

MÁRQUEZ'S WORLD

1. This is the famous illustration that appears on the cover of *100 Years of Solitude*.

2. Death and the supernatural are major themes of Márquez's work.

3. The year Márquez was born, there was an uprising at the town's banana plantation and a brutal reprisal in which more than 100 of the strikers were killed. This became a central event in *Solitude*.

4. A symbol of time. Márquez's writing is a constant reworking and re-examination of his past.

5. Márquez calls Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*—the story of a man who wakes up transformed into an enormous insect—a major literary influence.

6. Two of Márquez's novels.

7. William Faulkner and his mythical county of Yoknapatawpha inspired Márquez to create his own mythical town, called Macondo.

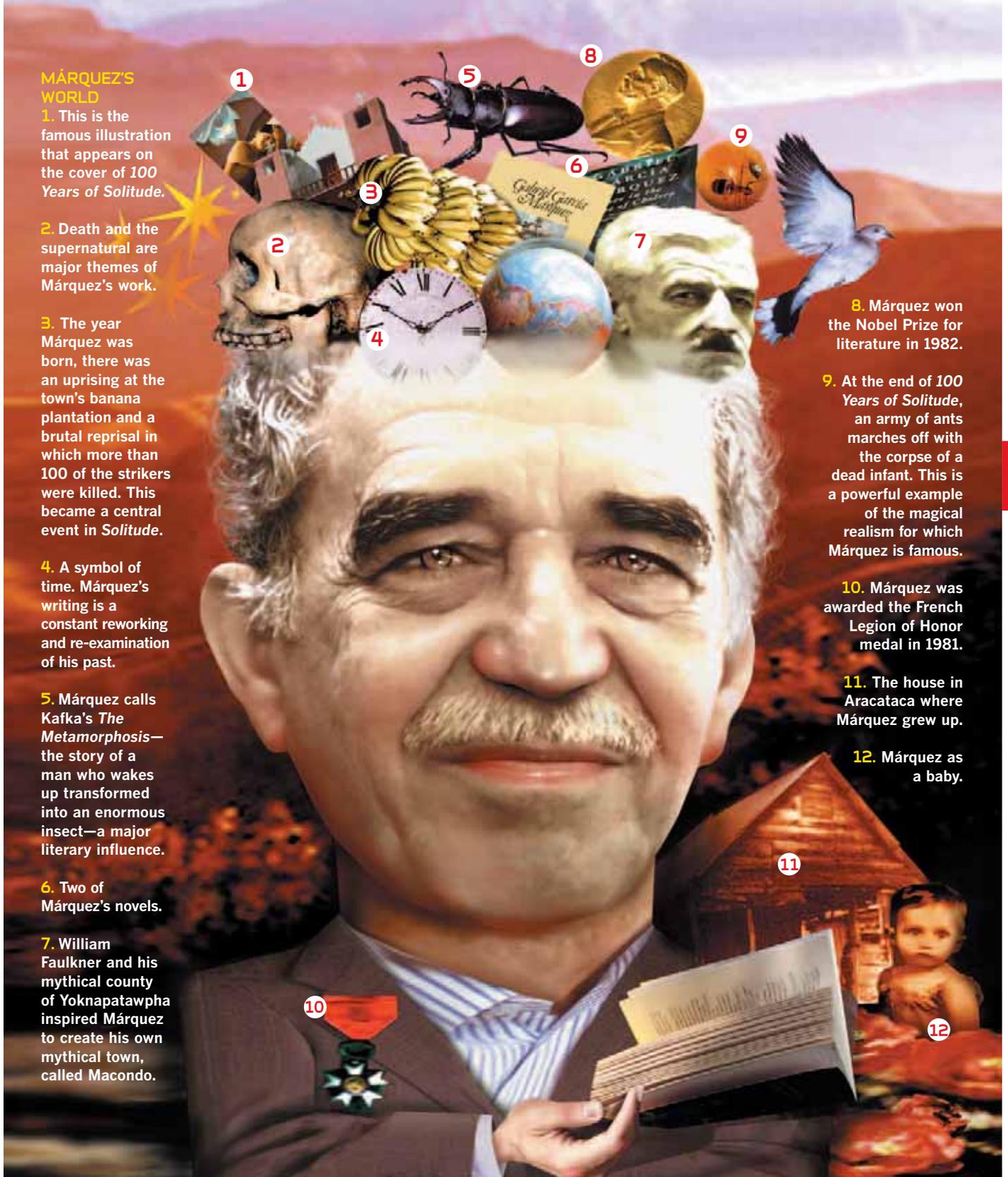
8. Márquez won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1982.

