

## Approved for use in English I

### Summary of the Work:

The story follows a young Native American boy as he struggles not only with the rite of passage to manhood but also with the harsh realities of the clash of his native culture and the modern white society. Having been raised in the traditional ways of his Ute ancestors, the protagonist of the story must first learn the "new ways" of the white people who dominate his world before he can create a clear identity of whom he is and where he fits in his environment. The story of Thomas Black Bull, the protagonist of Borland's novel, is one of constant transformation as a young boy searches for an identity. Symbolizing this most clearly is the fact that, throughout the story, Thomas's name is changed several times. He receives the name Little Black Bull from his parents, which is changed to Thomas Black Bull when a white minister baptizes him. Then, as he nears puberty, Thomas gives himself the name of Bear's Brother. When he becomes popular on the rodeo circuit, his fans dub him with the moniker Killer Tom. As he works out his frustration and anger from losing his parents before reaching puberty, being forced to enter a school to learn white society's ways, being used by swindlers and crooks as well as by people who need heroes, Thomas tries on many personas, but, in the end, he finds his way back home and is finally able to define his own identity. (From study guide at [www.bookrags.com](http://www.bookrags.com)) The novel is set at the turn of the twentieth century near Pagosa Springs, Colorado.

### Rationale:

Not written by a Native American author, this piece is not used as a Native American literature requirement. However, the novel can be used to reveal several literary elements, including theme and symbolism. One theme of the novel involves Thomas Black Bull's struggle to find meaning in his life. Having lost his parents as a youth and then being torn from his natural environment, Thomas spends the remainder of his youth forced to learn a new way of life away from the wilderness. He faces challenges to his culture, language, and values, and learns to cope in a world where he lacks control and understanding. Eventually, he turns aside his anger and hate and chooses to return to a life more like that of his childhood and finds peace and fulfillment. Other themes deal with homelessness and struggle with authority. His bear friend that Thomas must leave behind as a youth acts as a symbol of his connection to nature and his happier life. In addition, he and the bear are both orphaned, and the bear's actual imprisonment by the townspeople is like that of Thomas's feeling of imprisonment in the culture he does not understand.

### Professional Reviews and/or Critical Essays:

- \* Print resources are available from the library media center and libraries in the district. Contact any library media specialist to view the scholarly sources.
- \* Scholarly reviews are also available online through Books in Print and Gale. Contact the library media specialist to obtain username and password information to access the subscription database of full-text reviews.

### Noted Distinction:

- Notable/Best Books (A.L.A.)

### Readability:

- Lexile Score: 850
- Readability Level: 5.5

### Learning Resources Guidelines:

- The novel meets the Learning Resources Guidelines.

### Standard Alignment: [\(link\)](#)

### Approval:

Submitted to Committee:

Approved for Adoption:

### Notes on the Text:

*(The best way to evaluate and understand a novel is to personally read the book in its entirety.)*

### Connection to the Curriculum:

Theme and symbolism fit into the freshmen curriculum requirement. Elements of the hero cycle can be explored as the male protagonist leaves home to face dangers and adventure and returns home to find peace and satisfaction.

### Additional Connections:

*(AP, Honors, Essential/Applied, Dramas, Films, etc.)*

Film—*When the Legends Die*, 1972, starring Richard Widmark and Frederick Forrest, 107 min., PG