

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## The Black Arrow

by

### Robert Louis Stevenson

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### Book Information

Robert Louis Stevenson, The Black Arrow  
Quiz Number: 505  
Scribner, 1987  
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327 Pages  
Book Level: 9.0  
Interest Level: MG

During the War of the Roses, Richard Shelton's cross-bow and stout heart are pitted against the ambitious and wily Sir Daniel.

**Topics:** Classics, Classics (All); Community Life, Violence; Countries/Regions, England; Wars, Misc./Other

### Main Characters

Alicia Risingham Joanna's friend and niece to Lord Risingham

Arblaster the captain of the "Good Hope"

Bennet Hatch Sir Daniel's right-hand man, who is sensitive to Dick's plight

Ellis Duckworth a forest outlaw and leader of a group of men who seek to avenge wrongdoing

Joanna/Joan Sedley (John/Jack Matcham) a young woman of sixteen, whose wardship has switched hands between Sir Daniel and Lord Foxham; she is Dick's romantic interest

Lawless one of the outlaws and a friend to Dick

Richard (Dick) Shelton the main character, an eighteen-year-old who is Daniel Brackley's ward

Richard, Duke of Gloucester a physically deformed young man who is a fierce warrior

Rutter one of Sir Daniel's spies

Sir Daniel Brackley a political opportunist who acquires wealth by changing allegiances

Sir Oliver Oates a priest and Sir Daniel's clerk; he is controlled by Sir Daniel

### Vocabulary

**arras** a tapestry

**buttery** a room where liquor is stored

**fen** marshy land; a bog

**garrison** to supply with troops

**mien** bearing or appearance

**paladin** a knight

**paternoster** the Lord's prayer; the large bead on the rosary on which the Lord's prayer is recited

**unshriven** having unconfessed sins

### Synopsis

This story is set in the 1500's during England's War of the Roses. Richard (Dick) Shelton, an orphan, is the ward of Sir Daniel Brackley, a man known to switch allegiances frequently so as to gain land, wealth, and wardships of orphans, whom he might later marry-off for profit. As the story begins, Dick rides to the Moat House to gather fresh, able men for Sir Daniel at Kettleby where a battle is to be fought between the Lancaster and York armies. While Dick and Bennet Hatch, Sir Daniel's right-hand man, are appealing to old Nick Appleyard, a black arrow strikes Nick dead. A note indicates that John Amend-All, a mysterious archer, has killed Nick, and another message announces the targeting of three others: Sir Oliver Oates, who is a priest and Sir Daniel's clerk; Sir Daniel; and Bennet Hatch. The note accuses Sir Oliver of murdering Dick's father. Dick decides to remain loyal to Sir Daniel until he can learn more. Sir Oliver and Sir Daniel now exchange messages, with Dick being the courier. On Dick's return to the Moat House, he meets John (Jack) Matcham in the marsh, who is actually Joanna Sedley in disguise. Joanna is a girl over whom Sir Daniel has taken charge and plans to marry to Dick. She has escaped from Sir Daniel and seeks sanctuary in Holywood. Dick, unaware of Joanna's true identity, promises to accompany her there. On their journey, they see Ellis Duckworth (alias John Amend-All), a forest outlaw and leader of a group known as the Black Arrow. Dick abandons his promise to accompany Joanna (Jack) when he fears Sir Daniel's men will be ambushed by Ellis's men. A skirmish occurs, and later, Sir Daniel, disguised as a leper, makes his way through the forest and orders Jack and Dick to follow him to the Moat House. Jack says good-bye to Dick when they arrive, saying Dick will never see him again.

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When Dick confronts Sir Daniel about his father's death, Sir Daniel claims he is innocent and forces Sir Oliver to do the same. Dick is placed under close watch in a room above the chapel. With Mrs. Hatch's help, Joanna secretly visits Dick, where he learns of her identity. He declares his love for her, and she, for him. She warns Dick that his life is in danger, and they both attempt to escape. Dick succeeds, but Joanna is left behind. The rest of the story becomes a battle to outwit Sir Daniel and rescue Joanna from his possession. Dick meets Ellis Duckworth in the forest and learns of his father's death. Ellis pledges that Sir Daniel will be destroyed.

Now aligned with the Lancasters because of their rise in power, Sir Daniel is in Shoreby where Joanna is being held in a home by the shore. Dick meets Lord Foxham, Joanna's legal guardian, who promises him Joanna's hand in marriage if Dick can rescue her. Dick and an outlaw friend named Lawless make an ill-fated attempt to rescue her by sea. Later, Dick and Lawless slip into Sir Daniel's house disguised as friars. Dick finds Joanna with Alicia Risingham's help. Joanna tells him of her impending forced marriage to Lord Shoreby. Dick kills a spy and seeks sanctuary in the church from his crime. Sir Oliver is willing to tolerate Dick's refuge as long as Dick does not interfere in the marriage. But during the ceremony, Lord Shoreby is felled by Ellis Duckworth's arrow. Dick and Lawless are arrested, but Lord Risingham, Alicia's uncle, gives them a pardon and their freedom.

