

Literature Notes

Crispin:
The Cross of Lead

by Avi

From *Rooted in Language*



Rooted in Language

Laying a Path for Readers & Writers

Crispin: The Cross of Lead

Literature Notes

Crispin: The Cross of Lead by Avi is a young adult book about the young boy Crispin in fourteenth-century, Medieval England. Add a multisensory element through the use of simple drawings (stick figures are great) to illustrate a character or track the story's plot arc. Add your own ideas to ours, and join our ongoing discussions in our Facebook group, the Rooted Community.

For more of our ideas and to share some of yours, visit us at [RootedinLanguage.com](https://www.rootedinlanguage.com)

or on



Produced by Rooted in Language

Rita Cevasco MA, SLP; Moira Chrzanowski MA, SLP; Claire Molitors MA; Tracy Molitors MBA; Edited by Linda Plass, BSBA

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7577 Central Parke Blvd., Suite 350

Website: www.rootedinlanguage.com

Mason, OH 45040

To report errors contact: help@rootedinlanguage.com

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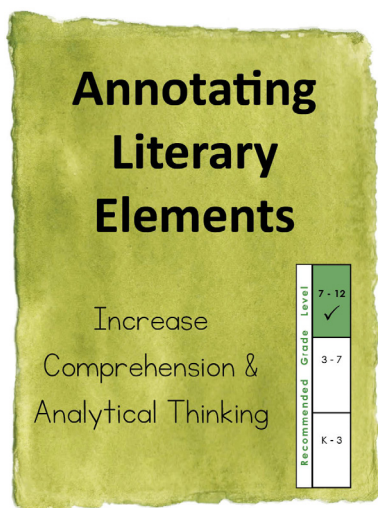
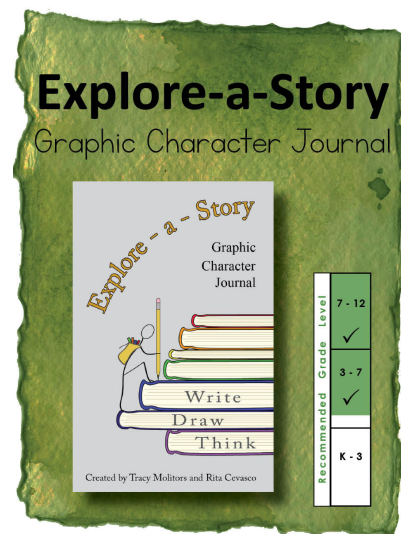
For the most effective application of this resource, click to watch our related deep dive video, [Crispin: The Cross of Lead](#), located on the Rooted in Language YouTube channel, or scan the QR code. The video is divided into four parts with timestamps marking each segment.



For more information about the ancient story-telling pattern known as The Hero's Journey, watch our related video entitled [Responding to Our World: The Hero's Journey](#), and refer to the accompanying resources included with our free download [Literary Analysis Tool, Images & Metaphors](#).

To further support your analysis, the following instructional materials are also available in the [Rooted Shop](#):

Explore-a-Story ~ for deep character analysis with writing



Annotating Literary Elements ~ for more on the plot arc and literary elements referenced throughout this series

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A Word About Quotations . . .

Follow basic MLA format from about late Elementary through High School when teaching quotation citations.

In-text citations for Print sources with known author (from the Purdue Online Writing Lab):

For print sources like books, magazines, scholarly journal articles, and newspapers, provide a single word or phrase (usually the author's last name) and a page number. If you provide the signal word in the sentence, you do not need to include it in the parenthetical notation:

Human beings have been described by Kenneth Burke as “symbol-using animals” (3).

Human beings have been described as “symbol-using animals” (Burke 3).

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Prologue: Setting and Genre

England, AD 1377

“In the midst of life comes death . . .
“in the midst of death comes life.”
If this be a riddle, so was my life (1).

Chapter One: Tone and Mood

Since our cottage was at the village fringe, the priest and I bore her remains along the narrow, rutted road that led to the cemetery. A steady, hissing rain had turned the ground to clinging mud. No birds sang. No bells tolled. The sun hid behind the dark and lowering clouds.

We passed village fields where people were at work in the rain and mud. No one knelt. They simply stared. As they had shunned my mother in life, so they shunned her now. As for me, I felt, as I often did, ashamed. It was as if I contained an unnamed sin that made me less than nothing in their eyes (1).

