***THE LIVING***

By Matt de la Peña

**Louisiana Teen Readers’ Choice 2016**

**Grades 9-12**

*Submitted by Jessica Barrilleaux, Student*

*School of Library and Information Science, Louisiana State University*

**Title**: *The Living*

**Author**: Matt de la Peña

**Publisher**: Delacorte

**Pages**: 308

**SUMMARY**

When Shy Espinoza leaves the home that he shares with his mother and sister in an underprivileged Southern California neighborhood to take a summer job as a pool boy on a luxury cruise liner, he does not expect the world to fall apart before he can return. He envisions earning big tips from wealthy passengers and watching beautiful girls in bikinis tan by the pool, but these hopes are quickly driven far from his mind by an almost impossible series of events. Maybe the strange message he received from a passenger who suddenly committed suicide should have been a warning, but a warning of what exactly?

A combination of devastating natural disasters, the outbreak of a new disease with no known cure, and hints of conspiracy coalesce to leave Shy stranded on a lifeboat with little chance of rescue. On top of it all, his only companion is a snobbish, prejudiced girl who has made it clear she thinks Shy is beneath her notice. This page-turner merges intense action, mystery, and meaningful commentary on the themes of social class, family ties, racial identity, and corporate ethics among others. Shy is a compelling main character who provides a realistic lens for it all. The sequel *The Hunted* will be available from May 12, 2015.

**AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY**

Matt de la Peña lives in Brooklyn, NY where he teaches creative writing at the university level. He earned his MFA in creative writing from San Diego State University after attending the University of the Pacific where he played basketball. In addition to *The Living*, he has written one picture book and five novels, the first of which *Ball Don’t Lie* is now a major motion picture. He has also published short fiction and essays in various literary journals and newspapers, and he enjoys travelling around the country to visit schools.

Biographical information taken from the author’s website at

<http://mattdelapena.com/bio/>,

Accessed September 22, 2014.

**AWARDS**

2014 Pura Belpre honor

2014 Best Fiction for Adults, YALSA

2014 Notable Children’s Book, ALSC

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Author website <http://mattdelapena.com/>

**OTHER TITLES BY AUTHOR**

*Ball Don’t Lie* (2007)

*Mexican WhiteBoy* (2008)

*We Were Here* (2009)

**RELATED TITLES**

*The Eye of Minds* by James Dashner

*The Impossible Knife of Memory* by Laurie Halse Anderson

*Life of Pi* by Yann Martel

*Nightmare City* by Andrew Klavan

*These Broken Stars* by Amie Kaufman

**CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS**

**Language Arts:**

* Some of the characters in this book have unusual names such as Shy and Shoeshine. Others are identified by their characteristics like “the man in the black suit.” Ask students to discuss what these names reveal about the characters. What about the characters with more traditional names like Carmen, Rodney, Addison/Addie, and Cassandra/Cassie for example?
* When they are first alone together on the life raft, Shy and Addie both feel as if they have been trapped with the worst possible companion. Ask students to use textual evidence to support a discussion of what makes the two characters such an unlikely pair and what eventually allows them to become friends. Then ask students to write a reflective essay about the person or type of person they would least like to have as a companion in a similar situation, including a clear explanation of their reasoning.

**Art:**

Ask students to analyze the cover of the book. What is conveyed by the style, colors, and content of the image? Is its meaning different before and after reading the book? Ask students to create an alternative cover to express another aspect of the story or to better represent the story by correcting any faults supported by evidence during the discussion. The original artwork may be viewed as 95/132 in the creator’s gallery at <http://www.artofphilipstraub.com/534810/gallery/> for reference.

**Language Arts and Art:**

When students begin reading the book, use the link below as a model for creating a basic character relationship web as a class. Choose a wall, bulletin board, or other location with sufficient space for expansion and the addition of new characters as students read. Use yarn to connect the characters, and let different colors denote different types of relationships: friendship, romance, business, unknown, hostile, etc. Ask students to add illustrations to each character’s circle and to modify the yarn connections to reflect the characters’ development and change as the story progresses.

