Lake of Merom” (p. 10).

Even so, the Temple, the anchor of Jewish life, remains a dark spot on the terrain, a brooding shadow in the sunny ambience of the story.

The fact that the setting of this story is a real place intensifies Speare’s descriptions. The story unfolds among the Israelites, the Biblical people of God. Downtrodden and oppressed, these people cling to prophecies preserved by their forefathers of a Messiah, a great deliverer, who will free them from the ruthless oppression of the tyrannical Romans and deliver the Kingdom of Israel back into the hands of a Davidic ruler. Even as all Israelites await this event, factions abound among them. Some believe that their God Jehovah will deliver them through peaceful means and willingly bow the knee to their

oppressors. Others flout the Roman rulers and covertly organize themselves into military platoons, preparing for a day when they will take Jerusalem back by force like the famed Maccabees. Into this world comes the humble carpenter Jesus of Nazareth. The historic ramifications of His life lend deep significance to the events of this story.

### **When does this story happen? (2)**

The main action of the story takes place over the period of one year.

Just prior to the events of the story, Israel fought against the vast and growing empire of Rome and lost. The famous Roman general, Pompey, took Jerusalem for Rome in 63 BC. Some 34 years later, Herod, a Jewish convert, was appointed king of Judea by the Romans. This Herod rebuilt Jerusalem, creating a temple complex that mocked with its sheer size the previous temple of Solomon. Herod's temple became a focal point for tension between various Jewish factions. Those Jews who favored peaceful coexistence with Rome seemed satisfied with the money Rome poured into building projects in Jerusalem. Dissidents, however, disdained the new temple both for the Roman money that built it and the political corruption that seemed to seep into the temple system with it. These dissidents awaited a Messianic Kingdom of an earthly and political nature. The story's main character, Daniel, waits with these.

Daniel, an eighteen-year-old boy, is just coming into manhood. The story charts his coming of age, as well as his journey to freedom. No longer a child but not yet a man, Daniel wrestles with the events of his past and with the struggles that plague his heart with childlike fervor. He is inexperienced, hot-headed, and imprudent. He has little judgment and nearly no self-control. He broods over his bitterness and anger. However, he is not calloused beyond help; he still yearns for the comfort of childhood friends. His search for a father figure leads him to Rosh, the rugged rebel who leads a band of mercenaries in the mountains of Judea. Calculating and shrewd, Rosh saves runaway Daniel from death so as to enlist him in an army of loyal soldiers. Daniel, needy and confused, accepts Rosh's leadership and remains blindly devoted to his plans to build a zealot army through thievery and deceit. Were Daniel older, his participation in Rosh's schemes would be inexcusable. However, his naiveté and youth excuse him to some degree and make him a sympathetic character.

Daniel's personal hatred for the Romans, which is fueled by the tragic story of his parents' deaths, combines with his anticipation of the coming Kingdom to heighten the tension of the story. In both of these opinions he is representative of many first century Jews. As the story progresses, however, both of these ideas come under scrutiny as Daniel confronts God's plan for the redemption of His people and the institution of His everlasting, spiritual Kingdom. This process amounts to a paradigm shift that confuses Daniel as it did many of his contemporaries.

The anticipation of an earthly, Messianic Kingdom was shared especially among members of a certain Jewish sect, the Zealots. These men refused to await the Messiah patiently while Rome destroyed their beloved nation. Rather, they covertly armed themselves, hoping to establish a ready army in expectation of the Messiah's arrival. The

ministry of Jesus represented a challenge to their understanding. Whereas they had expected a mighty warrior who would set them free from slavery to the Romans, Jesus taught them to “render unto Caesar what is Caesar’s and unto God what is God’s.” He challenged them to “love their enemies, do good to those who spitefully use and oppress you” and to “turn the other cheek.” He explained that His Kingdom was “not of this world,” but was instead a spiritual and everlasting Kingdom. He encouraged them to submit to their rulers, and endure the hardships inflicted upon them, teaching them that the Kingdom for which they longed was already among them. These were puzzling words for the Jews. Consequently, the coming of the Kingdom in the person of Jesus Christ represented a confrontation between God’s spiritual plan for Israel, and Israel’s plan for itself. Speare deals beautifully with these intellectual currents through her characters.

In addition to varying ideas of the Messianic Kingdom, Jesus confronted conflicting ideas of righteousness in his day. Righteousness was a crucial issue for the Jews, who believed themselves called by God to righteous lives. The issue of sin was particularly troubling, since it limited them from participation in the coveted Kingdom. They found remedy for sin in the sacrificial system and in strict obedience to the Mosaic Law.