Dick now meets Richard of Gloucester. Together, they launch a surprise attack on the town of Shoreby, where the Lancaster army is defeated. Dick is knighted and asks for the freedom of Arblaster, the captain whose boat he stole. Dick rescues Joanna and takes her to Holywood. On the morning of their wedding, Dick takes a stroll and meets Sir Daniel, whom he pardons. But then Sir Daniel is killed by Ellis Duckworth's arrow. Dick asks that Sir Oliver's life is spared. Dick and Joanna are finally joined in marriage with great happiness and choose to live apart from the battles going on around them.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

In what way does Dick Shelton owe his life to others?

*Many people throughout the story help Dick. Jack Matcham saves him from drowning when the ferryboat overturns. Sir Oliver warns him that he is being watched; Bennet Hatch tells him how to escape from the tunnel with Joanna; Lawless binds his wounds and becomes a faithful friend; and Lord Risingham offers protection to him until a fair hearing can take place. With this help, along with his own ingenuity, he is able to best Sir Daniel and marry Joanna.*

### Literary Analysis

What conflicts does Sir Oliver face in this story?

*Sir Oliver's conflicts are those of loyalty between man and God. He lives in fear of death or other retribution if he betrays Sir Daniel, and so he remains loyal to maintain his life and his power. He also fears eternal damnation, as he still holds loyalty to his God. At some point, earlier in his life, he may have done something wrong, and Sir Daniel held it over his head. Sir Oliver does try to warn Dick of impending danger without jeopardizing Dick's life. Unlike Sir Daniel, he does not enjoy the suffering of innocent people.*

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#### Inferential Comprehension

If Ellis Duckworth had spared Sir Daniel's life, how would Sir Daniel most likely have lived the remainder of his days?

*Answers will vary. Some may believe Dick's pardon would bring about a change of heart, and Sir Daniel would see the folly of his ways and the heartbreak he has brought to many. Others may believe Sir Daniel would leave after Dick's pardon, showing disappointment in not being able to obtain sanctuary where he wanted it, but feeling little remorse. He may continue disguising himself until he can flee to a place of safety, such as Burgundy or France, and there again align himself with the winning side for profit.*

#### Constructing Meaning

What lesson did Arblaster teach Dick Shelton?

*Dick finally realizes that an act of penitence will not undo the damage of a wrong act. Dick had stolen the "Good Hope," which was more than a mere possession to Arblaster; it was the source of his livelihood. Furthermore, Arblaster lost his friend, Tom, in the skirmish of the battle. Dick was naïve enough to think that winning Arblaster's freedom would compensate for his wrongdoing. Arblaster, however, probably felt that even with his freedom he had nothing to live for.*

### Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Perhaps the most neglected group of people in the story, in terms of how the warfare affected them, is the peasants. They pay rent to the ruling lord of the area, and when possession of the land changes hands, they need to pay again. Their possessions and homes are often destroyed and pillaged in the disputes. Have the students research the life of the peasant in England in the 1500's. Describe their daily routines, their clothes, their occupations, and their duties to the ruling lord. Was there any chance of them moving out of their station in life? How? Would the peasants agree with the notion that knighthood is noble

and honorable? Have the students present their findings to the class.

**Comparing and Contrasting** The church played a huge role in the daily lives of the people of the time. Some of the characters in the story sought sanctuary in the church. Explore the meaning of the word "sanctuary." Under what conditions was sanctuary given? Who was obligated to protect the person seeking sanctuary? Look at some of the other roles of the church during this time period and compare them to the roles organized religion plays in the lives of contemporary people. How are they similar and different? How has the role of governmental social programs, once solely the responsibility of the church and families, changed our societal structure? Has the church's power increased or decreased? In what countries of the world does the church play a stronger role? Present the findings to the class.

**Understanding Dialogue** There are many expressions used in the book that are common today. It might prove interesting to create a list of these expressions from the book and to write their meaning in an adjacent column. Look for other sources of words and phrases common to this era. This might include other books written about this time or songs from this era. Try to spend some class time, both teacher and student, using these expressions when you are addressing or answering one another.

**Identifying Reading Strategies** Many skirmishes and confrontations occur during the course of the story. Have the students review the story and, from the text clues, create a map of the area. Include the Moat House, Kettley, Shoreby, the fen, the forest, the house by the shore, the sea, Holywood, Lawless's den, and St. Bride's Cross. Develop some type of scale for the map based on known distances or time of travel. Students can evaluate the various battles and see if they can find alternate strategies to either avoid a confrontation altogether or win a battle with less loss of life. Students might like to compare their maps with their classmates to see if their conception of the area is the same as others.