9. At the end of *100 Years of Solitude*, an army of ants marches off with the corpse of a dead infant. This is a powerful example of the magical realism for which Márquez is famous.

10. Márquez was awarded the French Legion of Honor medal in 1981.

11. The house in Aracataca where Márquez grew up.

12. Márquez as a baby.



Gabriel García Márquez is one of the most famous living writers. He's also known as the "Father of Magical Realism," a genre of writing in which ordinary events are interwoven with dreamlike, supernatural, and fantastic elements.

Living to Tell the Tale

by Gabriel García Márquez

The Story So Far When Márquez accompanies his mother to his childhood home to help her sell the house in which they were both raised, he is flooded with memories of his childhood. This excerpt is from the first book of what will be a three-book-long memoir of his life and work.

IT WAS ALSO MY GRANDFATHER WHO GAVE ME MY first contact with the written word when I was five, and he took me one afternoon to see the animals in a circus passing through Cataca, under a tent as large as a church. The one that attracted my attention was a battered, desolate **ruminant** with the expression of a frightening mother.

"It's a camel," my grandfather told me.

Someone standing nearby interrupted:

"Excuse me, Colonel, but it's a dromedary."

I can imagine now how my grandfather must have felt when someone corrected him in the presence of his grandson. Without even thinking about it, he went him one better with a worthy question:

"What's the difference?"

"I don't know," the other man said, "but this is a dromedary."

My grandfather was not an educated man and did not pretend to be one, for he had dropped out of the public school in Riohacha

to go and shoot a gun in one of the countless civil wars along the Caribbean. He never studied again, but all his life he was conscious of the gaps, and he had an avid desire for immediate knowledge that more than compensated for his **deficiencies**. That afternoon he returned dejected to his office and consulted the dictionary with childish attention. Then he and I learned for the rest of our lives the difference between a dromedary and a camel. In the end he placed the glorious **tome** in my lap and said:

"This book not only knows everything, but it's also the only one that's never wrong."

It was a huge illustrated book, on its spine a colossal Atlas holding the vault of the universe on his shoulders. I did not know how to read or write, but I could imagine how correct the colonel was if the book had almost two thousand large, crowded pages with beautiful drawings. In church I had been surprised by the size of the **missal**,

continued →

MEET THE AUTHOR:

Gabriel García Márquez

BORN

March 6, 1928, in Aracataca, a town in northern Colombia.

RAISED BY

His grandparents and many aunts, in a house that was said to be haunted.

HOW HE WROTE 100 YEARS OF SOLITUDE

After years of being an unsuccessful writer, he suddenly had a vision for the novel. He wrote every day for 18 months straight, supporting his family by selling off all their possessions.

QUOTE

"I feel that all my writing has been about the experiences of the time I spent with my grandparents."

Applying context clues skills: see page 26

← continued from page 23

but the dictionary was thicker. It was like looking out at the entire world for the first time.

“How many words does it have?” I asked.

“All of them,” said my grandfather.