Jesus challenged the Jews’ understanding of righteousness as outward conformity by addressing the more difficult matters of the heart. Speare addresses this idea in the characters of Joel and his Pharisee father, who are both good, law-abiding Jews. The reader sees their strict adherence to the law played out in their religious hand washing. It is also evident in the inhospitable welcome Daniel receives from Joel’s family because of his uncleanness. Jesus challenges this idea of cleanliness, addressing more pressing matters of inward filth. Joel is intrigued by Jesus, but confused by his marginalization of the religious elements of law keeping.

Speare highlights these issues when her character, Jesus, speaks to a hospitable Jewish woman who is chastised by her peers for offering food to a large crowd without first insuring hand washing as the law required. “Do not be distressed...it was not needful. In this house the food has been given us with love...Let us make sure that our hearts rather than our hands are worthy to receive this gift” (p. 99). In this way, Speare skillfully demonstrates the shift of emphasis Jesus effected, from the external righteousness of the Pharisee to the internal righteousness of the Christian.

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## QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CHARACTERS



### Who is the story about? (3)

The main character and protagonist in the story is 18-year-old Daniel bar Jamin. In the story's past, Daniel was orphaned as a result of Roman oppression. His father, in an attempt to save his brother from imprisonment for failure to pay harsh Roman taxes, was caught and crucified. His mother died of grief. His younger sister, once sweet and open, is thereafter terrorized by fear and demons. Daniel and his sister are left in the care of their poverty-stricken grandmother, who apprentices Daniel to the local blacksmith. A harsh man, he beats Daniel and the other boys who serve him. Daniel finally runs away. On the brink of dying of exposure on the hills outside his hometown, Daniel is rescued by Rosh, the leader of a ragtag band of zealots. This act of kindness earns Rosh Daniel's undying loyalty. Daniel believes Rosh may be the long-awaited Messiah. From Rosh, Daniel learns to steal from rich Jews for the purpose of equipping his mercenary troop with weapons and food. Daniel justifies this behavior in light of the good Rosh will do for the Jews when he should grow strong enough to drive the Romans from Judea. Daniel lives with Rosh and his band in poverty in the hills of Galilee.

Daniel is bold-featured, tall, and physically mature. He shares his Galilean countrymen's coloring, tanned and dark featured. Living with Rosh and the other zealots, Daniel continues to hone the skills he has gleaned as an apprenticed blacksmith. He is strong, skillful, and brave. Because he is indebted to Rosh for his survival, Daniel blindly obeys all Rosh's orders to waylay and rob unsuspecting merchant Jews.

Daniel is not completely without character and education, however. He remembers the stories told by his grandmother about the great patriots of the faith. Although jaded and wounded by his childhood experiences, he remains a zealous patriot. He scorns the Romans who have occupied his homeland and robbed him of his family. In addition to



these stories, Daniel remembers the teaching he received in the temple school. This religious instruction, however brief, taught him adherence to the Mosaic Law, which he no longer obeys.

Not only does Daniel remember his grandmother's stories, he also remembers her person and the person of his sister, Leah. He feels pangs of guilt for his own irresponsibility in deserting them. He remembers his father's fierce loyalty to the family and his act of sacrifice to protect them from the world. These thoughts convict him inwardly, troubling his conscience. At the same time, Daniel fears his family, the responsibility they represent and the love they engender, both of which leave him vulnerable. He resents this vulnerability.

The appearance of Joel and Thacia, and then his old companion, Simon, are reminders to Daniel of the responsibilities and ties to his old life he had decided to forget. They continue to prick his conscience, driving him back to the people he has deserted. They goad him to take up the mantle of responsibility and manhood his father left to him. As the story progresses, Daniel learns the meaning of manhood, and begins to shoulder adult responsibilities. In the process, he finds the dark bitterness that broods in his heart is not the strength he considers it, but instead a fatal weakness that robs him of the love and freedom he desires.

Throughout the story, the most important thing to Daniel is freedom from Roman oppression. He wishes to help rid the country of the despised Roman rulers. Telling his story to Joel and Thacia, Daniel says, "After my father died I made a vow. Maybe they would say a boy eight-years-old couldn't make a vow, a real one that was binding. But I did. I vowed I would pay them back with my whole life. That I would hate them and fight them and kill them. That's all I live for" (p. 82-83; see also p. 80).

Daniel is also motivated by a desire for loving relationships. He longs for a father-figure, a family, and a friend. Over the course of the story, Daniel's desires for revenge and loyalty to his oath become overshadowed by this desire for companionship. Through his relationship with Thacia, he becomes aware that love and hatred cannot share the same breast. Each is consuming, and Daniel is consumed by his hatred. Forced to choose between his vow and love, Daniel finds himself unable to do so. Rather than master of his wrath, he finds himself a prisoner of it. Freed from this prison by the compassion of Jesus, he finds suddenly that knowing Christ is more important to him than his vow. Daniel's struggle with bitterness and hatred is common to man. For this reason, the reader pities him in his isolation and loneliness, and rejoices in his budding maturity. Like Jesus, we hope for Daniel, just as we hope for ourselves. And like Daniel, our only hope is in Jesus.