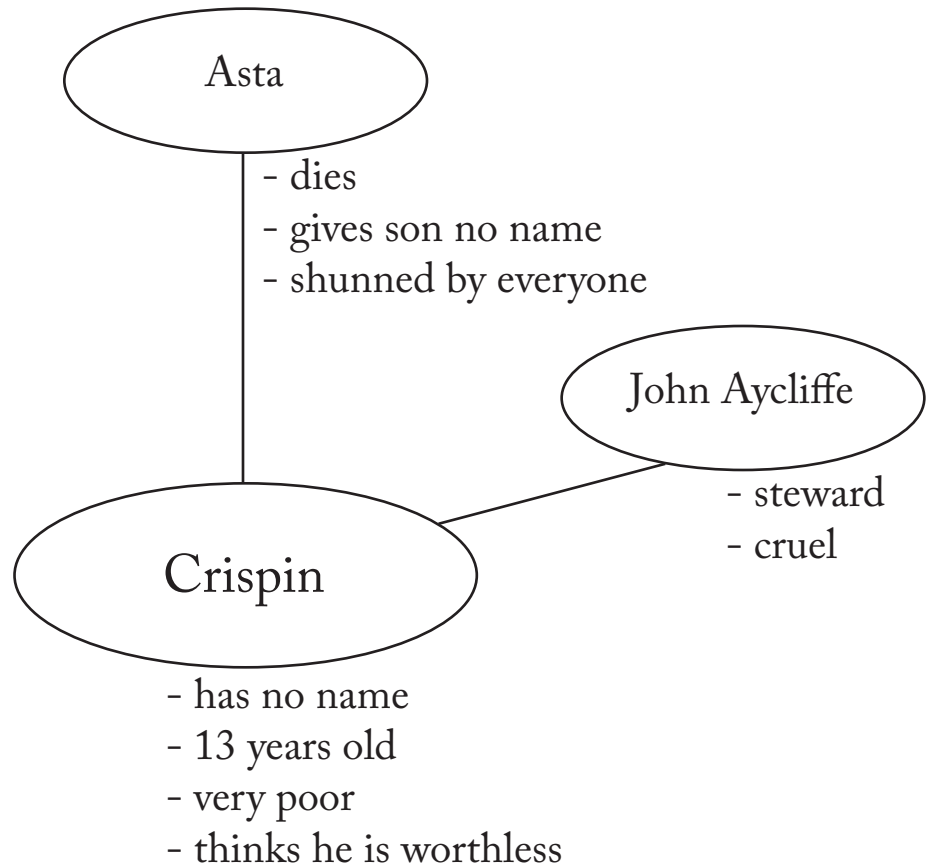
***Have students mark words that reflect or influence the mood/
tone of the text.***

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Create a Character Map



Use this as inspiration for a Character Map. Add important character details, relationships, and pictures. Keep the Character Map and add to it as new characters are introduced.

Chapter Two: Dialogue and Mysterious Words to Remember

“If God wills, it will come soon,” the stranger said.

“And am I to act immediately?” Aycliffe asked the man.

“Are you not her kin?” the stranger said. “Do you not see the consequences if you don’t?”

“A great danger to us all.”

“Precisely. There could be those who will see it so and act accordingly. You’ll be in danger, too.”

As a frowning Aycliffe began to fold the document, he turned away. When he shifted, he saw me (8).

Chapter Three: Main Character and the Enemy

I did try to accept my life, but unlike our perfect Jesus, I was filled with caution and suspicion, always expecting to be set upon or mocked. In short, I lived the life of the shunned, forever cast aside, yet looking on, curious as to how others lived (11).

Chapter Four: Former Life and Spark Event

As for the two roads that passed through Stromford, all I knew was that they led to the rest of England, of which I had no knowledge. And beyond England, I supposed, came the remaining world: "Great Christendom," our priest called it. But in all my life I'd never gone past the boundary crosses, which marked the limits of our village (19).

Draw a map of the setting:

A small village with North, South, East, and West roads leading out, marked by crosses at the end of the village. On the north side is the village green. On the west side is the Manor House and the Mill.

Chapter Five: Conflict Begins

Add to the Character Map:

Fr. Quinel, who represents the church, hope, faith, and trust.

Notice Crispin's Prayer for divine intervention because he needs a Helper. Crispin hopes help will come from Fr. Quinel, who he knows and trusts, but will it?

