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Introduction

This guide is divided into twelve units of study, and includes the following components:

Pre-reading Discussion

This is a detailed section on the key elements that readers will encounter in the reading assignment. The Pre-reading Discussion centers on the literary elements of *Johnny Tremain*, and gives suggestions for provoking interest in the chapters ahead. The section ends with ideas for initiating class discussions about the important concepts in the book.

Study Guide and Vocabulary List

Each unit contains a Study Guide, which includes comprehension questions and a vocabulary list, along with a corresponding reading assignment. Study Guide pages are designed to be duplicated and distributed when the reading assignment is given. Students should answer the questions and study the vocabulary words. Each Study Guide contains a “Writing Forum” section, in which students are asked to write a brief explication of some textual element. You may want to choose one or all of the questions listed; students may keep the Writing Forum questions in a continuing notebook. The following day’s class session could begin with a review of the written work before proceeding to a discussion of the chapters.

Discussion Concepts

This section details the important concepts that students have encountered in their reading of *Johnny Tremain*, and may be used to initiate class discussions. Discussions should involve events in the story and their relevance to the characters, important themes, and comparing and contrasting actions and statements. Students should be able to find quotes to support their opinions when necessary. Teachers may want to ask students to practice note-taking periodically during this discussion.

Tests

Tests of comprehension and vocabulary are included in the *Johnny Tremain* guide. Varied formats challenge students to think intently and creatively about the material.

Writing Projects

The writing projects at the end of the guide may be used as students progress through *Johnny Tremain*, or after the class has finished Unit 12.

Background

Type of Literature

Johnny Tremain is an example of realistic fiction. The historic events of *Johnny Tremain* actually took place in colonial America, but the character of Johnny Tremain is fictional.

Setting and Atmosphere

The setting of the story, or the time and place in which the events of the story occur, is Boston, Massachusetts, from 1773 to 1775. The story is placed within a historical account of the American Revolution, and is saturated in the customs, politics, pleasures, and conventions of the time.

The events of *Johnny Tremain* are historically accurate, and throughout the book there is a sense of the colonists' growing outrage against England's unfair actions. Because of Johnny's awakening consciousness—both personal and patriotic—the atmosphere created in *Johnny Tremain* is one of growing excitement, pride, and fervent patriotism.

Character Development

The characters in *Johnny Tremain* are developed through their words, actions, and feelings. The events of the novel are experienced through the character of Johnny as he changes and grows from a selfish, arrogant child into a responsible young adult. Johnny's friend Rab represents the type of adult that Johnny admires, and wishes to be like; Rab is a catalyst for many of the important changes that Johnny experiences.

In *Johnny Tremain*, many of the characters are symbolic of concepts or themes. The Lapham household represents Johnny's earlier life, in which he was a selfish and egotistical young apprentice. Rab and his family represent Johnny's "free" place, where he is free to grow but is expected to learn about life and himself. Merchant Lyte symbolizes an evil force in the first section of the novel, but he is replaced as the enemy by the British in the second section.

In *Johnny Tremain* Johnny changes and develops as the plot moves along. At first, he is self-serving and prideful as a young and talented silversmith. When he experiences the tragic, crippling accident that prevents him from utilizing his talent, he becomes bitter and resentful. As he learns to accept his deformity, Johnny learns to use his mind and limbs in other, constructive ways that further his growth into adulthood. As Johnny moves towards greater acceptance of his crippled hand, he also becomes more accepting of his emotional and intellectual self, and of others. In a final affirmation of his growing maturity, Johnny acts to heal himself by sharing his time of grief for Rab's death with Dr. Warren, and then by trusting Dr. Warren enough to allow him to examine and operate on his hand.

Plot

The plot consists of the series of events that introduce, develop, and resolve the major conflict in the story. Conflict exists in every narrative, and may appear in various forms. Conflict may exist between one person and another, between one person and a group, or between one person and nature or the environment. Several major conflicts may exist within one story; these are subplots. Conflicts are resolved, though not necessarily happily, by the end of the text.

There are several plots in *Johnny Tremain*. The first includes the events leading to Johnny's accident, the events describing the obstacles he confronts, and the events describing his successful solutions to these obstacles. Within these episodes, Johnny reconciles his conflicting feelings about himself and his ability to be a contributing member of his society. He fights to overcome his emotional shortcomings in order to emerge a self-reliant young man.

This primary plot is set within the action of the conflict between the Americans and the British. The events of the Revolution are closely involved with the events in Johnny's life; Johnny's life is colored by the personalities and occurrences of the Revolutionary War. The revolutionists that Johnny meets shape Johnny's personal growth, and his participation in the Liberty movement and acceptance of the ideals of the Sons of Liberty contribute to the events of history. By the end of the book, Johnny has resolved much of his turmoil; this is paralleled by the patriots' resolve to stand up for what they believe in and the subsequent outbreak of revolution.

Point of View

Johnny Tremain is told in the limited omniscient point of view. The third person pronoun is used throughout the book, but the reader is given insight into only one character's (Johnny's) thoughts and feelings.

The inherent subjectivity in this type of narrative raises an interesting question about the verity of events: is Johnny seeing what really happened, or what he thinks happened? To a certain extent, characters' actions reveal much about what happens simply because the action, taken at face value, corresponds closely to what the narrator says is happening. For example, for the scene on the wharf in Chapter 1 of "A Man Can Stand Up" to reveal the sadness and horror of war is realistic, because these are the characteristics of war; and because Johnny describes it as sad and horrible, the reader can surmise that Johnny is seeing what really happened.

Theme

The theme of a book may be either directly stated or implicit. In disseminating a text, the theme, or central concept of the story, becomes recognizable as a universally known idea.

One theme of *Johnny Tremain* can be determined by examining the major conflict of the novel. The theme of growing up characterizes *Johnny Tremain*, as Johnny struggles to deal with the obstacles before him in order to be initiated into adulthood. As he develops and successfully resolves his problems, he passes out of childhood and emerges as a young man.

A second theme is found in the retelling of the early stages of the American Revolution. The patriots' rebellion against England is traced graphically, with Johnny playing the role of "Any Patriot" swept up in the cause of liberty. The success of the outnumbered and ill-prepared patriots, despite overwhelming odds, parallels the success of Johnny's personal battle to overcome his problems.

There are many other, subordinate themes interwoven in *Johnny Tremain*. Courage, self-acceptance, humility, dedication to ideals, fighting for rights, and helping others are all issues that are a part of *Johnny Tremain*.