The truth is that I did not need the written word at this time because I expressed everything that made an impression on me in drawings. At the age of four I had drawn a magician who cut off his wife’s head and put it back on again, just as Richardine had done in his act at the Olympia. The graphic

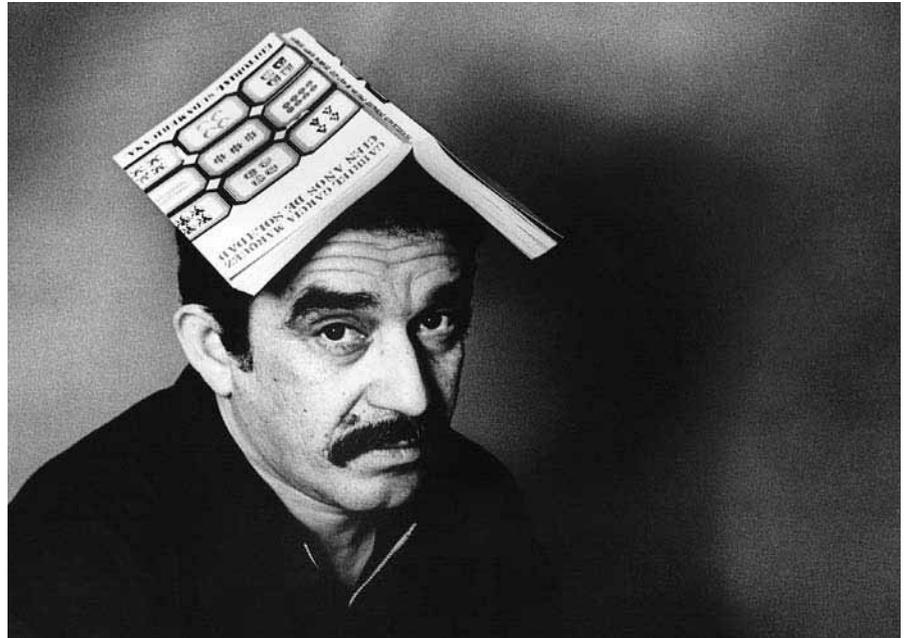
sequence began with the **decapitation** by handsaw, continued with the triumphant display of the bleeding head, and ended with the wife, her head restored, thanking the audience for its applause. Comic strips had already been invented but I only saw them later in the color supplement to the Sunday papers. Then I began to invent graphic stories without dialogue. But when my grandfather gave me the dictionary, it **roused** so much curiosity in me about words that I read it as if it were a novel, in alphabetical order, with little understanding. That was my first contact with what would be the fundamental book in my destiny as a writer.

When children are told the first story that in reality appeals to them, it is very difficult to get them to listen to another. I believe this is not true for children who are storytellers, and it was not true for me. I wanted more. The voracity with which I listened

to stories always left me hoping for a better one the next day, above all those that had to do with the mysteries of sacred history.

Everything that happened to me in the street had an enormous resonance in the house. The women in the kitchen would tell the stories to the strangers arriving on the train, who in turn brought other stories to be told, and all of it was incorporated into the torrent of oral tradition. Some events were first learned through the accordion players who sang about them at fairs, and travelers would retell them and enhance them. But the most striking story of my childhood occurred very early one Sunday, on our way to Mass, in an ill-advised sentence spoken by my grandmother:

“Poor Nicolasito is going to miss Pentecost Mass.”



“When my grandfather gave me the dictionary, it roused so much curiosity in me about words that I read it as if it were a novel, in alphabetical order, with little understanding. That was my first contact with what would be the fundamental book in my destiny as a writer.”

FROM *LIVING TO TELL THE TALE*
BY GABRIEL GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ,
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20-Minute Essay
>>TAKE 20 MINUTES
TO PLAN AND WRITE AN ESSAY BASED ON THE FOLLOWING:

Describe Márquez's relationship with his grandfather. Use details from the text to back up your thesis.



LCBook Club Questions

- 1** Are there stories from your childhood that are told again and again? Share one and explain what it reveals about who you are.
- 2** Why does Márquez call his statement, "The Belgian won't be playing chess anymore," his first literary success?

I was happy, because Sunday Mass was too long for a boy my age, and the sermons of Father Angarita, whom I loved so much as a child, seemed soporific. But it was a vain illusion, for my grandfather almost dragged me to the Belgian's studio, in the green velveteen suit I had been dressed in for Mass and that was too tight for me in the crotch. The police officers recognized my grandfather from a distance and opened the door for him with the ritual formula:

"Go in, Colonel."

