

by  
Avi

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## Book Information

Avi, Windcatcher

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Book Level: 4.0

Interest Level: MG

During a summer visit to his grandmother's home in Connecticut, a young boy learns to sail, discovers a sunken treasure, and wards off greedy treasure hunters.

**Topics:** Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Family Life, Grandparents; Mysteries, Treasures; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Just Connect: Relationships; READNOW - Perma-Bound, Perma-Bound - Read Now Grades 4-6; Sports/Recreation, Sailing/Boating; U.S. States/Regions, Connecticut

## Main Characters

Christina Carlucci (Chris) the practical teenage girl who teaches Tony how to sail

Grandma Souza Tony's protective grandmother, who worries about the dangers of sailing and treasure hunting

Grandpa Souza Tony's late grandfather, who bought the model of the "Swallow" at a yard sale

Mr. and Mrs. Souza Tony's parents, who agree to let him buy a sailboat

Quartermaster Ezra Littlejohn (Captain Littlejohn) the founder of Swallows Bay, who spent his life searching for the treasure that sank with the "Swallow"

Steve Carlucci the harbor master of Swallows Bay, who informs Tony that recovered treasure is the property of the state

the antique dealer the old man who admires Tony's model of the "Swallow"

the treasure hunting couple an unscrupulous, potentially dangerous man and woman who are illegally salvaging items out of the water

Tony Souza the adventurous, determined eleven-year-old boy who spends his summer trying to find a lost treasure

## Vocabulary

**accumulated** gathered a great amount of something

**capsized** turned over

**elated** very happy

**execute** to carry out or put into action

**salvage** to recover

**scudding** moving quickly and easily

**sluggishly** very slowly

## Synopsis

In 1777, Quartermaster Littlejohn struggles to protect the British army payroll as his ship, the "Swallow," sinks in a storm. A solitary man eventually staggers from the water and flings himself on the beach.

About two hundred years later, Tony Souza argues with his parents about purchasing a motor scooter with the money he has earned. When they refuse, he sets out to spend his money and finds a small sailboat named the "Snark" for sale. His parents allow him to buy it after he promises to take sailing lessons and wear his lifejacket. Soon afterward, Tony's father takes Tony and his boat to Tony's grandmother's house to spend three weeks in Swallows Bay, Connecticut.

Upon arriving at Grandma's house, Tony notices an old ship model in his room. That afternoon he goes to meet Chris, a teenage girl who will be his sailing instructor, and notices a couple leaving in a speedboat. Chris explains that they are treasure hunters. After Chris shows Tony the basics of sailing in his first lesson, Tony stops on his way home to look at the statue of Captain Littlejohn, the founder of the town. When Tony asks Grandma why the town is not named Littlejohn, they begin reading the history of the town. Tony notes that the history does mention a treasure, although local people scoff at the idea. His grandmother tells Tony that his

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fascination with sailing comes from his Portuguese ancestry, where sailors like to "catch the wind." Later he is examining the ship model when he notices the model is named the "Swallow."

The next day Tony notices that the statue of Captain Littlejohn holds a real spyglass. He also sees the couple leaving in their speedboat again. When he discusses the treasure with Grandma later, she suggests that they try to find it. During another sailing lesson, Chris points out the Thimble Islands, a chain of islands whose rocks and currents make sailing dangerous. After one more lesson, Chris tells Tony that he is ready to sail alone. He is talking to her in her family's store when her brother Steve, the harbor master, overhears their discussion of the treasure and informs Tony that any treasures that are salvaged belong to the state.

Tony persuades Grandma to let him sail alone the following Wednesday by promising to return after one hour to show he is safe. When Tony returns after an hour, Grandma gives him permission to continue to sail alone until lunch. As Tony departs, he sees the treasure-hunting couple speeding off. He follows them toward the Thimble Islands but loses sight of them. Tony explores for a while before he realizes that he is lost in the confusing maze of islands. He is relieved when he comes upon the couple's speedboat, but the man indignantly insists that Tony stay away, since the woman is diving. When Tony eventually returns home, Grandma is angry because he is late. They decide that Tony needs a compass and a watch for sailing. While they are shopping for these items, Tony notices an antique store's ship model, which Grandma says is old and expensive.

Later Tony persuades Grandma to come sailing with him so she can see that he is a good sailor. She is reluctant because she cannot swim, but she finally agrees. After a short trip Grandma goes home. She gives Tony permission to sail some more, but she asks him to leave the couple alone. Tony agrees to return in an hour. When he sees the couple leave their boat, he peeks into it and notices that their shovels have never been used, confirming his

suspicion that the treasure is not buried. The couple glares at him from a distance, so Tony sails away. He is soon startled by the sound of an approaching speedboat. Tony heads toward land when the couple in the speedboat tries to capsize his boat. Fortunately, he is able to bail the water from his boat and sail back to shore.

At dinner Tony tells Grandma about the couple's attempt; she advises him to report the incident to Steve. After dinner Tony finds a record of the sinking of the "Swallow." He suspects that Littlejohn was the only survivor of the wreck, and he persuades Grandma to take him to the antique dealer to find out more about his ship model.