**Here is a list of adjectives describing Daniel. (3f)**

Galilean  
Hardened  
Bitter  
Hurt/wounded

Violent  
Bold-featured  
Proud  
Out-doorsy

Immature	Patriotic
Hot-headed	Scowling
Angry	Longing
Resentful	Runaway
Irresponsible	Poor
Fearful	Dirty
Ashamed	Curious
Helpless/dependent	Guilty
Needy	Embarrassed
Physically Strong	Hateful
Crafty	Zealot
Jaded	Blindly obedient (to Rosh)

In terms of his self-image, Daniel claims he is irresponsible, and wants to be. He fears responsibility, since it could potentially sap him of personal freedom. Additionally, family ties engender love, and this he fears most of all. For love might make him soft and useless to both the cause of Israel's freedom and his own personal quest for revenge. Daniel hopes to beat the weakness from his flesh as he beats the softness from the metal at his forge. "Rosh did not know about the other things that bound him like cobwebs when he woke in the night. Leah. His grandmother. Thacia! A flush came up over his face. There was no room for such weakness. He raised the anvil and struck the softened metal, blow after powerful blow, beating out his weakness...He would get rid of this flaw in himself!" (p. 111).

Others see something different, however:

Leah responds to Daniel as she does to none other. She trusts him instinctively until that trust is shattered. "Leah's hand in his own was like the hand of a small child reaching out to him in trust and helplessness" (p.118). Joel and Malthace come to consider him a friend and an equal, despite his inferior class and education. Simon trusts in his character, and hopes for his future despite his immaturity and his involvement with the bandit, Rosh. Confident in Daniel's abilities at the forge and his trustworthiness, he places his home and business in Daniel's hands as he follows after Jesus to discover his identity. Daniel's grandmother, too, believes in him. Despite the many years he abandoned his place in the family, she awaited his coming at her death, knowing he would not stay away. "How had she been so sure that he would come? What had he ever done for her that she would dare to believe he would come back?" (p. 116-117) Each of these characters sees in Daniel a gentle streak of character that has yet to be obliterated by his hatred.

Rosh, however, looks upon this as weakness. "...[T]here's a flaw in you, boy, a soft streak. I've seen it over and over these years. Like a bad streak in a piece of metal. Either you hammer it out, the way you'd hammer out a bubble, or you'll be no good to us. When the day comes there'll be no place for weakness" (p.110). And yet Jesus, Rosh's counterpart, sees more than all of these. He speaks to Daniel about his bitterness. "Riches are not keeping you from the kingdom," he said. "You must give up your hate" (p. 225). Finally, when Daniel finds he cannot forsake the sin that grips his soul, Jesus comes to him. "Although he held his breath and made no sound, Jesus raised his head,

and his eyes met Daniel’s. There was no need to speak. Jesus knew. He understood about Leah. He knew that Daniel had rejected him. His eyes, searching and full of pity, looked deep into the boy’s and saw the bitterness and the hatred and the betrayed hopes and the loneliness. And then he smiled” (p. 252).

**Who else is the story about?**

While the story’s conflict seems to center upon Daniel and the Romans, the most important conflict exists entirely in Daniel’s own mind and heart. This conflict is exposed and developed through Daniel’s relationships with two significant characters, Rosh and Jesus. Hailed as Messiahs by their followers, each man approaches the idea of the Kingdom differently. Their presence side by side in the text makes for fruitful comparison. Daniel considers the differences between the two men as he longs for a leader worthy of his loyalty. Below is a list of adjectives that compare and contrast the characters of Rosh and Jesus.

<b>ROSH</b>	<b>JESUS</b>
Savior? (p.7)	Savior? (p.165)
Good man? (p.7)	
The Messiah (p. 11-12)	The Messiah (p.48)
Boss (p.12) Leader (p. 27)	Leader (p.165) Master (p.98)
Brave (p.13)	Fighter (p.47)
Brash/ Bully (p.21, 29)	Intense spirit (p.46)
Strong (p.19)	Strong-faced (p.46)
	Strong (p.57)
Aggressive (p.19)	Gentle (p.47, 99)
Commanding (p.53, 79)	Commanding Teacher (p.57)
	Like a Trumpet Call (p.48)
Demanding (p. 94)	Demanding (p.99)
Forbidding/Scowling/Gruff (p.110)	Warm/ Welcoming/ Friendly (p. 98-99)
	Smiling/ Happy (p.57)