Only then did I learn that the Belgian had inhaled a solution of gold cyanide—which he shared with his dog—after seeing *All Quiet on the Western Front*, the picture by Lewis Milestone based on the novel by Erich Maria Remarque. Popular intuition, which always finds the truth even when it seems impossible, understood and **proclaimed** that the Belgian had not been able to **endure** the shock of seeing himself crushed with his decimated patrol in a morass of mud in Normandy.

The small reception room was in darkness because of the closed windows, but the early light from the courtyard **illuminated** the bedroom, where the mayor and two more police officers were waiting for my grandfather. There was the body covered with a blanket on a campaign cot, the crutches within reach, where their owner had left them before he lay down to die. Beside him, on a wooden stool, was the tray where he had vaporized the cyanide, and a sheet of paper with large letters written in pencil: "Don't blame anyone, I'm killing myself because I'm a fool." The legal formalities and the details of the funeral, soon resolved by my grandfather, did not take more than ten minutes. For me, however, they were the most affecting ten minutes I would remember in my life.

The first thing that shook me when I came in was the smell in the bedroom. I learned only much later that it was the bitter almond smell of the cyanide that the Belgian had inhaled in order to die. But not that or any other impression would be more intense and long-lasting than the sight of the corpse when the mayor moved the blanket aside to show him to my grandfather. He was naked, stiff and twisted, his rough skin covered with yellow hair, his eyes like still pools looking at us as if they were alive. That horror of being seen by the dead shook me for years afterward whenever I passed the graves without crosses of suicides buried outside the cemetery by order of the Church. But what I remembered with greatest clarity, along with a charge of horror when I saw the body, was the boredom of nights in his house. Perhaps that was why I said to my grandfather when we left the house:

"The Belgian won't be playing chess anymore."

It was a simple idea, but my grandfather told it to the family as if it were a brilliant **witticism**. The women repeated it with so much enthusiasm that for some time I ran from visitors for fear they would say it in front of me or **oblige** me to repeat it. This also revealed to me a characteristic of adults that would be very useful to me as a writer: each of them told the story with new details that they added on their own, until the various versions became different from the original. No one can imagine the compassion I have felt since then for the poor children whose parents have declared them geniuses, who make them sing for visitors, imitate birds, even lie in order to entertain. Today I realize, however, that this simple sentence was my first literary success. ■

THE POWER OF WORDS

MÁRQUEZ'S LOVE OF WORDS MADE HIM A WRITER

In the following excerpts from *Living to Tell the Tale*, think about the meaning of each underlined word. Also consider the context in which the word is used. Then fill in the blank with the letter(s) of the correct definition(s).

SKILL DRILL

He never studied again, but all his life he was conscious of the gaps, and he had an avid desire for immediate knowledge that more than compensated for his deficiencies. _____

That was my first contact with what would be the fundamental book in my destiny as a writer. _____

The voracity with which I listened to stories always left me hoping for a better one the next day, above all those that had to do with the mysteries of sacred history. _____

Everything that happened to me in the street had an enormous resonance in the house. _____

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I was happy, because Sunday Mass was too long for a boy my age, and the sermons of Father Angarita, whom I loved so much as a child, seemed soporific. _____

Definitions

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| a. outpouring | d. counterbalanced; made up for | g. ability to bring about a response |
| b. quality of having a large appetite | e. blended | h. eager; enthusiastic |
| c. predetermined course of events | f. serving as a basis or foundation | i. causing drowsiness or sleep |

AND MORE POWER WORDS

RUMINANT – a mammal that chews cud

DEFICIENCIES – lack of necessary qualities

TOME – a large or scholarly book

MISSAL – the written content of Mass for the entire year

DECAPITATION – a beheading

ROUSED – to stir up or awaken

PROCLAIMED – made widely known

ENDURE – to undergo, as a hardship; to suffer

ILLUMINATED – brightened with light

WITTICISM – a biting or ironic remark

OBLIGE – to force or compel; to constrain

>>Your Turn! Using at least 6 of the underlined words, write two or three paragraphs describing an important event or influence in your life.