

The Black Arrow

Teacher Guide
By Carla J. Courtney

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How to Use This Book

This book is a part of the core curriculum in the 8th grade English class at Logos School. The chapters are of uniform page lengths, which makes it easy to schedule daily/weekly reading assignments.

History vs. Fiction

Historical fiction is a sub-genre of fiction. It features a storyline that is set within an actual location or historically factual series of events that have been previously recorded. The fictional nature of the work allows the author to take poetic license with the storyline, characters, and location. Quite often the major character is fictional, set within a historical set of events. This is true of *The Black Arrow* by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Historical fiction is commonly used to personalize a story, drawing the reader into a historical time frame or event. A skilled author develops a story, complete with characters that gain empathy for the young reader. Readers drawn into a story in this fashion remember not only the storyline itself, but the historical significance, vocabulary, and themes developed along with the story. This personalization of the story can raise the interest of both the reluctant and voracious reader. Works of historical fiction are available at many different reading levels from a variety of publishers.

There are causes for concern when reading historical fiction. Teachers must be aware of the blurring of the lines between factual and fictional events in the story. Guiding students to a correct understanding of true historical facts is essential in this genre. Authors who do not share your worldview or have revisionist tendencies in their writing can also be causes for concern. Distinguishing between the concept of literary romanticism and frivolous romantic liaisons should also be a concern when planning class discussions.

Selected themes you wish students to develop during discussions and compositions should reflect the curriculum goals of your school as set by your administration. In the case of the homeschool family, the parent is welcome to handle topics in a manner fitting the age of the child and the family setting.

Five Elements of Stories in *The Black Arrow*

The Black Arrow is an excellent book for studying the five elements of stories. It offers an older reader the opportunity to study complex characters, plot twists, and a wide range of themes. As a teacher or teaching parent, you have many options to adapt these elements to your educational setting.

The characters in this book can be organized in many different ways, allowing young readers the opportunity to argue over the quality of traits in each of the characters. Characters can be organized most obviously as men or women, York or Lancaster. However, great classroom discussions can be generated with the determination of protagonist or antagonist. Can a character in a story switch sides? How does one distinguish a protagonist from an antagonist? What type of conflict is generated in a story when one character crosses from protagonist to antagonist? The teacher or teaching parent should not overlook the use of disguise by different characters and the change of personality that occurs while in the disguise. Women donning men's clothing was particularly risky during this time period, since Joan of Arc was accused of dressing as a man in battle.

Remembering that the setting includes both location and time frame, *The Black Arrow* is straight-forward on both. This work of historical fiction takes place in England. The story opens in the 1450s, and the events take place over the course of a year. This is the story of a local skirmish (Black Arrow gang vs. Sir Daniel Brackley) inside of a civil war (York vs. Lancaster) shortly following a war with France (the Hundred Years War). Stevenson is very up-front about his one character that is outside of the timeline: Richard Crookback.

The plot in *The Black Arrow* includes plot lines and sub-plots, complete with twists and turns. This gives the teacher and students the opportunity to discuss events in the story, taking opportunities to prioritize events and situations. In the final discussions of the book, the teacher can challenge the student to summarize the plot in the top twenty events, then down to ten events, and even down to three events.

This story is rife with conflict, both internal and external. The internal struggles of individual characters are well-portrayed by the author on the issues of revenge and justice. Robust discussion will follow when teachers and students tackle the issues determining the fine line of justice and revenge, particularly when seen in light of Psalm 64. Spiritual devotion is also portrayed as an internal struggle within certain characters. The presence of true and false priests in this story will lead to discussions of true and false shepherds in our day. The obvious external struggle of Black Arrow vs. Sir Daniel Brackley becomes a personal battle between Richard Shelton and Sir Daniel Brackley, culminating in Dick's discovery that forgiveness is the ultimate justice.

An abundance of themes provides teachers and students great opportunity for discussion. Stevenson as the author puts forth his own theme that war is unhealthy for children and other living things. Justice and revenge are classic themes addressed in the book, and the use of disguise gives a unique opportunity for discussing the valid use of disguise and deception in war. Learning to express their opinions is vital to the educational experiences of dialectic students, since hopefully they are beginning to form their own opinions on these topics. Love and marriage are two of the other topics that can be addressed. Although most teens are uncomfortable discussing these topics, they can learn to do so in a mature manner. Medieval marriages were not often based upon love, but they were often based upon land possession and acquisition as well as dowry. The fact that Joanna's marriage is sold from one suitor to another should make the young ladies in your classroom grateful for a modern Christian understanding of the value of women! Dick is appalled at the thought of marrying a girl he does not know, but as Dick and Joanna are thrown together in adventure, their friendship and trust of each other grows into a proper form of love.