	Compassionate (p.100)
Derisive (p.109) Inconsiderate (p.111)	
Calculating/ Manipulative (p.20)	Not manipulative or self-seeking (p. 166)
self-seeking (p.166)	
Wanted (p.21)	Wanted (p.45)
Angry/ Volatile (p.23)	Not angry (p.48)
	Calm (p.103)
	Serene (p.100)
Careless (p.27)	Sensitive/ Concerned/ Thoughtful (p. 99)
Watchful (p.27) Unknowing (p.111)	Knowing (p.166)
Defensive (p.31)	Not defensive (p.48)
Zealot (p.33)	Zealot (p. 47)
Confident	Sure (p.166)
Dirty	Clean/ Simply Dressed (p.46)
Squat bodied/ thick/ muscular/ grizzly/ bristly	Slight/ knotted arms and shoulders/ hard worker
Small, black eyes (p.20)	Eyes of light, warmth, welcome and friendship (p.98-99)
Infamous	Famous (p.45)
Outlaw (p.13, 79)	Carpenter (p.45)
Perverted Justice (p.106)	
Autonomous/ A Law to himself/ Lawbreaker (p.111)	Law teacher/ Keeper/ Respector (p.57, 48)
Rough (p.110)	Gentle (p.47,99)
Inconsiderate (p.111)	Considerate (p.111)

Talks about coming kingdom	Preacher of coming Kingdom (p.45)
	Rabbi (p.46)
Dark/ Brooding (p. 46)	Inwardly lit, radiant-faced (p. 46)
Lion-like (p.79)	Quiet (p.470)
	Powerful (p.47)
Unafraid (p.48, 100)	Unafraid (p.48, 100)
Controls with disapproval	Contagious vitality (p.57)
	Overpowering (p.99)
	Genuine (p.99)
	Thankful (p.99)
	Sharing (p.99)

Each of these men represents one of the two kingdoms set before Daniel, the kingdom of this world, and the Kingdom of God. Daniel is forced by the events of the story to choose between them, but finds that he is unable to do so. In the end, Daniel is eventually chosen by Jesus to inhabit His Kingdom.

Other important characters in this story include:

Joel and Malthace – These characters are important not only to the action of the story, but to Daniel’s character development.

Samson – This huge slave, loyal to Daniel for his part in freeing him, eventually lays his life down for Daniel, demonstrating true love for him. Such love, foreign to Daniel, compels him and the action of the story as once again kingdoms collide.

Leah – Daniel’s sister, demon plagued, cares for him and represents his responsibility. She stirs love in his heart, though he hates it. This relationship brings Daniel to crisis and exposes the prison his bitterness and hatred have become for him and all he loves.

Simon – Another zealot and a friend from Daniel’s youth, Simon believes in Daniel. A seeker of the Messiah, his kindness and faith in Daniel influence the boy to look into the person of Jesus as well.

Marcus – This young Roman soldier loves Daniel’s sister. Yet Daniel despises him for his nationality. His presence brings further conflict into the story, bringing it to its climax.

**Is there a character or characters that oppose the protagonist in the story?**

***Antagonists:***

The Romans

Joel’s Father

Jesus, in a sense

The young Roman soldier

Amalek, the abusive blacksmith to whom Daniel was apprenticed

**In what way is he antagonistic? What goal of the protagonist is he opposed to? (4b-c)**

The Romans –

The Romans occupy the whole region of Jerusalem, and subject the Israelites to taxation and forced labor in some instances. The Jews resent their presence and control, and Daniel is no exception. His family’s history with the Romans only worsens this situation. For both these reasons, Daniel exerts himself against the Romans, and hates them wholeheartedly. “I live for just one thing – to rid us of our Roman masters” (p. 151).

Daniel’s family history with the Romans is a brutal one. The Roman tax collector had come early to Daniel’s newly married uncle. Because he had splurged and bought his wife a gift in honor of the birth of their first child, he could not pay the taxes. He was a proud man, and did not ask for the help of his family. He was arrested. Daniel’s father and four other men tried to rescue him. In the process, all were caught. The Romans decided to make an example of the men and crucified them. Daniel’s mother refused to leave the cross of her husband. She caught pneumonia from exposure and died shortly thereafter. His young sister was so traumatized by the event that she became possessed by demons of fear. Consequently, she refuses to leave her home, or to be seen by anyone. She hasn’t left her home since she was 5-years-old. Daniel’s grandmother, his sole remaining relative, became the children’s caretaker. Without a male provider, she was reduced to poverty. She sold Daniel to Amalek, the abusive blacksmith, as an apprentice/slave. It was in this situation that Daniel made the acquaintance of Simon the Zealot, and from it that he fled into the mountains.