Chapter Six: No Escape and Rising Action

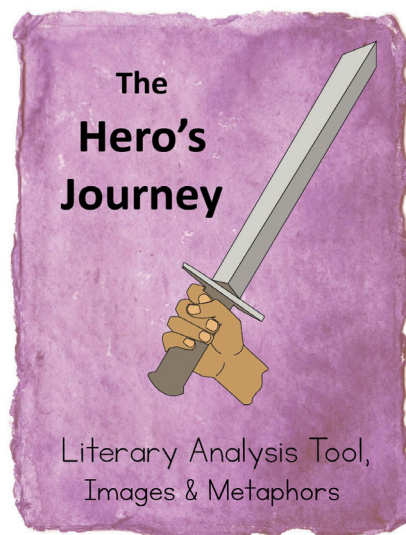
Create a list of words to describe Crispin's state of mind:

- Afraid of the unknown
- Timid
- Uncertain
- Indecisive
- Hesitant to leave his old life
- Confused

Chapter Seven: The Threshold of Change and The Call to Action

Use The Hero's Journey to identify the following:

- Old Life:
- Spark Event:
- Threshold of Change:
- Guards block his path:
- Call to Adventure:



Chapter Eight: The Giver of Knowledge

I shook my head in puzzlement. “These things you say: a name. Reading. Writing. My father . . . Why would my mother keep such things from me?”

The priest became very still. Then from his pocket, he removed my mother’s cross of lead, the one with which she so oft prayed, which was in her hands when she died. I had forgotten about it. He held it up . . .

“Tomorrow,” he said, cutting me off and folding my fingers over the cross, “I’ll explain . . . Now go,” he said. “And stay well hidden.”

. . . The things the priest had said made my heart feel like a city under siege (35-36).

Find a Biblical Allusion, the Ally, and the Gift

Biblical Allusion:

“There’s always Judas lurking” (29).

Ally gives knowledge & a gift: Fr. Quinel

- Lord Furnival is going to die, so there will be a change in power
- Crispin is his secret name
- He knows who Crispin’s father is (but won’t tell him—who is it?)
- He advises him to flee Stromford and gain his freedom elsewhere
- His mother was of higher birth and could read and write (although she never taught Crispin—why?)
- Gift: His mother’s lead cross with writing on it (which Crispin can’t read—what does it say?)

Chapters Nine & Ten: Friend or Foe at the Threshold

Crispin begins to make his own decisions—to follow Cerdic's lead or not?

- Friend or deceiver?
- Takes him to Peregrine, a minor helper who gives a blessing
- At the crossroads decision: follow original advice from Fr. Quinel or Cerdic's advice as his supposed messenger?
- The trap!

Chapters Eleven & Twelve: Notice and Interpret Symbolism

As I lay there, I remembered Goodwife Peregrine's pouch that hung about my neck. With a spurt of hope, I sat up, and emptied the contents into my hand. To my dismay it contained three seeds, one of wheat, one of barley, and one of oats—plus my mother's cross of lead.

Sorely disappointed, I tossed the seeds away but decided to keep the cross in the pouch as the solitary connection to my past (51-52).

Have students find and interpret the symbolism of the three seeds.

As I lay there, I remembered Goodwife Peregrine's pouch that hung about my neck. With a spurt of hope, I sat up, and emptied the contents into my hand. To my dismay it contained **three seeds, one of wheat, one of barley, and one of oats**—plus my **mother's cross of lead.**

"Sorely disappointed, I tossed the seeds away but decided to keep the cross in the pouch as the solitary **connection to my past** (51-52).

Chapters Thirteen - Fifteen: Supernatural Help

Perhaps this was where God had led me, where I would gain my liberties, where people would treat me kindly. And where there would be food for me.

Yet as I drew close I began to sense something greatly amiss. There was no rising smoke, no people, sheep, or cows. No living thing appeared, not so much as a single cock, goose, dog, or pig. Nor were there smells, no dung, no manure. The fields I passed had long been unplowed (57-58).

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Connect to History

Investigate the history of the 1300's in England:

- Middle Ages and Medieval times
- Serfs, peasants, Lords, masters, serfdom, feudalism, fealty
- The plague
- Villages, houses, roads
- The role of the church

Chapters Sixteen - Twenty-Two: The Mentor

At first all I saw was rubble and rot. Then, partly hidden in the shadows, I saw a man who was anything but a skeleton. On the contrary, he was a mountain of flesh, a great barrel of a fellow, whose arms and legs were as thick as tree limbs, and with a tublike belly before all . . .

As for his face, most striking was a bushy beard of such ruddy red it seemed as if the lower part of his face was aflame. He also had a large, red, and fleshy nose and hairy eyebrows of the same hue, as well as a cherry-lipped mouth big even for such a face as his (61).

Have students mark selected literary elements within a passage:

1. Assonance and alliteration

At first all I saw was rubble and rot. Then, partly hidden in the shadows, I saw a man who was anything but a skeleton. On the contrary, he was a mountain of flesh, a great barrel of a fellow, whose arms and legs were as thick as tree limbs, and with a tublike belly before all . . .

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2. Color imagery

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3. Metaphors and similes

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Character Study of Bear: Guided Annotation

Help students notice the following: imagery, irony, alliteration, metaphor, interesting vocabulary, inconsistencies in character, hints of his belief system and motivations, humor, sarcasm, and moods.