<http://ltl.learningally.org/Classroom-Teaching-Tools/Strategies-and-Activities/Graphic-Organizers/Character-Relationship-Web/Character-Relationship-Web-Graphic-Organizer/437/>

**Science:**

Before leaving home, Shy reassures his family that a cruise ship is perfectly safe from sharks and other marine life because the hull is made from incredibly thick steel. How does something so heavy stay afloat, even when there isn’t a tsunami affecting it? Individually or in small groups, have students perform one of the experiments in the links below to discover the concept of buoyancy as it relates to density and hydrodynamics.

<http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/bring-science-home-shipping-science/>

<http://www.education.com/science-fair/article/archimedes-principle-floats-boat/>

**Technology and Social Studies:**

Shy takes a summer job on a cruise ship because it sounds more interesting than working at a local restaurant or automotive shop. Even before the multiple disasters and tragedies occur, the experience takes him out of his comfort zone and exposes him to people from many different social classes, nationalities, and backgrounds. Not everyone has the opportunity to travel the world to experience these differences for pleasure or even as part of a profession. Ask students to research and present the benefits of becoming more globally-minded citizens as well as specific technological tools that could help them to accomplish this without physically travelling the world.

**History:**

In this book, conspiracy theories turn out to be true, and paranoia is a key part of survival; hidden islands, corrupt pharmaceutical companies manufacturing diseases to make a profit on antidotes, and scientists willing to murder innocents to keep their secrets are all real. Ask students to evaluate and prepare a presentation on a historical conspiracy theory, whether true or unresolved. How does its prevalence reflect on the contemporary society? Topic suggestions might include the Roswell Alien theory, the idea that Shakespeare did not write his own works, the Dreyfus Affair, or the Tuskegee Syphilis Study.

**Vocabulary:**

Condescending

Gazebo

Genocide

Napalm

Paranoid

Taqueria

Quarantine

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. Shy’s mixed-race background is not a major theme of the book, but it brings topics like prejudice and socioeconomic divides into the narrative. What do you think these themes add to the work? How might the story be different if told from the perspective of another person on the cruise ship?
2. What genre would you assign to this book? Why? Is only one sufficient or correct? Why or why not?
3. Shy’s family is very important to him. As a reader, how do you know this even though the characters are not part of the action of the story?
4. Before dying, the oilman gives Shy the engagement ring that he comes to think of as “the good-luck ring” (307). What is the significance of the ring, and why does Shy keep it a secret?
5. By the end of the book, Shy has discovered the potential for romance with both Carmen and Addie. How is his relationship different with each girl, and what facets of his personality does each reveal that develop him as a more complex main character?
6. *The Living* has a cliffhanger ending. Where do you think the sequel will take Shy and the rest of the characters? What textual evidence is there to support your claims?

**RELATED WEBSITES**

**American Pharmacists Association: Code of Ethics**

http://www.pharmacist.com/code-ethics

The full text of the code ignored by the pharmaceutical companies in the book

**The Books of Matt de la Peña**

http://mattdelapena.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/delapena-studyguides.pdf

A reading guide from Random House with an introduction to the author’s work and discussion questions for each of his previous books

**Centers for Disease Control: Emergency Preparedness**

http://emergency.cdc.gov/

Learn how natural disasters and disease outbreak can be managed

**National Tsunami Warnings Center: FAQs**

http://wcatwc.arh.noaa.gov/?page=tsunamiFAQ

Tsunami facts and what to do in the case of a tsunami warning like the one Shy’s cruise ship received

**Teacher’s Guide: Matt de la Peña’s “Passing Each Other in Halls”**

https://www.oneteenstory.com/pdf/ots\_teachersguide\_6.pdf

A lesson plan based on the banning of the author’s book on racial grounds