Joel’s father –

Joel’s father is a learned man who has sided with the conservative majority in the crisis of Roman rule. Rather than cast his lot with bandits like Rosh who hide in the hills and antagonize their Roman oppressors, he hopes to work within the new framework the

Romans provided to establish a peaceable kingdom. He believes the violence that the zealots fomented is damaging to the Jewish people, and refuses to allow the vitriolic poison to infect his own household. To prevent this, he denies Daniel access to Joel and Thacia. Personally, Joel's father holds nothing against Daniel. He somewhat likes Daniel's spirit. He is of like mind concerning the need for a Messiah Redeemer. Yet his approach to this event is entirely different than Daniel's.

Jesus –

While Jesus in no way physically opposes Daniel, nor ideologically opposes him, Jesus' concept of how to realize their shared objectives represents a paradigm shift for Daniel and the other Israelites. Jesus in no way advocates the pursuit of vengeance on the Romans, neither does he advocate a military overthrow of their government. Rather, he suggests the establishment of the kingdom they all await through peaceable means, and describes it as being already present, in fact, in Himself. He cautions Daniel against rash actions, vengeance, and bitterness, encouraging him rather to forgive his enemies. For Daniel, who lives for vengeance alone and whose hatred of the Romans gives his very life meaning, Jesus' words are menacing. Even so, he is strangely drawn by this man.

The young Roman soldier –

This young man was enlisted by the Romans as they charged across the then known world, dominating and subjugating other nations. He befriends Daniel's sister Leah. He is lonely, and recognizes a kinship in this young and beautiful girl. When he gives her a gift of fine fruits, Daniel is incensed. He destroys the gift, nearly destroying his sister in the process. She, having come so far out of the darkness that plagues her, retreats once again into the shadows where demons enslave and terrorize. The soldier is concerned when he hears of her ensuing illness, pacing the sidewalk across from her house, enduring Daniel's stormy looks in the process. Again, his presence as an opposing character is not intentional. He had been forced to join the Roman army, caring nothing for their goals or agendas. He knows nothing of their violent treatment of Daniel's family. His only relationship to Daniel's family is one of concern and friendship. Yet he is antagonistic to Daniel due to his very presence and the uniform he wears.

Amalek –

Amalek, the blacksmith to whom Daniel was apprenticed as a boy, beat and misused Daniel. Daniel runs away from him, hiding with Rosh in the hillside.

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## QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: CONFLICT AND PLOT



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**What does the  
protagonist want, and why can't he have it? (5,6)**

This story is about Daniel trying to overcome Roman oppression in his own life and regain peace. Above all things, Daniel wishes to see the Romans expelled from Israel and a new kingdom established in its place. Whereas his desires are initially shrouded in the sins of revenge, hatred, and bitterness, Jesus sees in them the seeds of a new kingdom. Daniel vows “to live and die for God’s Victory!” (p.226). Jesus responds, “That is not a vow of hate...Go in peace, my son. You are not far from the kingdom” (p. 226). Daniel’s desire for a new kingdom is right and good. Yet it is not the oppressive presence of the



Romans that keep him from it. Rather, it is his bitterness of spirit. Unable to forsake this, Daniel remains in bondage, isolated from others just as his sister is, a prisoner in his own stony heart. Yet the presence of Jesus and His silent forgiveness softens Daniel's heart and delivers him (p. 248, 252). The handicaps that Daniel must overcome are internal, not unlike our own. His greatest stumbling block is his own sinful nature. Although various conflicts develop circumstantially throughout the story (including the capture of Joel, which necessitates a daring rescue), they only serve to heighten or intensify Daniel's inner conflict. As Daniel comes to realize his own bondage to bitterness and the isolation it causes, he despairs. Unable to turn from his bitterness, he abandons himself to the darkness, even as his sister Leah has done. "They were both alike, Daniel thought, turning his back on the blossoming roadway. They could not learn to hope again" (p. 246). Although his objectives don't change, he sees himself and the snare in which he is trapped for the first time. The presence of Jesus, undeserved and unexpected, delivers him where he could not deliver himself. With this deliverance come new freedom, perspective, and joy.

Because other characters' lives depend on Daniel's deliverance, this conflict represents a sort of race against time. Will Daniel see the futility of his bitterness and pursuit of vengeance in time to save innocent and misled Joel from the prison ships? Will he recognize in Samson's deliverance the selfless love and forgiveness that Jesus advocates? How will he reconcile himself to this sacrifice? Will Daniel's bitterness rob not only him, but also Malthace of happiness and love? And what of Leah? Will she remain in bondage to the fear and demons that torment her? These matters hinge on Daniel's personal freedom, just as in life the lives of others are inextricably linked to our own. Our ideas, our struggles, our character flaws have consequences, not only for us, but for others.