His clothing was ragged, torn, and patched...hairy dirty skin (62).

He was singing raucously...massive hands...big fingers...booming laugh (62).

Old pig's eyes, I thought, shrewd and wily (62).

Scrutinizing me...while a sly smile played at his lips (63).

'Hunger never pleases me,' he roared (64).

Wished me to reply...showing disappointment (65).

'I hate all tyranny' (65).

'A priest,' he said mockingly (67).

'And failed to note that anyone who catches you may haul you back?' (68).

Towering above me, hat bells tinkling with mocking laughter, bushy red beard like flames from Hell, he seemed to me a true demon (69).

Then he put his dagger aside and tossed me a piece of bread (71).

'Ah, boy, what does it matter?' he said, speaking in a far softer voice than before. 'You didn't truly expect to live without a master, did you?' (72).

'You needn't be so resentful,' he said. 'When you've lived as much as I, you'll learn to neither trust nor love any mortal. Then, the only one who can betray you is yourself' (73).

'Do you ever smile, boy?' he demanded. 'If you can't laugh and smile, life is worthless. Do you hear me?' he yelled. 'It's nothing!' (73).

'I wander from town to town, through the kingdom. Not as a beggar, mind you, but as a man of skills. Skills, boy, which enable me to gather enough farthings and pennies to live and keep this belly full.' (75).

He cocked his head to one side. 'Do you have any thoughts about anything?' (76).

'Music is the tongue of souls' (77).

'Crispin, if I bid you to sing, you'll sing,' he said (87).

'As God in Heaven knows, both wheat and trust take a full season to grow' (88).

'To feed us I've put both our lives in jeopardy,' he said. 'That's the kind of freedom that exists in this kingdom (89)

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Crispin's Treasure

It had grown dark. The only light was our little fire. A breeze had sprung, which caused the flames to dance. Bear's red beard seemed to glitter in the firelight, so that his face—despite the dark—was equal to any sun. His bald head gleamed like a moon. Indeed, he was big enough to fill the entire sky.

Then he began to speak of his many adventures, his riotous life, the marvels he had seen, the scrapes he had escaped, his fortunes good and bad. Never had I heard such tales. It was a world and life, a way of being, utterly unknown to me. What's more, everything he talked about was stitched with laughter. It was as if life itself were a jest. Except, every now and then he'd cry out with an awful anger at what he called the injustices of the world (90-91).

Chapters Twenty-Three - Twenty-Six: Growth

Bear challenges Crispin to engage, creating a transformation in Crispin:

- Bear asks Crispin questions about himself
- Bear tells Crispin to laugh more
- Bear encourages Crispin to ask more questions
- Bear tells Crispin that God is in his heart, not in a church
- Bear encourages Crispin to make decisions and think for himself
- Bear allows Crispin to express feelings of anger
- Bear asks Crispin what he wants for his life
- Bear gives Crispin responsibilities

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Crispin's Journey

Chapters 26 - 41: The Pit

Hero's Journey	Event	Evidence (Citations)	Analysis
Home			
Call to Adventure (Spark Event)			
Helper(s)			
Weapon/Tool			
Guards block the path			

Hero's Journey	Event	Evidence (Citations)	Analysis
<p>Threshold</p> <p>Supernatural help</p> <p>Mentor Teaches New Skills</p> <p>Treasure</p>			

Hero's Journey	Event	Evidence (Citations)	Analysis
Challenges			

Hero's Journey	Event	Evidence (Citations)	Analysis
The Pit or Battle			
Return or Restoration			

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Chapters 26 through 31:
Rising Action as the Hero Faces Challenges

Hero's Journey	Event	Evidence (Citations)	Analysis
Challenges (rising action)	Guards at the river crossing	<p>Crispin and Bear try to cross the bridge on the main road, but guards are there.</p> <p>Crispin recognizes them and is sure they are after him.</p> <p>Bear believes Crispin and they go another way.</p> <p>Bear questions Crispin and reads Crispin's cross.</p> <p>Bear is thinking, but Crispin doesn't know about what.</p>	<p>There were guards out looking for Crispin, but he still doesn't know why.</p> <p>Crispin convinces Bear that it is not safe. Bear didn't believe him.</p> <p>before this, but now he does. Bear knows what the cross says, but he won't tell Crispin.</p> <p>It is a clue as to why the guards are after him, but Crispin is still in the dark.</p>

Chapters 26 through 31: Rising Action as the Hero Faces Challenges

Bear shrugged. “We’re strangers. For some, strangers are threats, and they look at us accordingly. Pay it no mind.”

“But you told them we were going to Great Wexly.”

“A small slip.”

“Bear . . .”

“What?”

