

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Johnny Tremain by Esther Forbes

Book Information

Esther Forbes, Johnny Tremain

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293 Pages

Book Level: 5.9

Interest Level: MG

This book follows a young apprentice from a tragic accident in a silversmith's shop to his dramatic involvement as a patriot in the days just before the American Revolution.

Award: Newbery Medal

Topics: Adventure, Misc./Other; Power Lessons
Vocabulary, Grades 7 & Up;
Recommended Reading, California
Recommended Lit., English, 6-8; Wars,
American Revolutionary War

Main Characters

Cilla Lapham the third daughter of Mrs. Lapham, who is the same age as Johnny and is expecting to be married to him

Colonel Francis Smith British officer who wants to purchase Goblin and takes on Dove as his horse boy

Doctor Warren a young doctor who offers to operate on Johnny's hand and is one of the Observers

Dorcas Lapham Mrs. Lapham's second daughter, who falls in love with and marries Frizel, Junior

Dove a junior apprentice in the silversmith shop, who is responsible for Johnny's accident and later works as Colonel Smith's horse boy

General Gage British officer sent to replace Governor Hutchinson

Isannah Lapham Mrs. Lapham's youngest daughter who has an angelic look about her which people notice

Johnny Tremain a young, orphaned boy who is apprenticed as a silversmith, and who has an accident that leaves him with a crippled hand

Josiah Quincy one of the Observers who wins the case Merchant Lyte brings against Johnny

Lieutenant Stranger Colonel Smith's orderly-officer, who offers to teach Johnny how to jump with Goblin

Madge Lapham Mrs. Lapham's oldest daughter, who falls in love with and marries British Sergeant Gale

Master Lapham the silversmith to whom Johnny has been apprenticed by his mother; he is a very devout man who warns Johnny about his arrogance

Merchant Jonathan Lyte a wealthy local merchant who Johnny later discovers is his granduncle

Miss Lavinia Lyte the beautiful daughter of Merchant Lyte

Mr. James Otis one of the Observers believed to be dangerous because he appears to experience moments of insanity

Mr. John Hancock one of the Observers

Mr. Justice Dana the justice who ruled in Johnny's favor in the case brought against him by Merchant Lyte

Mr. Lorne Rab's uncle who owns and runs the <|>Observer</|>, an anti-British paper, and who gives Johnny a job delivering newspapers

Mr. Paul Revere one of the Observers who offers Johnny a chance to work for him before his accident

Mr. Sam Adams the most outspoken of the Observers; generally viewed as the leader

Mrs. Bessie a Whig who is a servant in the Lyte household

Mrs. Lapham the silversmith's daughter-in-law who keeps house for the silversmith and his apprentices

Percival Tweedie a silversmith from Baltimore with whom Mrs. Lapham negotiates after Johnny can no longer work as a silversmith

Rab a boy two years older than Johnny, who works at the print shop for his uncle

Vocabulary

atrophying decrease in size or wasting away of a body part

Tory a colonist loyal to the British king

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Whig someone sympathetic to the cause against the British

Synopsis

Johnny Tremain's dying mother provides for him by contracting him as an apprentice with Mr. Lapham. This arrangement is fine for arrogant Johnny because he is very talented as the silversmith's apprentice. All of this is threatened after he hurts his right hand in an accident trying to secretly finish a sugar bowl on a Sunday. Johnny is no longer able to work as a silversmith after the accident, and the master urges him to find other work he can do with his crippled hand.

Johnny searches unsuccessfully for other work he is willing to do. When he feels there is no other option, he goes to Merchant Lyte with the cup left to him by his mother. This cup bears the Lyte crest, and Johnny feels he will take his place as a Lyte. Rather than accepting Johnny as a long-lost relative, Merchant Lyte accuses Johnny of stealing the cup from him. After Johnny is cleared of the charge, he agrees to take a job delivering papers for the *Observer*.

At the *Observer* he becomes politically aware of what is happening around Boston in the 1770s and does what he can for the Observers who meet regularly at the newspaper office. He becomes more and more involved as the outbreak of the Revolutionary War nears. He becomes a man as he dedicates himself to the cause and finds out the truth of his identity.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How did Johnny feel about Cilla? How do you know?

He misses her company after he has been gone from Lapham's. Because of this, he arranges to meet with her two days a week. After a while, he takes her for granted and misses three weeks of meeting. When Rab shows an interest in her, Johnny becomes jealous. From that time on, he visits her regularly.

Literary Analysis

How does Johnny's friendship with Rab change him?

Rab provides a role model for Johnny. Watching Rab, Johnny learns to be more patient of others, to be persistent, and to use his strengths positively.

Inferential Comprehension

Predict what role Johnny will take in the rest of the war.

Answers will probably vary. Some may predict that he will become a soldier; others may think he will continue as a courier of information.

Constructing Meaning

Dove confessed that he had purposely given Johnny a cracked crucible when Johnny burned his hand. Why didn't Master Lapham punish him?

When Dove explained his reasoning, he knew enough to play on Master Lapham's piety. He said he did it to punish Johnny for working on Sunday. Master Lapham was somewhat naive and was ready to forgive and forget.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story of Johnny Tremain leads to the beginning of the Revolutionary War. We see the events that lead up to the first battle at Lexington, and we know the results of that fight. Find information on three major battles of the Revolutionary War. Describe the events of each battle including who won the

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battle and what contributed to the victory.

Understanding the Author's Craft Prior to the outbreak of the war, Miss Lavinia makes Isannah choose between going with her to London and staying in America with Cilla. Isannah chooses to go to London with Miss Lavinia. Write a letter that Cilla may have written to Isannah after the outbreak of the war.

Recognizing Details Rab is very concerned about the gun that he will be able to carry into battle. To him, the ultimate weapon to have is a British musket. Find information on guns made during the Revolutionary War. Make a diagram of a British musket and a diagram of a typical gun owned by a rebel.

Responding to Literature At the Lyte house in Milton, Johnny finds the family tree in the Bible. He finally solves the mystery of his father's identity and where his mother fit into the Lyte family. Research and draw your family tree going back as far as you can.