

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Kidnapped (Unabridged) by Robert Louis Stevenson

## Book Information

Robert Louis Stevenson, Kidnapped (Unabridged)  
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278 Pages  
Book Level: 7.6  
Interest Level: UG

After he is kidnapped by his villainous uncle, a sixteen-year-old orphan escapes and becomes involved in the struggle of the Scottish Highlanders against English rule.

**Topics:** Adventure, Life Changes; Adventure, Survival; Classics, Classics (All); Family Life, Uncles; Interpersonal Relationships, Friendship; Series, Puffin Classics; Series, Scholastic Classics

## Main Characters

- Alan Breck a rebel Scottish Highlander who befriends David and helps him escape from his captors
- Captain Hoseason the captain of the "Covenant"
- David Balfour the main character, a lad of seventeen who is kidnapped to prevent him from claiming his rightful inheritance
- Duncan Dhu Maclaren a Scotsman who shelters Alan and David for a month until David recuperates from his illness
- Ebenezer Balfour David's greedy and miserly uncle, who lives on the Shaw estate and sells David into slavery
- James Stewart (James of the Glens) a Jacobite Highlander who aids Alan and David in their flight across Scotland
- Mr. Rankeillor a lawyer who helps David claim his estate
- Mr. Riach the second officer aboard the "Covenant," who saves David from dying in the hold of the ship
- Mr. Shuan the first officer aboard the "Covenant," who murders Ransome, the cabin boy

Red Fox (Colin of Glenure) a red-headed Englishman who oversees the Appin land in Scotland for the King of England

## Vocabulary

- bairn** a child
- dram** a small swallow
- firth** a narrow inlet or fjord
- ken** to know or recognize
- moor** an extensive area of open land with low-growing shrubs that is often poorly drained
- portmanteau** a large leather suitcase that opens into two compartments
- smallpox** an infectious and often fatal disease that leaves pockmarks where there were once blistered pimples on the skin; it has been mostly eradicated by vaccination

## Synopsis

When David Balfour was seventeen, his father died. David's only inheritance was a note left to him by his father to Ebenezer Balfour of Shaws, who is David's uncle. A Mr. Campbell gives David the letter, saying if things do not work out between him and Ebenezer, he is welcome to return to Essendean. As David approaches the area where his uncle lives, he becomes wary, as people he meets along the way seem to despise the name of Shaws. When he finally arrives, he finds a neglected and unfinished house instead of the grand estate he had envisioned. His miserly uncle is an even greater disappointment than the house. David begins to suspect that his father may have been cheated out of his inheritance, and his suspicions grow stronger when Ebenezer tries to kill him. Ebenezer promises to take David to see Mr. Rankeillor, the family lawyer, in order to receive the true story of David's inheritance. Before they reach the office, however, Ebenezer and Captain Hoseason persuade David into coming aboard the ship "Covenant." He is promptly knocked out and becomes a prisoner on the ship, bound for America to be sold as a slave in the colonies.

David is loosed from the hold of the ship when Mr.

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Riach, the second officer, takes pity on him. David learns about the kindness of the rough seamen, when to approach them, and when to stay away. Mr. Shuan, the first officer, abuses the sailors when he is drunk and eventually murders Ransome, the cabin boy. After this, David becomes the cabin boy.

One night, while sailing dangerously close to some land, the "Covenant" strikes a small boat. Only one man survives from the other boat, Alan Breck, a Scottish Highlander and Jacobite who is sought by the British authorities. Alan and Hoseason make a deal to put Alan ashore for an agreed upon sum. Upon overhearing Hoseason and Mr. Riach plotting to surprise Alan and steal his money, David warns Alan, and together they stave off their attackers. Alan and David vow to help each other in the future, even though their views on the government vastly differ.

When the "Covenant" becomes shipwrecked on a reef, Alan and David's vow of loyalty becomes tested. They are at first separated, but are soon rejoined in an area that is dangerous to Alan. Alan is blamed for the murder of the Colin of Glenure, known as the Red Fox. If caught, both he and David will pay for the crime. They decide to escape to the lowlands to find Mr. Rankeillor, where David might then be able to aid Alan. With an army of soldiers looking for them, they travel by night and hide by day. They also run in fear of Alan's own countrymen, who might turn him in for the lucrative reward. David learns the loyalty of the Highlander people through the risks they are willing to take to harbor Alan and him.