“You also called me your son.”

“Ah, Crispin, you could do worse. Far worse.” Usually such a remark came with a laugh. This time he was very serious (132).

Chapter 32: Extended Metaphor

“Bear, you . . . you won’t betray me . . . will you?”

He gave me an angry look. “How can you even ask?”

“Forgive me,” I said. “But . . . it has happened.”

. . . Frowning, he considered me for a while. “Crispin,” he said, “you must know I care for you. Perhaps you remind me of what I once was. And as the Devil knows all too well, liking goes many leagues with me. True, you’re as ignorant as a turnip—or perhaps a cabbage—but you’ve a heart of oak, small acorn though you are” (137).

Chapter 33: Personification and Universal Idea

“Aside from the sheer numbers of people, what struck me most were the many ways people dressed, along with the great variety of colors to their clothing, colors I had never seen before, nor could even name. It was as if rainbows had come to earth, draped themselves on these folk, and paraded along the road. I soon realized it was not just words I had to learn to read, but what people wore as well” (142).

What is the Universal Idea?

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Connect to History

- Look at a map of England and find Stromford and Great Wexly
- Look at images of the Great Wexly Cathedral
- Investigate festivals in the Middle Ages
- Investigate how signs were labeled (pictures rather than words)
- Foods and drinks of the time period
- Water sources and sewage management in towns and villages

Chapter 34 - 36: Characters' Growth and Tragic Flaws

“When we met,” he said, “you dared not even ask my name. Now you stare brazenly at me and presume to ask of my affairs. Have we risen in the world, or fallen?”

“That’s for you to say,” I said.

“As to what I really do,” he said with a placating smile, “I’m a fool because I should like to be in Heaven before I die.” He reached for the door.

“I don’t want to stay here,” I said. “It’s close and ill smelling.”

“You’ll do as your told” (158).

Chapter 37 - 40: The Crisis Moment Begins . . .

As he turned, the hairs at the back of my neck began to prickle. In truth, I could hardly believe what I was seeing. It was none other than John Aycliffe, the steward of Stromford Village . . .

Our eyes seemed to fasten on one another. It was as if neither of us could believe the other was there, and we were in Stromford's forest once again.

But then he set up a cry, shouting, "There!" and pointed right at me. "The boy! The wolf's head! " He's here! Catch him!" (168).

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Challenges Cause Both Bear and Crispin to Change and Grow

CHARACTER THOUGHTS	BEFORE	NOW
<p>Crispin's thoughts/trust of Bear</p> <p>Bear's thoughts about Crispin</p> <p>Crispin's ability to give an opinion</p> <p>Bear trusting Crispin</p> <p>Crispin's bravery</p> <p>Crispin's ability to defend himself</p> <p>Crispin's wisdom</p> <p>Bear – Crispin relationship</p> <p>Who is protecting whom?</p>	<p>Crispin thinks Bear is "mad"</p> <p>Bear thinks he's foolish</p> <p>Master/Servant</p>	<p>Bear thinks he's naive</p> <p>Father/Son</p>

Chapter 41- 42: Foreshadowing and Metaphor of “The Pit”

I hastened up to our room to tell Bear, but he was still asleep. Reluctant to wake him, I returned to the steps to stay on guard. But as I sat there, I found it impossible to escape the sensation that something dangerous was drawing in upon to us. It put me to mind of the snares Bear used to catch the birds we ate; an unseen loop, pulled tight, until the unsuspecting birds were caught. Perhaps we now were those birds (188).

Chapter 43: Becoming a Hero

We worked in silence. She seemed tense. But then, as if she'd been thinking the matter over for some time, she said, "Crispin, I'm sorry for your troubles, but if ever a boy could find a good master, you've found him in Bear. As God is merciful, keep him close to his true calling—his juggling and his music. Don't let him mingle too much with those who would cause trouble. Because"—she looked at me as if I knew something I didn't—"if you don't help him, things could go much the worse for you both" (192).

Add to the Character Map

Crispin	His mother
Fr. Quinel	John Aycliffe
The rich messenger	Cerdic
Bear	One-eyed man
Widow Daventry	Lord Furnival
Lady Furnival	John Ball

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Crispin's Journey: Growth & Reward

