

Son of Charlemagne

A Reading Guide

For the book by Barbara Willard

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How to Use This Book

This book is part of the 5th grade curriculum at Logos School. There are thirteen chapters in this book, but they are of uneven lengths, so chapters could be split to create equal reading assignments.

Five Elements of a Story

Son of Charlemagne is set during the founding of the Holy Roman Empire, and gives an account of the struggles and hard work that Charlemagne and his family endured over a period of twenty years as the Franks fought the Saxons, the Roman Empire was reassembled in alliance with the Church, and King Charles was finally crowned Holy Roman Emperor (in A.D. 800). Willard's story provides both a helpful context for the political turmoil of the time and a good place to identify the five elements of a story.

The main character is Carl, Charlemagne's second oldest son and heir. The story traces Charlemagne's ascendancy to emperor from Carl's point of view, as Charlemagne and his son deal with both Saxon enemies and traitors within their own court on the long journey to becoming Holy Roman Emperor.

The story takes place during the late 7th Century A.D. Charlemagne's kingdom spans Aquitaine, Italy, Burgundy, Lombardy, Bavaria, East Franks, West Franks, and Saxony. Most of the action takes place in or around King Charles's palace at Aachen in Lombardy, but they travel across the Alps to Rome several times and Carl is stationed in far-off Saxony for a time.

The story begins with Charlemagne's decision to make Carl (his second-born son) his heir, instead of his oldest son Gobbo, who is a hunchback. His youngest two sons are in turn crowned kings of Aquitaine and Italy. This sets the story up for future conflict. For the next twenty years, Carl takes more and more responsibility as King Charles's second in command, supporting King Charles through multiple remarriages, Saxon uprisings, traitors within the court, and dealings with the Pope. At the end of the book, Charlemagne and Carl's years of work finally pay off and Charlemagne is crowned Holy Roman Emperor, with Carl as heir.

There is both internal and external conflict within the story. The Franks and the Saxons vacillate between war and peace for most of the story. There is also conflict within Charlemagne's own family: after years of scheming, Charlemagne's oldest son turns traitor after being disinherited by

Comprehension Questions

Chapter I: Family Journey, A.D. 781

1. Who is the author of this book, and what is the title?
2. When does the story begin?
3. Who are the king's children?
4. Who is the king, where is he going, and why?
5. Who is King Charles's heir?
6. Who is Gobbo, and what does that nickname mean?

Chapter II: The Palace School

1. What story must be told in secret at the palace?
2. Who comes to visit the palace school?
3. Why is Alcuin visiting the palace school?

Chapter III: Kings in the Making

1. Who met King Charles on the road to Rome?
2. Who does the Pope rechristen in Rome?
3. What affect does the christening ceremony have on the king's children?
4. Who is Rhotrud engaged to?
5. Why does Charles have two boys rechristened and sent to their new kingdoms?

Answers to the Comprehension Questions

Chapter 1: Family Journey, A.D. 781

1. Barbara Willard; *Son of Charlemagne*.
2. A.D. 781.
3. Carl, Pepin, Rhotrud, Bertha, Carloman, Lewis.
4. "King Charles of the Franks was on his way to Rome....[he] was the champion who had arisen to reawaken and restore the Church, and order in civil things, and the precious knowledge of books and the things of the mind" (7). "In his secret heart, Charles dreamed of a new Roman Empire, one based and rooted firmly in the Christian faith," (8).
5. Carl.
6. Gobbo is Pepin, and the nickname means "Hunchback."

Chapter II: The Palace School

1. The story of Roland's defeat
2. Alcuin of England, a great scholar; "The Englishman was spoken of as the spiritual heir of the great scholar Bede of Yarrow" (20).
3. To become headmaster of the school, in order to help it grow.

Chapter III: Kings in the Making

1. Pope Hadrian
2. Lewis and Carloman - Carloman's name is changed to Pepin.
3. Pepin the Hunchback (Gobbo) is dispossessed; Carloman is Pepin in his place. Also, Lewis and the new Pepin now have their own kingdoms to attend to (even though they are children). Pepin is now King of Italy; Lewis is King of Aquitaine.
4. The young Emperor Constantine, son of Empress Irene.
5. Charles says it is a sacrifice, but necessary so that these areas would be ruled by Christian kings.

Quiz &
Final Test

ANSWER KEY