This conflict represents several struggles. First, Daniel's struggle with the Romans, and more specifically with Marcus, represents a Man vs. Man or Man vs. Society struggle.

However, a Man vs. God struggle is also present as Daniel wrestles with the new ideas presented by Jesus, the Son of God and the second person of the Trinity.

Perhaps the most acute struggle Daniel experiences is the inner struggle above referenced, or Man vs. Self.

### **What other problems are there in the story? (7)**

Rosh, the outlaw, distracts Daniel from his true goal. Although Daniel supposes Rosh to be the Messiah who will lead his people out of bondage to the Romans, he is no more than a bandit. His physical strength and stature, his control of the men and his military tactics obscure the strength of the true Messiah from Daniel's view. Rosh represents the Kingdom Daniel expects God will bring. Jesus' inner strength and character, which emanate not from physical stature or manipulation or show of force, but from self-abasement, forgiveness, love, and uprightness of character is contrary to all of Daniel's expectations.

Plot conflicts deepen the inner conflict Daniel experiences when young Joel, who trusts Daniel implicitly, is arrested by the Romans and consigned to a galley ship. This conflict serves to unmask Rosh's true, apathetic character. The death of Nathan in the rescue attempt intensifies this unrest. Samson's sacrifice resolves this plot conflict, yet makes Daniel's inner conflict even more acute. What manner of love is this, to return love for hatred, concern for abandonment? Why would Samson do such a thing? In this experience, Daniel begins to comprehend something stronger than the strength of a man, something that might truly bend a bow of bronze.

Thacia, too, in her open effort to give her heart to Daniel stirs the waters of discontent that cloud his heart. He is not free to love in return, and yet he would love her. This is budding evidence that he himself is not free, but has inflicted bondage upon himself with his oath.

Leah's response to Daniel's rage against the Romans undoes him completely. In his rage, the vitriol he has meant for his enemy has pierced the hearts of those he most loves, and in truth, his own heart. "Leah, like Samson, had perished by the sword he had meant for Rome" (p. 248).

Throughout these conflicts, Daniel finds in Jesus comfort, acceptance, and forgiveness. He finds peace. "Yet he remembered how Jesus, in a way he had never understood, had somehow lifted from him the terrible weight of Samson's death. If only he could take to Jesus this heavier burden of guilt. In the sleepless hours he forgot the doubts that had confused him that night on the rooftop. He remembered only the infinite kindness of the teacher's eyes. He did not think that Jesus would turn him away" (p. 239).

However, Jesus' decisive movements to refuse the crown the people offered infuriate Daniel.

### **How is the main problem solved? (9)**

Daniel's conflict is resolved through the personal appearance of the character Jesus. In this, Daniel does get what he's after, but not in the manner in which he expected. For, in healing Leah and delivering Daniel from his hatred, Daniel receives the kingdom he ardently longed for, and simultaneously, freedom from all external rule and oppression. Freed from his sin, Daniel realizes that the kingdom is "now," but invisible.

Daniel emphatically does not solve his own problems here. He is helpless to let go of his rage and oath for revenge. Even in the face of losing everything and everyone he loves, he is incapable of forsaking his own sinful wrath. "He sat beside Leah's mat, bewildered. One by one they had all left him, everyone who touched his life. Rosh. Samson. Joel. Thacia. Simon. Jesus. Now Leah was slipping away. With Leah's death he would be altogether free. But freedom seemed suddenly a terror of emptiness, and he had nothing to fill it but hatred...vengeance was all he had to give. It was better than nothing" (p.248). Even in the face of his sister's impending death, he cannot repent. This is evident in his words to Marcus. "If you could save my sister's life, I would not profane our house...I would rather let her die" (p. 251).

It is only the person of Jesus that evokes repentance. “If I could speak to him! Daniel thought with longing. If I could tell him it is my fault, that I have done this to Leah!” (p.252). In the character Jesus’ eyes Daniel finds understanding, acceptance, and forgiveness, and with these healing and freedom. In the face of Jesus’ smile Daniel is undone. “Unable to endure that smile, Daniel bent his head. Suddenly, with a longing that was more than he could bear, he wanted to stop fighting against this man. He knew that he would give everything he possessed in life to follow Jesus” (p.252).

From where does this powerful emotion come? Instead of giving Daniel what he deserves, the character of Jesus shows Daniel mercy and forgiveness. This demonstration of forgiveness leads Daniel to repentance. Daniel experiences the powerful, freeing force of love. “Was it possible that only love could bend the bow of bronze?” (p.252). The Scripture tells us that it is the kindness of God that leads us to repentance, and Spere paints a beautiful illustration of this truth in Daniel’s deliverance.