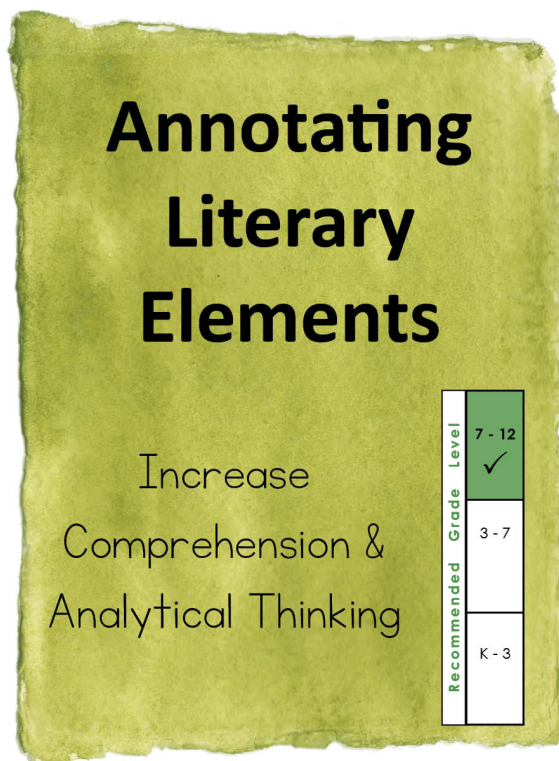
Chapters 44 through the End

The Pit or the Final Battle = Hero faces the Dragon Alone!

- Hero must draw on personal resources
- Battle facilitates character growth
- Battle leads to freedom from the conflict

In Annotating Literary Elements, this point is:

- Crisis moment
- Climax



Chapters 44 - 45: Separation Occurs Often with Role Reversal

Bear frowned . . . “My business will be quickly done. You’ll stay here and keep out of sight. Then we’ll go.”

“But Bear, I think I saw someone across the alley last night, too.”

“The same person?”

“I couldn’t tell.”

“Crispin,” he said, “for one so unwilling to see the world when first we met, perhaps you notice too much now?”

“You’ve been protecting me,” I said, “Maybe I should be protecting you” (195).

Chapters 46 - 47: The Noble Sacrifice (Biblical Allusion)

Once the men were in the garden, Bear took command. Using his great height and strength, he fairly lifted the men onto the back wall one by one. Once there, they swung their legs over, dropped down, and disappeared.

The last to go was John Ball.

. . . Bear swung about. "Crispin," he said, holding out his arms. I ran to him. He picked me up and all but flung me to the top of the wall . . . I looked back toward Bear. He had just begun to climb the wall when the soldiers burst out of the house and into the garden.

"Go, Crispin," Bear cried (203-204).

Chapter 49: Secrets Reveal Hero's True Identity*

Widow Daventry:

“But if Lord Douglas knew his daughter had a son by Lord Furnival, he might make a claim to the Furnival wealth through you. And if Lady Furnival knew of you as well, she would do anything to protect her power here.

“Your connection gives no honor. No position. What someone fears is not you, but that you will be used. Can't you see it? Your noble blood is the warrant for your death. It will remain so till it flows no more” (218).**

* Plot arc of rising action decreases annotations

** Notice quotation marks

Chapter 50: The Hero's Resolve— To Think for Oneself and Be Brave

How odd, I thought: it had taken my mother's death, Fr. Quinel's murder, and the desire of others to kill me for me to claim a life of my own.

But what kind of life?

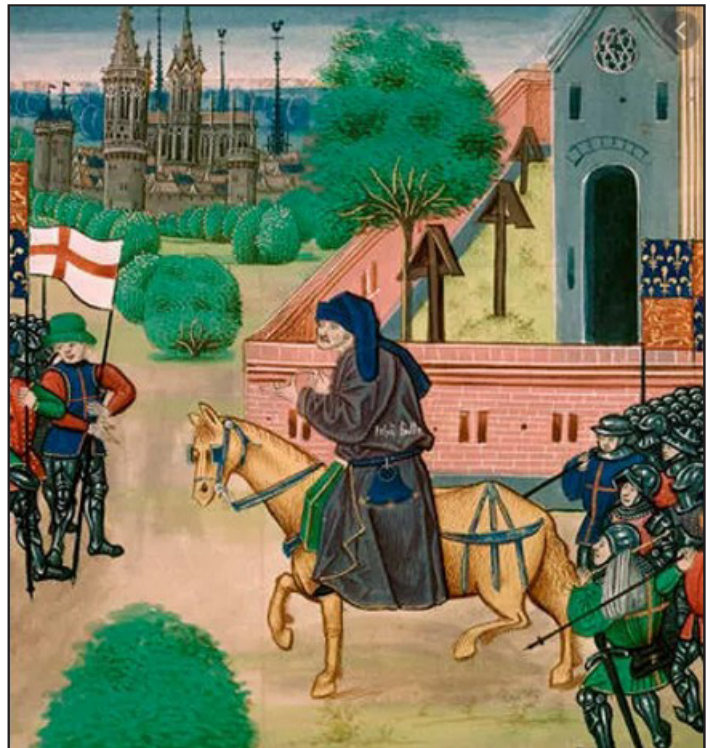
. . . For the first time, I began to think upon John Ball's words. They made sense. For what I recalled most was his saying "that no man, or woman either, shall be enslaved to any other, but stand free and equal to one another" (221-222).

