

# **Amos Fortune: Free Man Study Guide**

## **Amos Fortune: Free Man by Elizabeth Yates**

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## Overview

Amos Fortune: Free Man is based on the true story of a man who was born in Africa, captured by slavers when he was fifteen, sold as a slave in America, and freed when he was fifty-nine. Amos Fortune's life illustrates the triumph of a patient and peaceful man who deeply values freedom, responsibility, and the respect each human being owes to others. Amos's love for the earth, whether in Africa or in New England, is inspiring. Although the captured Atmun-shi fail to respond to him, Amos's attempts to lead and preserve his people win readers' admiration, as do his humility, his generosity, and his craftsmanship. Perhaps the most touching element of Amos's life is his resolute search for his crippled sister Ath-mun, whom the slavers leave behind. Once he realizes that he will never find her, Amos endeavors to help other women to live in freedom, and his struggles emphasize the value of individual freedom and self-respect.

## About the Author

Elizabeth Yates was born in Buffalo, New York, on December 6, 1905, the sixth of seven children in the family of Harry and Mary Duffy Yates. From kindergarten through the twelfth grade she attended the Franklin School in Buffalo, followed by a year of boarding school in Mamaroneck, New York.

Equally important in her development as a writer, however, were the summers she spent on her father's farm south of Buffalo. On sunny days she roamed the countryside on horseback, composing stories in her head; on rainy days and during other free moments, she retired to her secret writing place, an unused pigeon loft.

For three years, Yates worked for a newspaper and a magazine in New York as a book reviewer, researcher, and feature and fiction writer. The time period that she refers to as her "apprenticeship" as a writer ended when her first book was published in 1938. Since that time Yates has published more than thirty books for young adults and more than twenty for older readers, as well as articles, essays, and reviews in journals.

Fifteen of her books have been published in foreign editions, most of them British, but some of them Dutch, Japanese, Israeli, Bengali, and German.

Her manuscripts are among the special collections of Mugar Memorial Library, Boston University.

On November 6, 1929, Yates married William McGreal, and for ten years they lived in Europe, primarily in London, where Yates undertook extensive research in the British Museum and the London Library. The couple also traveled extensively in Great Britain and Iceland, as well as on the Continent. In 1939 they returned to the United States, and two years later they found their "ideal" farmhouse in Peterborough, New Hampshire. Her husband died in December 1963, but Yates continues to live in Peterborough, where she has long been active in community affairs.

Yates's talent has been recognized with many professional awards. Twice she has received the New York Herald Tribune Spring Book Festival juvenile award (1943 and 1950); she has also received the Newbery Medal and the William Allen White Children's Book Award (1953) for *Amos Fortune*, the Boys' Clubs of America Gold Medal (1953), the Jane Addams Children's Book Award from the United States section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (1955), and the Sarah Josepha Hale Award (1970).



# Plot Summary

*Amos Fortune: Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates is the biography of a man born freely in Africa, who was abducted as teenager to be sold as a slave in the new American Colonies. This youth learned to communicate with the people of his new world, learned a deep devotion to the Bible, and became a free man who lived with a kindness and generosity of heart that taught those around him the meaning of compassion. This biography won the Newberry Medal for its contribution to children's literature in 1951, and continues to teach a new generation of readers what it is to be human.

It was springtime in the a small African village off the Gold Coast. The At-mun-shi people were participating in an annual celebration to appease the gods of spring, when a group of slavers interrupted their celebration by killing the king and rounding up the youngest and healthiest of the group. At-mun, the fifteen year oldfifteen-year-old son of the king was one of these youths.

At-mun, aware of the death of his father and the importance this placed on his shoulders, attempted to keep the spirits of his fellow villagers high during the journey to the ocean. However, the longer the journey and the harsher the treatment, the less the At-mun-shi cared to respond to At-mun's courageous council. Once on board the ship that would take them to another world, the At-mun-shi began to forget their language, their past, and their own names. At-mun, himself, struggled to hold on to these simple truths.

Once they arrived on the American coast, the weakest were unloaded first. At-mun, being a strong young man, left the boat on the final stop in Boston. Once on the auctioneer's block, At-mun found sympathy in a kind weaver, who bought him without haggling with the auctioneer and named him Amos. Amos now had a new home with kind people, who taught him to read and write along side their own young children.

Amos was offered his freedom many times over the next fifteen years. However, Amos always turned it down, preferring the security of an older mentor and the time to search for the sister he left behind in Africa. When the man who so kindly bought him, Caleb Copeland, passed away, his wife and daughter were forced to sell him despite their own desires to the contrary, in order to pay off debts left behind.