Does Daniel get what he wants? “To know Jesus would be enough... Almost with the thought the terrible weight was gone. In its place strength and sureness, and a peace he had never imagined, flowed around him and into his mind and heart” (p.253). What Daniel most wants is freedom, and it is in the forgiveness of the character Jesus that he finally finds it.

### **How does the story end? (10)**

Tying up loose ends is simple for Spere. Daniel’s deliverance is evident not only in intangible and inexpressible feelings, but in his immediate actions towards the Roman centurion he had vowed to hate. Daniel invites him into his home to see Leah in her regained consciousness. His relationship with Malthace, too, is repaired, in both her presence with Jesus at the healing, and her loving concern for him. “He heard Thacia catch her breath, and turned and looked into her eyes. He knew he was not worthy of the gift he saw there, but he knew that at last he was free to offer her all that he had in return. In that one brief look they made a new vow together” (p. 253-254). In a moment, Daniel’s hatred has been exchanged for love, his despair for hope, and his torment for life.

Daniel finally experiences the truth of his conjecture, “Was it possible that only love could bend the bow of bronze?”(p. 252). Spere communicates her overriding theme that love is indeed stronger than hatred. This universal truth is expressed by the Apostle John in the Scriptures. “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). By extension and comparison, Daniel also learns that bitterness breeds only death. This truth, too, is expressed in the Bible in the book of Hebrews. “Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...” (Hebrews 12:14-15). The strength of Spere’s novel is in its appeal to such universal themes. Her exploration of the nature and strength of bitterness and love result in a resounding and victorious affirmation of the Truth.

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## QUESTIONS ABOUT STRUCTURE: THEME



### **What does the protagonist learn? (11)**

Daniel is of course changed in heart and mind by the events of the story. Among other things, he learns that love is stronger than hatred. He learns the redemptive nature of self-sacrifice. He learns that what is unseen is more real than what is seen. He learns the destructive force of bitterness and its unintended consequences. Although he doesn't completely understand the changes wrought in him in the final sequence of the story, he is irrevocably altered.

Daniel's actions are also profoundly affected. Note his new civility and hospitality towards the Roman centurion and his returned love towards Malthace.

Although the character Daniel is incapable of explaining his change of heart, his reference to the bow of bronze becomes a symbolic explanation for it. His hardened heart has been bent by the powerful force of redemptive love.

### **What do the other characters learn? (12)**

Leah, too, is delivered during the character Jesus' visit. Freed from her demons and the sickness they provoked, she experiences health and wellness.

### **What is the main idea of the story? (13)**

Throughout this story, Speare seems to indicate that a good life is a life spent on others – that is, a life of self-sacrifice. This is evident in the character of Samson. It is also present in the character of Jesus, and somewhat in the character of Simon the Zealot. Speare also implies that a good life is only possible as the individual embraces the principles of love, grace, and forgiveness – those principles upon which the invisible kingdom is built.

Speare causes her readers to wonder at the helpless condition of humanity in their bondage to their own sin. The amazing capacity of the human soul to harbor hatred, bitterness, and resentment is given treatment. By this, she provokes the reader to consider his own plight in light of Daniel's, and encourages him to seek freedom in the reality of the historic Jesus.

## QUESTIONS ABOUT STYLE



### **Does the author use descriptions and comparisons to create pictures in the reader's mind? (16)**

Spere relies on the use of imagery in her story. She creates this with vivid descriptions, strong verbs, well-chosen adverbs, and quality adjectives.

“Samson came crawling toward him and hunched at his feet. Exasperated, he...rummaged in the cave for another tattered cloak...flung it over the naked shoulders, and lay down again” (p. 28).

“Now watching the water sloshing out carelessly...” (p.29).

“He was slight, with the knotted arms and shoulders of one who had done hard labor from childhood...” (p.46).

“Jerking back his head, Daniel saw with horror the great rock that teetered on the opposite bank, ripped from the cliffside, and crashed down, gathering speed and force, carrying with it a roar of dirt and stones. Stupefied, he watched the leaping, frenzied soldiers” (p. 207).

### **Spere uses similes to create imagery (16d)**

Rosh carried Daniel like a baby (p 7).

Daniel approaches Thacia and Joel like a wary animal (p.6).

Leah's hand is like a small child's (p.118).

Daniel's weakness is like a bad streak in a piece of metal (p. 110).

Jairus approaches Jesus like a beggar (p.165).

Jesus' voice is like a trumpet call (p. 48).

Again, it is like thunder (p. 47).

And again, it is like a comforting touch (p. 103).

Rosh is like a lion (p. 79).

**She uses metaphors to create imagery (16h-l)**

Lake Merom is a shining jewel (p.10).