Connect to History: Investigate John Ball

Ball preached that “things would not go well with England until everything was held in common.” At these meetings he argued, “Are we not all descended from the same parents, Adam and Eve? So what can they show us, what reasons give, why they should be more the masters than ourselves?”

It is in Ball’s words that we find the early concept of the equality of all men and women “as opposed to the rigid class divisions, privileges and injustice of feudalism; equality as justified by scripture and expressed as fraternity, that was to continue as a basic ideal of the English radical tradition” (<https://spartacus-educational.com/YALDballJ.htm>).

***John Ball at Mile End
from Jean Froissart,
Chronicles (c. 1470)***



Chapter 50: The Hero's Resolve Continues

I saw it then: Bear and Ball were talking about the very word Father Quinel had used, freedom. Something I had never had. Nor did anyone in my village, or the other villages through which we had passed. We lived in bondage.

To be a Furnival was to be part of that bondage.

As time passed in the darkness of my hiding place, the one thing I knew for sure was that as Bear had helped to free me, he had given me life. Therefore I resolved to help free him—even if it cost me that new life to do so (222-223).

Chapters 52 - 56: The Hero Faces the Dragon

- Intense rising action
- Usually an internal or emotional battle-- with the hero teetering on the edge of failure

“The more I gazed on him, the more my panic rose and my eyes turned toward the floor” (240).

- Battle scene is also often literal
- Hero uses the sword and new skills, in this case the cross and a dagger (fighting skills and thinking skills)
- Reader is both sure and unsure of the outcome (against all odds)

Chapter 57: Biblical Allusion Continues

Small as I was, I had to stoop to enter the room. It was small, dark, and stinking within. By the light of the torch I saw Bear. His great bulk had been stretched upright upon a ladder-like structure, arms bound high over his head, unshod feet bound below just as tightly. Almost naked, his bloodstained body was striped and welted as if he had been whipped. His head hung limp upon his chest, his beard spread like a rumpled napkin (249).

Chapter 58: The Hero Reaches the Treasure and Crosses the Threshold to Home

I ran where the steward lay. From around my neck, I removed the cross of lead and laid it on the steward's bloody chest. . .

"Crispin," said Bear as we moved away from the walls, "in that place they had me, I heard chants coming from the cathedral. The priests were singing, 'Media vita in morte summas,' which means, 'In the midst of life there is death.' But Crispin," he said, "can't you see the new truth we've made? In the midst of death there's life!" (260-261)

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Writing Opportunities

Should Crispin have given up his cross?

Why Crispin should keep his word to John Aycliff and give up his cross.