When the two finally arrive at Queensferry, David meets with Mr. Rankeillor. After confirming David's identity, Mr. Rankeillor tells David the story of David's father and Ebenezer. David's father forewent his inheritance in order to be with the woman he loved. When David came to his uncle, Ebenezer thought David knew the story and feared the deal with his now-dead brother would not hold up in court. David now understands why Ebenezer wanted to get rid of him. Not wanting to air this disagreement in court for fear of retribution to Alan,

David, with the help of Mr. Rankeillor and Alan, frighten Ebenezer into agreeing to give him two thirds of his yearly income from the Shaw estate. With this money, David is able to help Alan reach safety.

## Open-Ended Questions

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

### Initial Understanding

David asks Neil Roy Macrob if he had news of Alan Breck and offers him a shilling. Why did Neil Roy tell David, "there is a thing that ye would never do, and that is to offer your dirty money to a Hieland shentleman"?

*The students will recall that there is a price on Alan's head. Most Highlanders were very poor since they paid taxes to the monarchy as well as to their exiled king. Loyalty was something they valued highly, and a Highlander would take it as an insult that someone would think they could be bribed into informing on their clansmen.*

### Literary Analysis

This tale of adventure is narrated through David's eyes. How is David's perspective an advantage to the reader?

*David is a young man, naive and unprepared for the adventures he encounters. Therefore, the reader sees the situations through "new," unexperienced eyes rather than "seasoned" ones. Awe, fear, and weariness are intimately described. In certain cases, the reader struggles through a difficult situation or learns about a particular custom from a fresh perspective. As most readers have not experienced the situations in the story first-hand, they can experience the adventures right along with David.*

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## Inferential Comprehension

Mr. Riach and Mr. Shuan hold important positions on the "Covenant." In what ways are they different?

*Even though they both drink, Mr. Riach could be thoughtful and compassionate, as shown when he advocates for David and gets him released from the hold. On the other hand, Mr. Shuan is responsible for Ransome's murder and would have murdered Mr. Riach too, if the Captain had not intervened. While Mr. Riach helps and defends the downtrodden, Mr. Shuan victimizes them. Mr. Riach comes to Alan's aid when the "Covenant" was shipwrecked, allowing him to escape to safety while he confronts his fellow sailors.*

## Constructing Meaning

*Kidnapped* shows two characters, Alan, a Jacobite rebel and Scottish Highlander, and David, a British Whig, overcoming their political, religious, and geographical differences and becoming friends. Has reading this book given you hope for seeing the resolution of individual differences in modern problem areas such as Northern Ireland, Croatia, or Bosnia? Could that hope extend beyond the individual to include entire nations resolving their conflicts?

*Students will need to examine their feelings toward conflict resolution both before and after reading the novel. Their prior opinions will be shaped by their own experiences, their current environment (tolerant or prejudicial), and possibly other stories they have read with a similar theme. Students may be optimistic about individual relationships, but pessimistic when it comes to the national scene. They may come to appreciate why change is slow and conflicts persist.*

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Characterization** Romantic literature is filled with various heroes and villains. Have the students construct a character sketch of each of the people in *Kidnapped*. What category do they fit into -- hero or villain, and why? Do any of the characters exhibit the qualities of both?

What is each villain's greatest character flaw and what is each hero's strongest asset?

**Comparing and Contrasting** Have the students research the Jacobite rebellion in Scotland. Compare and contrast the viewpoints of the Highland Scotlanders to the Lowland Scotlanders during this time. What benefits did the association with the British monarchy offer? Why were the Highlanders opposed to this association? The students can present their findings in a list or chart form.

**Making Predictions** At the end of Chapter 29, "I Come Into My Kingdom," David lies "awake till dawn, looking at the fire on the roof and planning the future." Have the students outline a sequel to *Kidnapped*. What do they think David's life will hold from here?

**Recognizing Detail** At one point in the narrative in Chapter 12, David recommends that the reader look for the route the "Covenant" takes on its sea adventure from its start at the Queen's Ferry until it is shipwrecked. The students may find it worthwhile to photocopy a map of Scotland and follow David's journey not only by sea, but also by land. Have them formulate a legend showing places Alan and David stop along their journey, geographic features such as the rocks and moor, as well as an outline of their route.