

Johnny Tremain

Reader's Guide
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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 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. Such is the case with *Johnny Tremain*; young Johnny is the protagonist set within the beginning of the War for Independence.

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 family setting.

Author Biography

Esther Forbes

June 28, 1891 – August 12, 1967

Esther Forbes was a talented authoress, earning both a Pulitzer Prize for History (*Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* 1942) and a Newbery Medal for children's literature (*Johnny Tremain* in 1943) during her career. As a young lady she struggled in school due to nearsightedness and dyslexia. She had a creative imagination and wrote wonderful stories in college. Her first short story was published in 1915.

Forbes began working at Houghton-Mifflin as a typist, but when they discovered her atrocious spelling, she was transferred to a department that read new manuscripts. Following an unhappy marriage, she moved to her hometown of Weston, MA, where she lived with her mother and siblings. Her mother was an invaluable help in researching her historical novels. She continued writing until the end of her life in 1967.

Forbes used her knowledge gained in the writing of *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* as a basis for *Johnny Tremain*. She began writing *Johnny Tremain* on December 8, 1941, the day war was declared against Japan. One of her goals was to encourage American youth in the upcoming challenges of self-sacrifice and patriotism.

Five Elements of Short Stories in *Johnny Tremain*

Johnny Tremain is an excellent book for studying the five elements of stories. It offers an older reader the opportunity to study complex character, 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 quality of traits in each of the characters. Characters can be organized most obviously as men or women, Whig or Tory, historical or fictional. 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 presence of inanimate objects in this story as well. Silver is an active part of this

Comprehension Questions

Name: _____

Chapter 1: Up and About

Section 1:

a. Describe Johnny. _____

b. How do the three boys relate to one another? _____

c. What do we learn is one of Johnny's faults as a character? _____

d. What are the two youngest daughters called? How do they treat Johnny?

Section 2:

a. What is Mrs. Lapham like? _____

b. What is Mr. Lapham like? _____

c. What embarrassing thing happens to Johnny that morning at breakfast, when he's asked to read the Bible? _____

Section 3:

a. What work do Mr. Lapham and his apprentices do? _____

b. How does Mr. Lapham do at his job? _____

c. Who is the rich patron who shows up to their shop? Do you recognize his name? _____

d. Mr. Hancock leaves money for the three apprentices—Mr. Lapham says so that they'll vote for him. Why won't Mr. Lapham vote for Hancock? _____

Section 4:

Who ends up having to do nearly all the work on Mr. Hancock's sugar bowl?

What does Cilla make for Johnny? _____

Section 5:

a. Why does Cilla wake him in the middle of the night? Does Johnny dislike the two girls? What does Johnny tell Cilla about his mother? _____

b. What does he promise to show her when they go home? _____

Section 6:

What is on the cup? _____

Name: _____

Chapter 2: The Pride of Your Power

Section 1:

a. Why does Johnny seek the counsel of Paul Revere? _____

b. How does Paul Revere speak to Johnny? _____

c. What offer does Paul Revere make to Johnny? _____

d. Why does Johnny turn down Mr. Revere's kind and generous offer? _____

Section 2:

a. Johnny is quite anxious to finish the work on the sugar basin. What necessary item is out of stock in the shop? _____

b. Why is Johnny treating Dove, and even Dusty, so rudely? _____

c. When Mr. Lapham hears the boys arguing, what action does he take? _____

Answers to the Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1: Up and About

Section 1

- a. Johnny is 14 years old, light eyes, fair hair, the boss of the house.
- b. Johnny bosses the other two. Dove hates Johnny and fights him; Dusty worships Johnny but sympathizes with Dove.
- c. Pride: he could have been friends with Dove, but preferred to bully him.
- d. Cilla and Isannah.
They tease him.

Section 2

- a. Mrs. Lapham keeps everything clean, cooks well, and doesn't need genteel manners.
- b. Mr. Lapham is a pious, kind old man who doesn't really listen to others.
- c. Mr. Lapham makes him read all these verses about pride and then asks him if God would like him, or if God likes humble people, and makes him swear to walk humbly before God. The girls laugh at him, and the boys kick him under the table.

Section 3

- a. Silversmith work.
- b. He does it well, but doesn't listen to orders well; Johnny has to be there to write it all down.
- c. John Hancock.
He has one of the only signatures you can recognize on the Declaration of Independence.
- d. He's stirring up trouble with England, along with Samuel Adams, being patriots. He's happy under England's rule.

Section 4

Johnny.

A stamp with his initials for his handiwork

Section 5

- a. Isannah feels sick. He needs to help carry her outside.
No, he just pretends to dislike them.
She died when he was young. She was related to a rich merchant, the Lyte family, but never went to them for help, even though they were poor.
- b. He promises to show her a cup his mother gave him, which he was never to part with, no matter how poor he was.

Section 6

On the cup is the Lyte family crest: an eye rising over the sea, with the motto "Let there be Lyte".

Chapter 2: The Pride of Your Power

Section 1

- a. Johnny is dissatisfied with his work on the handles. He thinks he can do better, but he needs advice from a master silversmith.

Name: _____

Character Quiz

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

- | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. _____ Johnny Tremain | A. Lovely, spoiled, rich girl |
| 2. _____ Rab Silsbee | B. Unhappy Tory soldier, executed |
| 3. _____ Cilla Lapham | C. Injured silversmith |
| 4. _____ Issanah Lapham | D. Lazy silver apprentice |
| 5. _____ Mr. Jonathan Lyte | E. New silversmith at Lapham's |
| 6. _____ Lavinia Lyte | F. Rich merchant in Boston |
| 7. _____ Mrs. Bessie | G. Printer apprentice |
| 8. _____ Pumpkin | H. Lovely, spoiled, poor girl |
| 9. _____ Dove | I. Johnny's loyal friend |
| 10. _____ Mr. Tweedie | J. Cook for the Lyte family |

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

- | | |
|-----------------------|--|
| 1. _____ Samuel Adams | A. Not always trusted by Sons of Liberty |
| 2. _____ John Hancock | B. Offered to fix Johnny's hand |
| 3. _____ Paul Revere | C. Leader of the Sons of Liberty |
| 4. _____ James Otis | D. Master silversmith makes warnings |

Name: _____

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 5. _____ Dr. Joseph Warren | E. British officer in Boston |
| 6. _____ Josiah Quincy | F. Owns the businesses on the wharf |
| 7. _____ Colonel Smith | G. Lawyer defended Whigs in Boston |

Short Answer:

1. What are the five elements in a story?

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____
- e. _____

2. List four Tories in the story.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

3. List four Whigs in the story.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____