A boy endures a baptism by fire and becomes a man during the bloody Battle of Lexington, April 19, 1775.

Award: NCTE Notable Children's Books in the Language Arts
Topics: Community Life, Freedoms; Popular Groupings, College Bound; U.S. States/Regions, Kentucky; Wars, American Revolutionary War

Main Characters

Adam Cooper  a fifteen-year-old boy, who must grow up quickly during the Battle of Lexington
Granny  Adam’s grandmother
Joseph Simmons  Adam's distant cousin
Joshua Dover  another distant cousin of the Cooper family
Levi Cooper  Adam’s eleven-year-old brother
Moses Cooper  Adam’s father, who has strong opinions about everything
Mrs. Cartwright  an older woman from Adam’s village
Ruth Simmons  Joseph’s daughter and Adam’s friend
Sarah Cooper  Adam’s mother
Solomon Chandler  a colonist from Lincoln Town who fights with Adam against the redcoats

Vocabulary

blasphemous  irreverent
cantankerous  irritating or difficult to deal with
catarrh  inflammation of the mucus membranes
conciliative  an act to pacify or reconcile
salient  prominent

Synopsis

Adam Cooper is a fifteen-year-old boy growing up in Colonial America. He lives with his family in a small village in Massachusetts. Adam is constantly trying to please his father, but he always falls short of this goal. Adam has decided that his father does not love him, and probably never will, because he is not good enough. Moses Cooper, Adam's father, has joined many other Colonial men to form the Committeemen. The Committeemen are both a political group interested in preserving their rights as free colonists, as well as a militia ready to fight for those rights. Adam longs to join them, but is prevented from doing so by his father, who says Adam is unable to offer proof that he is a man.

When the village receives word that the redcoats are marching toward Lexington and Concord, the Committeemen gather to assert their rights. Adam joins the men and boys waiting to sign the muster book and is allowed to join the Committeemen. When the redcoats arrive, the Committeemen are hoping to be able to state their case, but are fired upon instead, and the fighting begins. Adam's father is killed in the initial attack, but the other men support Adam in his attempt to stand as one of them. The story covers just a day and a half in the life of a young boy at the start of the Revolutionary War, but we see how his views of war are changed forever.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding
Why did Adam hide in the Harringtons' smokehouse?

He was afraid of being shot, he was in shock after seeing his father killed, he was confused about where to go and what to do ....
Literary Analysis
How was the war that Adam fought in different from a war today?

Answers may include: different weapons, different tactics, different communication and organizational methods, different technologies, etc.

Inferential Comprehension
After he signed the muster book, Adam's one desire was to be alone? Why?

He wanted time to think about what he had just done, he wanted time to sort out his many confused feelings, he wanted to think about what this meant for his future....

Constructing Meaning
Solomon told Adam, "Let it hurt, but become strong in the sorrow." What did he mean?

Correct answers may include: don't take pleasure in killing a man, do what you must do, and use regret to help make yourself strong.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting  The story takes place during Colonial times. Have the students research life in Colonial Massachusetts and compare it to their lives today. This could be done through individual reports, drawings, models, etc.; or the students could be divided into groups, with each group researching and presenting a different aspect of Colonial life (foods, occupations, weapons, family life, etc.).

Understanding Literary Features  The theme of the story is how one boy's life is changed with the coming of war. Although students may not have experienced a war firsthand, there are always events in their lives that have contributed to changing them. Have the students identify such an event (the birth of a sibling, the death of someone they knew, moving, starting school, etc.) and describe how the event changed them both positively and negatively.