Scriptural Themes

Even though Robert Louis Stevenson was a self-avowed atheist, his writings are filled with scriptural values that Christians will readily recognize. The principles of poetic justice reflected in Psalm 64 provide an excellent framework for this literature study. Knowing the stories of scripture and obeying the direct instructions of scripture helps us to glory in the wisdom of God as the storyteller. Remembering that “vengeance belongs to God” (Romans 12:19) should be at the center of your class discussions in the development of a Christian worldview. Another helpful resource in understanding the scriptural themes of this story is the Heidelberg Catechism, questions 106 & 107. These questions follow the commandment regarding murder, and they can spark quite a discussion in your class.

Q 106: But does this commandment speak only of killing?

A: In forbidding murder God means to teach us that he abhors the root of murder, which is envy, hatred, anger, and *desire for revenge*, and that he regards all these as hidden murder. (emphasis mine)

Q 107: Is it enough, then, if we do not kill our neighbor in any of these ways?

A: No; for when God condemns envy, hatred, and anger, he required us to love our neighbor as ourselves, to show patience, peace, gentleness, mercy, and friendliness toward him, to prevent injury to him as much as we can, and also to do good to our enemies.

Grading and Accountability

No matter your school situation, record keeping is an important part of keeping track of student progress. Schools require more active record keeping on the part of the teacher, while homeschools may use simpler methods of accountability to prove student accomplishment.

There are some basic tools included in this teacher's guide to help grade the students. The first option is the list of discussion questions. These will help keep track of the important elements of the story. They can also be used as comprehension questions requiring a written response. Answers can be structured as brief statements or as complete sentences. A second option for grading is the set of quizzes. These are grouped reasonably and easily scheduled. Once again, brief answers or complete sentences can be used to evaluate student understanding of the storyline and concepts. A final option is for the book test to be administered when the student has completed the reading. Using a variety of testing techniques, students can demonstrate their knowledge of the storyline basics as well as the development of theme. Opinion questions are offered as a way of allowing the student to formulate and support an opinion in response to the reading. These tools may be adapted to best meet your situation.

Writing is another tool for assessing student knowledge and skill ability. Character sketches allow students to descriptively express an understanding of the relationships built within the storyline. Essays allow students to organize their thoughts based upon story events. Chapter summaries allow a student to keep track of complicated plot lines while incorporating new vocabulary and applying grammar concepts learned in English instruction. Creative writing, such as poetry, interviews, and comic illustrations, offers additional opportunities to put pen to paper. Writing assignments are also flexible enough to allow the teacher or parent to determine a proper grading standard.

Chapter Summaries

Chapter summaries are writing tools that allow students the opportunity to keep track of characters and storylines while developing better writing skills. Vocabulary words can easily be added to these assignments. Grammar concepts can also be added easily to chapter summaries, allowing more practice of new skills. Encourage your students to open sentences in different manners. Try using a prepositional phrase to begin a sentence. Clauses also make interesting openers. Using verbs, adjectives, and adverbs of a descriptive nature will also improve the quality of student writing. Inserting questions, alliteration, metaphors, and similes will also provide variety to the content of student writing assignments. A chart will be a creative way to keep track of the different elements used in the chapter summaries.

Author Biography

Robert Louis Stevenson

November 13, 1850 – December 3, 1894

“For he had the splendid and ringing sincerity to testify, in a voice like a trumpet, to a truth that he did not understand.” G.K. Chesterton

Robert Louis Stevenson, born to a prominent lighthouse engineer, was a thin and sickly child. He learned to read late in childhood, but dictated numerous stories to his mother and nurse at a young age. His father was quite proud of his son's talent and paid for the publication of his first story, “The Pentland Rising: A Page of History, 1666” (1866). Although he was enrolled in the University at Edinburgh to study engineering, his heart was not into his studies. His rejection of Christianity by 1873 caused a rift between Stevenson and his father that would not heal for many years. The younger Stevenson embraced a Bohemian lifestyle, frequenting saloons and brothels. His travels, necessary for his poor health, provided a wealth of material for his stories and novels. Despite poor health and extensive travel, he published his best novels between 1880 and 1887. He and his wife Fanny eventually settled in Samoa where they are both buried.

G.K. Chesterton's biography of Stevenson not only provides information regarding Stevenson's upbringing and professional life, but a critique and an analysis of his stories and novels. Chesterton's insight into Stevenson's character reveals Chesterton's Christian worldview.

