

# The Thirty-Nine Steps

Teacher 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.

## About the Author

John Buchan, a Scottish-born author, enjoyed his writing as an exciting sideline to his career in British politics. He was the oldest son of a Scottish minister and later attended both Glasgow University and Oxford. Heavily influenced by Sir Walter Scott, Buchan's adventurous stories are written 'where the incidents defy the probabilities and march just inside the borders of the possible'.

Buchan began as a war correspondent during WWI. He later served on the Headquarters Staff and as a Director of Information. The characters in his thrilling mystery *The Thirty-nine Steps* are based upon people he met during his service in the war.

In his later years, Buchan served as an MP from the Scottish Universities. As the Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfield, he served as the fifth governor general of Canada until his passing in 1940.

## Five Elements of Short Stories

*The Thirty-nine Steps* 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 by nationality. 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.

Remembering that the setting includes both location and time frame, *The Thirty-nine*

*Steps* is straight-forward on both. His work of intrigue and espionage begins in England, but quickly moves to the Scottish countryside, returning to England for the suspenseful ending. The time is set in the 1910s, prior to WWI.

The plot in *The Thirty-nine Steps* 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 narrow it 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 trust and loyalty. Richard Hannay is constantly struggling within himself over whom he should trust. He makes some wise decisions along the way, but he also has a few close calls. Hannay's obvious conflict with the enemy Black Stone group keeps the reader hoping that he will stay one step ahead of the antagonists. Adventure, suspense, a bombing, and an airplane chase keep the reader guessing at what will happen next.

Trust, the use of disguise, and perseverance are prominent themes in this book. How does one choose who to trust in a situation like this? What are the qualities that help you determine who to trust? What do you do when you have misplaced your trust? Hannay must be creative in his use of disguise for purposes of travel, and yet it seems the Black Stone group is always hot on his trail. Great discussion can be had on the topic justifying the use of disguise. Is Hannay's use of disguise deceptive or protective? Is there a reason for each in this story? Even though Hannay succeeds in turning his information over to the proper British authorities, he does not rest easy until he finishes his part in the plot. He is determined to see it through to the end. The British are finally able to enter the upcoming WWI with their military secrets intact.

## 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 assess student understanding

of the storyline and concepts. A final option is 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.

# Comprehension Questions

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# *The Thirty-nine Steps*

## Chapter 1

1. Who is the narrator and main character in this story? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. What is the setting of the story? \_\_\_\_\_

3. How long has he been in London? What is his opinion? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. If nothing happens to him on the next day, what does he plan to do? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What appears at Hannay's elbow outside of his flat? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Who is the man and where is he from? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. Who is planning to stir up trouble between the Russians and the Germans?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the first step in their plan? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

9. When is Karolides coming? \_\_\_\_\_

10. Who will the anarchists blame for the assassination? \_\_\_\_\_

11. Why were people following Scudder? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

12. How had he escaped from the men who were following him? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

13. How is Scudder disguised at this time? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

14. Where does Scudder stay? \_\_\_\_\_

15. Why doesn't Hannay pay close attention to Scudder's story? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

16. Where does Hannay find Scudder one evening after dinner? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

# Chapter 2

1. What is worrying Hannay now? \_\_\_\_\_

---

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2. What is Hannay's other concern? \_\_\_\_\_

---

3. What does he resolve to do? \_\_\_\_\_

---

4. What is Hannay's first goal? \_\_\_\_\_

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5. How does Hannay feel about all this? \_\_\_\_\_

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6. What does Hannay think the murderers took? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Where does Hannay decide to go? \_\_\_\_\_

8. What does he do before he leaves? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. What does he find in the suit pocket? \_\_\_\_\_

10. How does Hannay disguise himself? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. What suspicious thing does Hannay see on the street? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Where does Hannay go? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

# Answers to the Comprehension Questions

## Chapter 1

1. Richard Hannay. He is thirty-seven years old.
2. England. 1910s.
3. Three months.  
He is terribly bored.
4. He plans to take the first boat to the Cape, meaning Capetown, South Africa.
5. A nervous little man appears, wanting to come in.
6. He is Franklin Scudder, from Kentucky, America.
7. The Anarchists.
8. The plan to assassinate Constantine Karolides, a Greek man who was coming to London to help negotiate peace.
9. June 15.
10. Austria and Germany.
11. The people realized Scudder possessed this confidential information.
12. Scudder had faked his own death. He had found a corpse and shot it in the jaw, making it look like he committed suicide.
13. Scudder is disguised as a British officer.
14. In Hannay's flat.
15. Hannay thinks it will never concern him.
16. In the smoking room, dead with a knife in his heart.

## Chapter 2

1. He is worried that he will be the murderers' next target because Scudder confided in him.
2. He might be charged with murder, because the police would find his story suspicious.
3. Hannay resolves to take up where Scudder left off.
4. To stay alive for the next three weeks, hiding out from the murderers and the police.
5. Excited! Hannay's been bored until now.
6. Scudder's pocketbook.
7. Galloway, Scotland.
8. Hannay changes his appearance. He shaves his mustache and wears an old tweed suit.
9. The pocketbook.
10. Hannay waits for the milkman and gives him money to exchange outfits with him.
11. Hannay sees somebody on the street exchange a signal with a person on a first floor window.
12. Hannay runs to the train station; he does not decide on his destination.

# Quizzes and Final Test

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## *The Thirty-Nine Steps*

Match the character to the correct characteristic.

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Richard Hannay
  2. \_\_\_\_\_ Franklin P. Scudder
  3. \_\_\_\_\_ Karolides
  4. \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Harry
  5. \_\_\_\_\_ Sir Walter Bullivant
- 
- A. Greek Premier under threat of assassination
  - B. Sir Harry's relation at the Foreign Office
  - C. A Scot recently returned from southern Africa, ready for adventure
  - D. American freelance spy
  - E. A local Scottish politician

