

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for Treasure Island (Unabridged)

by
Robert Louis Stevenson

Book Information

Robert Louis Stevenson, Treasure Island (Unabridged)

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187 Pages

Book Level: 8.3

Interest Level: MG

This classic presents a tale of piracy on the tropical seas, of treachery and greed combined with romance, treasure, and adventure.

Topics: Classics, Classics (All); Natural Environments, Oceans; Power Lessons AR, Grade 8; Series, Scholastic Classics; Transportation/Vehicles, Ships/Boats

Main Characters

Abe Gray a mutineer turned good who helps Smollett's band of men on the island

Ben Gunn a seaman who had been marooned on Treasure Island and takes the treasure

Bill an old sea captain whose treasure map is sought after

Black Dog a former shipmate of Bill's who fights with him at the inn

Captain Smollett the man who signs on as captain of the "Hispaniola" and performs his duty to return home with the treasure

Dr. Livesey a medical doctor who is part of the expedition to find treasure

Israel Hands a mutineer wounded on board the "Hispaniola" who is eventually killed by Jim Hawkins

Jim Hawkins an innkeeper's son who narrates most of the story in which he goes to sea to find treasure

Long John Silver a one-legged tavern owner and sea veteran who signs on as the "Hispaniola's" cook and incites a mutiny

Pew a blind acquaintance of Bill who was after his treasure map

Tom Redruth the squire's servant, who is shot and killed on Treasure Island

Trelawney a squire who outfits a ship to look for the treasure indicated on a map

Vocabulary

booty stolen goods

bulwarks the side of a ship extending like a fence above deck

coracle a small, wooden-framed boat covered with wicker or grass and waterproofed with a material such as pitch or animal skin

gig a long, light ship's boat moved by oars or sails

lugger a boat rigged with a four-cornered sail that slants across the mast

palisades a line of high, steep cliffs

scuppers openings in a ship's side to let water run off the deck

tin cannikin a small can or drinking cup

Synopsis

Treasure Island is a tale of adventure and intrigue, loyalty and disloyalty, and an old seaman's ability to change his stripes as the situation demands. It is also about the coming of age of a young boy.

John Silver is a very likeable and entertaining old sailor who gets himself hired on as the cook on the "Hispaniola" for an expedition to find buried treasure. Jim Hawkins, the son of an innkeeper, becomes involved with the same expedition after finding a treasure map in the sea chest of a sailor who dies while staying at his family's inn.

Though he doesn't let on, Silver already knows of the treasure map and the island to which it refers. He was a shipmate of the man who hid the treasure and is now determined to get his share by any means necessary. He manages to convince many of the "Hispaniola's" crew to stage a mutiny, kill all of the non-mutineers, and escape to a life of luxury. His plan is partially foiled because Jim overhears it and informs the doctor, squire, and captain.

The race to control the ship, the stores of supplies, the island's only shelter, and the treasure map commences when the ship reaches its destination.

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Shelling by the ship's guns and an attack on the stockade take their toll on both sides.

Against his better judgment, Jim decides to search for a crude boat made by a sailor previously marooned on the island. He finds it and uses it to reach the enemy-occupied "Hispaniola" and set her adrift.

Jim survives nearly being swept out to sea, a knife wound in his shoulder, and an almost certain execution by angry pirates, which all help usher him into manhood. He accepts the blame placed on him for running off and stays true to his word, which further attests to his emerging maturity.

Silver manages to stay alive by saying and doing what each faction wants. He finally steals a small share of the treasure and disappears. Jim and his mates share the remainder of the treasure and can tell the tale of Treasure Island for the rest of their lives.

Open-Ended Questions

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

Initial Understanding

How is John Silver able to manipulate both the pirates and Jim Hawkins's friends to get what he wants?

John Silver joins the crew of the "Hispaniola" with a dual role. To the doctor and squire he is an honest cook, to the pirates he is the leader of their mutiny. After the mutiny occurs, Silver's role is clearly defined as leader of the pirates and enemy to Jim Hawkins and friends. As the pirates gradually weaken in strength and confidence, however, Silver saves Jim Hawkins's life and leads the pirates into a trap. Silver's talent as a negotiator and traitor gains him refuge on the "Hispaniola's" return voyage, when he promptly steals part of the treasure and makes his final escape.

Literary Analysis

What, if any, significance is there to the fact that the treasure described by Jim Hawkins contains coins of so many sizes, shapes, denominations, and nationalities? Explain your answer.

The diversity of the money symbolizes the almost unstoppable desire people of all kinds, from all walks of life, and all ages have for the attainment of wealth.

Inferential Comprehension

Why do you think John Silver outwardly shows such a liking to Jim Hawkins? Explain your answer.

Jim is young and may remind Silver of a son he could have had. Jim also possesses qualities that most people would find admirable, such as courage and honesty. Silver's affection could also be faked, since he seems to be very good at fooling people.

Constructing Meaning

A metaphor is an implied comparison between two unlike things. Recount the way in which John Silver is portrayed in the story. Then list and explain two metaphors that describe him.

Students may suggest the following answers: He is like a chameleon because he changes his colors or loyalties to fit different situations, or he is like a young tree because he bends according to which way the wind is blowing.

Teachable Skills

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Jim uses Ben Gunn's primitive coracle to recapture the "Hispaniola." Research the design of an ancient coracle and that of other small and simple types of watercraft. Then, build a model of a boat that a shipwrecked or marooned person could build and use to escape.

Comparing and Contrasting Jim Hawkins seemingly betrays his friends when he abandons them at the stockade to find Ben Gunn's boat. In the end, it proves to be a brave act that enables them to escape. Think of a time when you went

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against what was expected of you for the purpose of bringing about something good and perhaps received some criticism as a result. Write a one-page explanation of this situation and what it taught you, comparing how you felt to how Jim Hawkins probably felt.

Extending Meaning The treasure map plays a key role in this novel, allowing the conflict to build and culminate with the treasure being discovered. Make a treasure map using your yard, playground, a park, etc. as the setting. Make the adventure more realistic and fun by actually hiding or burying a "treasure." Write clues, perhaps some of them written in riddles, to help lead the treasure-seekers to the right location. Then, ask a family member or friend to try to find it. Report back to your class about the results.

Recognizing Details Robert Louis Stevenson made *Treasure Island* seem more realistic by using the language of the men who sailed the seas and the terms that pertain to sailing. Choose a subject about which you have some knowledge and write one scene or chapter in which you use the language and terminology that are typical for that subject. For example, if you wrote a chapter involving baseball, you might include the terms "bunting," "fly balls," and "called strikes." In your scene, a fan might yell, "Hey, batta, batta!"