The Jordan is a silver thread (p. 10).

The road is a narrow ribbon (p. 9).

Daniel's weakness is compared to a flaw in metal in an extended metaphor (p. 111).

Rosh calls his band of men lily livered jackals (p. 23).

The bronze bow is an extended metaphor or symbol illustrating the theme of the story (p.183).

**Does the author use the characters and events in her story to communicate a theme that goes beyond them in some way? (17)**

**She uses allusions to weave her tale. (17f)**

"...[they say] that he fought beside the great leader Judas when they rebelled against the Romans at Sepphoris, and that when the others were crucified, he escaped...." (p. 13).

"'All the mighty ones,' he said, remembering Rosh's very words. 'Joshua, Gideon, David, all of them fought on the soil of Galilee. No one could stand against them. It will be so again...'" (p. 11).

"God will send us another David" (p.11).

She references the New Testament account of the healing of Jairus's daughter (p.165).

She references the New Testament account of the feeding of the 5,000 (p.240-241).

She references the New Testament accounts of Jesus healing people and of the throngs of needy people that followed him wherever He went (p. 96-101).

She references the New Testament account of Jesus reading from the book of Isaiah in the temple (p.46-47).

She references the New Testament account that Jesus was nearly stoned after speaking in a temple in Nazareth (p.48).

She references the New Testament account of the rich young ruler (p.225).

**She uses foreshadowing to heighten tension (17a-c)**

Speare creates discomfort in the reader when the group of boys meeting at Daniel's smithy is closely watched by the Roman centurion. "Still, there was something about it that made him uneasy" (p.141).

Daniel is overcome with uneasiness as Leah responds to Thacia's gifts and seems to be expecting some important event (p. 169-170).

"Hate does not die with killing. It only springs up a hundredfold. The only thing stronger than hate is love" (p.224).

Jesus hints at Daniel's future by telling him that he is "not far from the kingdom" (p. 226).

**She uses symbolism to emphasize the story's themes (17a-b)**

The symbolism Speare creates becomes the title of her book. Employing the image of the bronze bow, Speare creates an extended metaphor. The bronze bow is, as Malthace says, the thing impossible to do. For Daniel, it is letting go his vow of hatred, and instead loving the Romans in spite of their oppression. Summoning this love in return for abuse is an impossibility until Jesus intervenes, loving Daniel in spite of his unfaithfulness, and serving and delivering him. In this manner, Jesus demonstrates that love can bend a bow of bronze. Love bends Daniels' will.

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## QUESTIONS ABOUT CONTEXT



### Who is the author? (18)

Elizabeth George Speare (1908-1994) began writing for publication when her children began attending junior high school, leaving her alone for the first time since her childhood. Born in Melrose, Massachusetts, Speare spent her early years much by herself. She had a younger brother, but was very isolated from other children her own age. She spent much time devouring books and enjoying nature near her New England summer home. It was as a child that she first dabbled with writing her own stories.

As a young college graduate, she taught high school English literature, and served as a camp counselor. She married Alden Speare in 1936, and began a long and satisfying career as a stay-at-home mother. When her children were grown, she indulged in her old habit of composing stories. Her first published work, *Calico Captive*, depicts a woman captured by the Indians in the French and Indian War. Historical fiction seemed to be her passion, as she turned next to issues of Puritanism in the late 1600s with *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*, for which she won a Newbery Award. *The Bronze Bow*, Mrs. Speare's third published book, won her a second Newbery Award. In 1989 Mrs. Speare was awarded the Laura Ingalls Wilder Award for substantial and enduring contribution to children's literature. She has been cited by notable sources as one of the 100 most popular children's authors of all time.

### When did the author live? (19)

Mrs. Speare lived in the twentieth century. This was a period marked by a materialistic philosophy which in many ways was the fruit of rationalism in the scientific revolution. This worldview holds that reality is defined by the evidence of the senses, and that the invisible or unverifiable has questionable standing. It is notable that Speare's main character, Daniel, struggles with similar notions as he ponders the invisible kingdom spoken of by the character Jesus.

The late twentieth century also marked a sharp decline in popularity for traditional Christian values in public life, and witnessed a fragmentation of the traditional family. These developments motivated Speare and other writers to recall the values of an earlier time. In her Newbery acceptance speech, Speare said that the duty of the writer was to salvage love, honor, and duty. "Those of us who have found Love and Honor and Duty to be a sure foundation must somehow find words which have the ring of truth." Daniel's own struggle with duty, love, and honor underscore the very issues Speare targeted as crucial in her own day.

## STORY CHARTS



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the **climax** and central **themes** of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central **conflict**. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.



# *The Bronze Bow* by Elizabeth George Speare: Story Chart





