Based on

The House of the Scorpion
By Nancy Farmer

About the Book:
Matt is different. He struggles with whether he is human or not. He has been told by many that he is lower than an animal; he is not fit to live in a house. Matt is the clone of the powerful El Patron of the Alacran family. He lives in El Patron’s house and has the best of all material possessions, yet he is barely tolerated by the rest of the family. He is totally isolated from the outside world. Matt is loved like a son by Celia, the family cook. His body guard, Tam Lin, teaches Matt many life lessons. The only friend he has close to his own age is Maria, the daughter of a powerful United States senator, who visits the Alacran family during school holidays. As Matt grows older, he begins to realize that El Patron controls an entire country called Opium that produces and sells drugs. He begins to see the evil that exists in his little confined world. As El Patron lies on his death bed, Matt finally sees the obvious; he has been created to provide body organs for El Patron. With the help of his few friends, Matt escapes Opium and flees to Mexico, which is now called Aztlan. There he experiences great hardships and dangers as he attempts to make his way to the convent where Maria now lives. Once at the convent, he learns that things have changed greatly in Opium since El Patron died. He is the only one who can return to Opium and set the evil right. Through his many trials and his interactions with others, he now knows that he is human and valuable. By changing Opium, he can change the world.

Set the Stage:
Use the following to get the students ready to read:
• Discuss the concept of cloning.
• If it was possible to clone humans, what might be some ethical issues?

Review:
After reading the book, use the following to lead a discussion:
• Think about the pre-reading discussion on cloning. Did some of the issues that were discussed arise in the book? Were there more ethical issues than originally thought? After reading this book, have your thoughts about cloning changed? If so, how?
• What was the family’s reaction when they first saw Matt and were told that he was a clone? Why would they come to this conclusion?
• Mi Vida means “my life” in Spanish. Why did El Patron call Matt by this endearing name?
• Describe how Tam Lin begins to influence Matt. What clues are given in the early part of the story that show that Tam Lin is more than he appears to be on the surface?
• Discuss why Maria’s friendship is so important to Matt. What important moral values does he learn from her? How do these values influence him throughout the book? Describe the moral values that your parents try to instill in you. How do they affect your decisions?
• Compare and contrast current day North America to the North America that exists in this book. What do you think it would be like to live in the United States based on this book? Why would it be different than what you currently experience?
• Describe Matt’s feelings when he finally realizes that El Patron doesn’t truly love him; that El Patron only had him created for spare parts. Describe a time when you felt betrayed.
• When Matt finally reaches Aztlan, he is taken to an orphanage. How is this different than what he expected? Compare the orphanage experience to that of a communist government.
• What was El Patron’s motivation for all that he did? Think about a real-world person in history who was motivated in the same way. Compare that person to El Patron.
• Matt struggles with whether he is human or beast. By the end of the book, he realizes that he is truly human. Describe the characteristics that he identifies about himself that help him realize this.
• Why do you think the book is called The House of the Scorpion? What could be another title? Why would the new title be appropriate?
Student Activity (found on the last page of this PDF):
In this activity, students will sequence events that occurred in the book.

Answers: A. 2; B. 6; C. 13; D. 7; E. 1; F. 9; G. 15; H. 10; I. 11; J. 4; K. 12; L. 5; M. 8; N. 3; O. 14.

Related Activities:
To extend the students’ enjoyment of the book, try these:

- **Animal Cloning**: Have students read a related article about animal cloning. Divide the class into two groups. Assign one group pro-cloning and one group anti-cloning. Have the students participate in a classroom debate. After the debate, have students write a short paragraph on their opinion of animal cloning.

- **One Can Make a Difference**: Dona Esperanza’s book *A History of Opium* helped Matt become conscious of the evils of El Patron and the empire he had created. Have students research real people who have stood up for a cause to right an injustice. Then have students pretend to be that person and present a short speech about their cause.

- **Family Ties**: Review the Alacran family tree. Have students create their own family tree.

- **Illegal Drugs**: The Council of Farmers grew addictive drugs to make their fortunes. These drugs are illegal, yet available in our world today. Have students research the dangers of a specific illegal drug. Then have them prepare a poster with the information they learn. Use these to help kick off an anti-drug campaign at your school.

- **Changing the Future**: Matt has an awesome job ahead trying to change Opium. Have students write a story set twenty years after Matt begins his work. Students are to describe what life is like for the people of Opium, the country’s morals and priorities, how Opium impacts the world, and what Matt’s life would be like.
A Struggle for Humanity
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Directions: Sequence the following events by numbering them in the order in which they occurred.

A. _____ Matt is imprisoned like an animal in a small room in the Big House, with only Rosa providing food.
B. _____ El Patron celebrates his 143rd birthday with a big party.
C. _____ Matt is reunited with Maria and meets her mother Dona Esperanza.
D. _____ Matt is accused of killing Maria’s dog Furball.
E. _____ Matt meets Steven, Emilia, and Maria.
F. _____ Matt visits the eejit pens.
G. _____ Matt decides that it will be his job to break down the empire of Opium.
H. _____ El Patron dies and Mr. Alacran orders Matt killed.
I. _____ Matt reaches Aztlan and begins working in the plankton factory.
J. _____ Tam Lin takes Matt to the oasis.
K. _____ Matt and Chacho are thrown in the boneyard.
L. _____ Matt begins to visit the music room, where he discovers the secret passageways and his musical talent.
M. _____ Matt begins reading the book A History of Opium and learns that El Patron controls the county of Opium and that there is a Council of Farmers that produces other illegal drugs.
N. _____ Matt chooses Tam Lin as his body guard.
O. _____ Dona Esperanza convinces Matt to return to Opium.