The following morning the antique dealer says that Tony's ship model is very old and valuable. He adds that the name of the maker might be inscribed inside the model. Because Grandma is uneasy about the couple, she tells Tony on the way home that she no longer wants him to hunt for the treasure. When they get home Grandma invites Chris to come over. When Grandma tells Chris about the couple's attempt to capsize Tony's boat. Chris agrees that Tony should stay away. That night a determined Tony removes the top of his model. Inside he finds a magnifying lens; through it he reads the name "Ezra Littlejohn, Quartermaster" inscribed on the floor of the miniature cabin.

Tony returns to the statue the following day and places the lens in the spyglass. He sees that the spyglass is aimed at Money Island. Within thirty minutes Tony is sailing for the island. There he discovers the couple's boat anchored between Money Island and Hoghead. He lands on Hoghead and sneaks up on the couple to spy on them, leaving his lifejacket in the boat. Tony is attempting to get closer when he suddenly finds himself face-to-face with the couple. As Tony is running away, he hears the speedboat start up. He races to his boat and is dismayed to find it floating away. He now discovers that he is stranded on the island. Since he is a strong swimmer, he decides to swim from island to island until he reaches the mainland.

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A fog is settling as Tony swims, and he quickly realizes that the current is too powerful. When he loses sight of land in the fog, he becomes desperate to reach any land. As Tony heads toward a dim shore, he loses his sneaker. Diving to find it, he sees the ribs of a ship. Upon reaching the shore Tony collapses. He awakens at dusk and is exploring the island when he discovers his boat wedged in some nearby boulders. He knows he should not sail since he has lost his compass, but he does not want to stay on the island. In the boat he quickly finds that the fog is preventing him from finding his way home. As he drifts it occurs to him that he probably found the "Swallow" when he dove for his sneaker. He is considering this when a boat approaches.

Tony is happy to be saved until he sees that the boat belongs to the couple. They offer to give him a ride to Swallows Bay and tow his boat. Soon they begin to question him about what he has seen. Tony accidentally reveals that he saw the remains of a shipwreck. The couple offers to split the treasure with Tony if he will keep silent about his discovery. When Tony sees a searchlight, he calls out. It is Steve, Chris, and Grandma. Tony announces that the "Swallow" has been found, thereby ending the greedy couple's plan. That night Tony asks Grandma if he can stay for the rest of the summer. Even though there are no more treasures, Tony wants to "catch the wind."

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

Why is there so little information about Captain Littlejohn's life before he comes to Swallows Bay?

*In the first place, there never was a "Captain" Littlejohn. His actual position was quartermaster. This misleads several people's attempts to find out about his life. Secondly, Littlejohn was part of the British army, so he keeps his past a secret when he comes to live in post-Revolutionary America.*

### Literary Analysis

How does the coast of Swallows Bay contribute to the fact that the shipwreck has not been discovered?

*There are strong currents that make it difficult to dive and swim in the water. Strong storms frequently rearrange the geography of the coast. Rocks in the water make it difficult for boats to navigate, and swift changes in weather make it hard to sustain a lengthy search.*

### Inferential Comprehension

How do Tony's feelings about visiting Grandma change in this story?

*In the beginning of the story, Tony resents having to spend three weeks of his summer staying with Grandma. He has been bored at Grandma's house in the past because he has no friends in Swallows Bay. After he gets his boat, though, he feels better about his visit. He is excited about learning to sail and looks forward to going to Swallows Bay. He also seems to enjoy learning about his heritage; he loves to sail like his grandfather and learns Portuguese words from Grandma. By the end of the story, he has enjoyed his stay so much that he asks if he can spend the remainder of the summer with Grandma.*

### Constructing Meaning

Is Tony greedy? Defend your answer with examples from the story.

*Answers will vary. Some students will feel that Tony is willing to risk too much simply to find the treasure. They may speculate that Tony's incentive for keeping the ship model is that the model may be a clue to finding the treasure, which is worth more than the model. Other students may feel that Tony's real motivation for finding the treasure is the challenge of finding something people have sought for years. These students may point out that Tony knows that he will not be allowed to keep the treasure, and he chooses in the end to report his discovery rather than accept the couple's offer to split the treasure.*

## Teachable Skills

**Describing Actions or Events** Tony has to carefully reconstruct Captain Littlejohn's history because so little has been written about him. Have the students write a journal in Ezra Littlejohn's words describing how he comes to live at Swallows Bay and what he does while he is there.

**Identifying Persuasive Language** Tony learns about recovering sunken treasures while he is searching for the "Swallow." Have the students research what must be done to recover a sunken ship such as the "Titanic." Then have them write a persuasive essay that addresses the issue of whether people should be allowed to keep treasure that they find in the sea.

**Recognizing Cause and Effect** Tony's parents and grandmother express safety concerns for Tony when he learns to sail. He is required to have certain equipment and to take sailing lessons from an experienced person. Ask students to list Tony's safety-related equipment and rules that Tony is expected to follow. Then have them state a dangerous consequence that could occur for each piece of equipment or rule Tony ignores.

**Identifying Reasons** Tony makes and breaks several promises throughout this story. Have the students make a list of these promises and the reasons Tony gives for breaking them. Are the reasons justifiable? Explain.