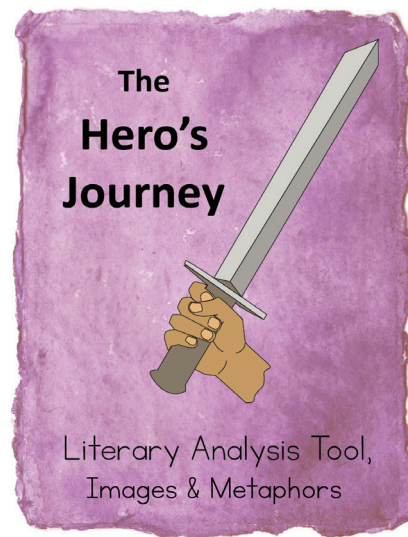
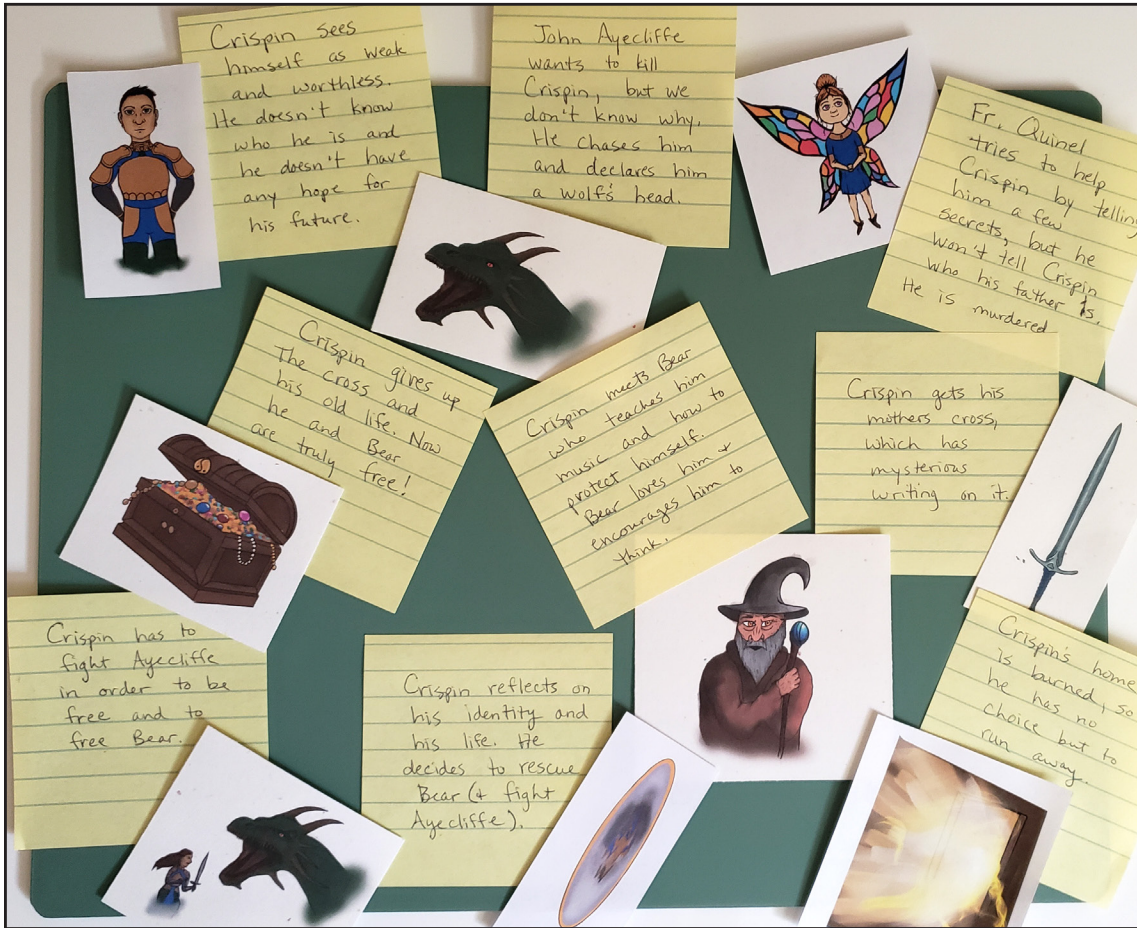
- Even though JA didn't keep his word that doesn't mean that Crispin shouldn't keep his
- It is honorable to keep his word
- Crispin is better^{person} than JA
- Crispin would rather forget that he is F. son
- Giving up the cross is a sign of leaving the old behind and starting his new free life with Bear

This student eventually turned her pros and cons into an essay.

Why Crispin should keep his cross of lead.

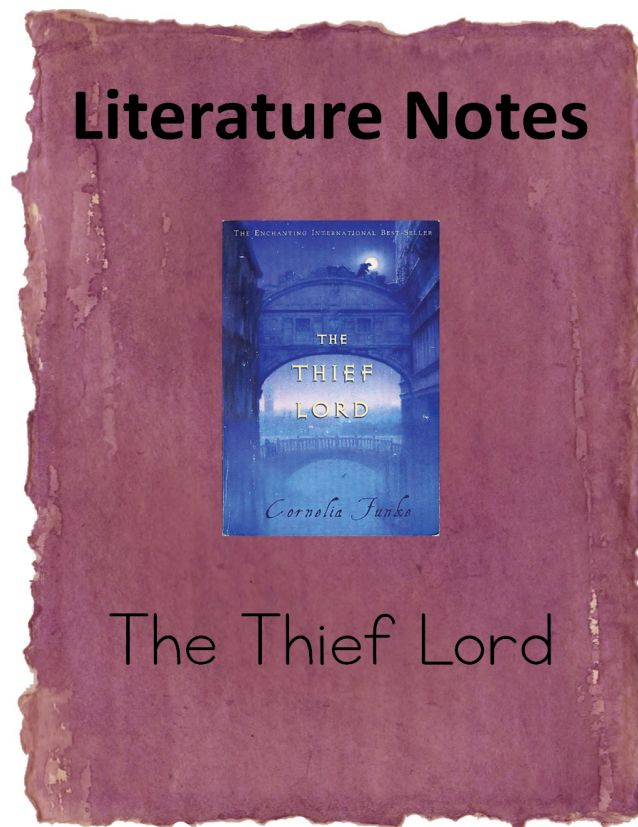
- John Aycliff is dead so it wouldn't matter to him anymore.
- JA. didn't keep his promise.
- It was the only thing he had from his mother.
- Proof of who he is
- He could go to lord Douglas and show him

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