Comprehension Questions

Name: _____

The Black Arrow: Prologue

1. What is the name of the hamlet in the story? _____

2. When the express rider comes, what is his news? _____

3. What is the opinion of the villagers regarding this battle? _____

4. Who is Sir Daniel to Richard Shelton? _____

5. Who is the character that “goes to bed Lancaster and gets up York”? _____

6. Who is the old archer of Agincourt who is shot in the back? _____

7. What color is the arrow, and what is the inscription on the arrow? _____

8. Where do Shelton and Hatch carry the body of Nick Appleyard? _____

9. Summarize the ominous message on the church door. _____

10. What is the last counsel of Bennet Hatch to Richard Shelton? _____

Name: _____

Book 1: The Two Lads

Chapter 1: At the Sign of the Sun in Kettley

1. At the beginning of chapter one, we meet the fourth man who is scheduled to receive a black arrow in his black heart. What is his name? _____
2. Sir Daniel has an old man brought to him named Condall. What accusation does Sir Daniel make? _____

3. When Dick Shelton arrives, he reveals the message from the church door to Sir Daniel. What does Dick want to know? _____

4. There is also a young boy there, named Master John. As he is sneaking out of the house, he asks Dick directions to what location? _____

5. When Sir Daniel finds out that Master John is gone, what are his orders to the man Sheldon? _____

Answers to Comprehension Questions

Prologue

1. The name of the hamlet in the story is Tunstall.
2. The express rider brings the news that a battle is impending.
3. The villagers do not support these battles. It is the ruin of the land.
4. Sir Daniel is Richard Shelton's master and guardian.
5. Sir Daniel switches sides to his advantage.
6. Nick Appleyard is the old archer of Agincourt who is shot in the back.
7. The arrow is black, and the inscription reads "Appleyard from Jon-Amendall."
8. Shelton and Hatch carry the body of Nick Appleyard back to his house.
9. To summarize: Bennet Hatch, Sir Oliver Oates, and Sir Daniel Brackley will die by the hand of the Black Arrow Band.
10. Bennet Hatch counsels Richard Shelton to keep an eye on Sir Daniel, do not trust the priest, and make strong friends.

Book 1: The Two Lads

Chapter 1: At the Sign of the Sun in Kettley

1. Sir Daniel Brackley, knight of Tunstall, is the fourth man from the message.
2. Sir Daniel accuses Condall of crimes he did not commit, saying Condall will hang unless he writes him a check for everything he has.
3. Dick wants to know if the rhyme from the church door is true.
4. Master John wants directions to Holywood.
5. Sir Daniel wants John Matcham returned to the Moat House by the time he returns.

Chapter 2: In the Fen

1. Dick finds the horse belonging to the boy John Matcham. Dick shoots it with his crossbow so it doesn't slowly drown.
2. Matcham is headed to Holywood.
He is seeking sanctuary from a man who is oppressing him.
3. Dick's opinion is "A plague on all of them—except Joan of Arc."
4. Joanna Sedley is a wealthy girl that Sir Daniel wants to marry off to Dick.
5. Dick is embarrassed by the warmth of John Matcham's words.

Chapter 3: The Fen Ferry

1. Hugh Ferryman makes fun of John Matcham because he is too small—"somethin' o' the wrong model."
2. Hugh Ferryman is worried about John a Fenne.
He serves Sir Daniel and stops people along the way.
3. Their horse is shot, causing their boat to capsized. Because Dick cannot swim, John helps Dick ashore.
4. Dick refuses to leave John, especially after John had saved his life.

Final Test

Name: _____

The Black Arrow

Final Test

Character Matching: Identify the characters on the right by their description on the left.

- | | |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. _____ A self-serving, unscrupulous knight | A. Bennet Hatch |
| 2. _____ Original guardian of Joanna Sedley | B. John Matcham |
| 3. _____ Organizer of the Black Arrow Fellowship | C. Arblaster |
| 4. _____ Tunstall parson | D. Sir Daniel Brackley |
| 5. _____ Lead protagonist | E. Nicholas Appleyard |
| 6. _____ Joanna Sedley's pseudonym | F. Lord Foxham |
| 7. _____ Veteran of the Battle of Agincourt | G. Will Lawless |
| 8. _____ Sir Daniel's retainer helps Dick on occasion | H. Ellis Duckworth |
| 9. _____ "Friar Tuck" outlaw ends his life in devotion | I. Sir Oliver Oates |
| 10. _____ Captain of the Good Hope | J. Richard Shelton |

Short Answer:

1. John Amend-All was the pseudonym used by _____ .