Amos went to a kind man and his wife. Ichabod Richardson was a tanner, and he taught Amos the trade, a trade that would sustain Amos the remainder of his life. Richardson kept Amos for almost thirty years, finally promising Amos he would free him in six years time, if he would pay money every month into a fund. Amos agreed. However, Richardson died before Amos could finish his payments. The kind wife, who never really agreed with her husband's bargain with Amos, gave Amos his freedom early. Mrs. Richardson then offered to allow Amos use of her husband's shop and tools, until he could buy one of his own.



Amos had waited until he had gained his freedom to consider marriage. Amos knew a woman, a slave of forty years, through a group of fellow slaves. Amos paid for Lily's freedom before he married her. It was Amos's sole consolation on the day of his wife's death, less than a year later, that she died free. Amos then bought the freedom of another woman he loved, Lydia, and married her only to have her die soon thereafter, as well. Finally, Amos bought the freedom of and married a younger woman with a four-year-old daughter and remained happily married to her until his death more than twenty years later.

On a trip to deliver some leather in a distant town, Amos found an idyllic village situated at the base of a mountain. Amos knew this was the place he wanted to buy for his own farm. Amos packed up his new wife and child and moved to this village, living on borrowed land, until he could reestablish his tanning business and save for a farm of their own. In the process of saving the money, Amos met a widow woman who was in desperate need for financial assistance in taking care of her many children. Violet would not allow Amos to give up his dream of owning his own farm and refused to let him help this woman. However, Amos would later find a way to help the woman's oldest daughter, Polly.

After once again reestablishing himself on his own land, Amos took on several local boys as apprentices to his business, while his wife and daughter began selling linens they wove themselves on a loom. When Amos learned the indigent woman's two eldest children, Polly and Moses, were to be auctioned off at a vendue to help the town pay for their care, Amos purchased Polly with an insanely low bid. Amos knew the girl was ill and would not live much longer. He and he wanted her to die in the freedom of his home, rather than in the servitude of another home.

As Amos aged and became aware that he would soon die, he began to think about the legacy he would leave behind. Amos decided that he wanted to support the local church and the local school. Amos left the majority of his savings to the church in order to buy a silver communion set and to the school to purchase anything they might need. Amos passed away on November 17, 1801, leaving behind a living legacy of kindness and generosity.



# Africa 1725

## Africa 1725 Summary

*Amos Fortune: Free Man* by Elizabeth Yates is the biography of a man born freely in Africa who was abducted as teenager to be sold as a slave in the new American Colonies. This youth learned to communicate with the people of his new world, learned a deep devotion to the Bible, and became a free man who lived with a kindness and generosity of heart that taught those around him the meaning of compassion. This biography won the Newberry Medal for its contribution to children's literature in 1951, and continues to teach a new generation of readers what it is to be human.

It was a clear spring night off the golden coast of Africa. and theThe At-mun-shi tribe was preparing for their mystic dance, which would welcome the time of herbage and the planting of the corn. The king played a drum, and several other drums answered, as the people put down their weapons and joined the celebration. At-mun, the fifteen year oldfifteen-year-old son of the king, watched with his sister, Ath-mun. The entire village began to gather, chanting a traditional incantation, when suddenly gunshots rang through the night. The and the king fell.

At-mun ran to his father's side, as white men invaded the village. At-mun quickly moved to his sister, protecting her from these strange invaders. A white man approached At-mun, weary at first, and then more boldly, as he was joined by another, and. They pushed Ath-mun away from her brother's side before handcuffing At-mun with bamboo withes. The white men led At-mun away, but not before he could remind his sister that they were royalty. She and that she must keep her head high to lead her people through this traumatic episode. They could not escape their birth rightbirthright.

## Africa 1725 Analysis

The At-mun-shin people are a peaceful people as described by the beauty of their springtime celebration and their delayed reaction, when the slavers invade their village. This foreshadows the next chapter in the At-mun-shi's reaction to being held captive. This chapter also introduces At-mun, a child of dignity and respect as portrayed by his reaction to the slavers, again foreshadowing the character of the biography's topic. By describing At-mun as holding his head high and instructing his sister to do the same, Ms. Yates has foretold the character this child hasillustrates his ability to even at the young age of fifteen, the strength inside him to keep his head up, even after the death of his father and being separated from his young sister, and the. This spirit which will sustain this boyhim throughout the remainder of his life.





# The Middle Passage

## The Middle Passage Summary

The captives were marched through the jungle until noon, when the slavers stopped to rest during the heat of the day. The captives were left to sit in the sun, while the slavers napped in protective tents. At night, they were placed into boats on the river and taken to the ocean. During this trip, the slavers mostly fell asleep as do the majority of the captives. At-mun stayed awake to memorize their progress so that he could lead his people back home should they manage to free themselves. At-mun prayed to the Spirit of the Night, the Spirit of the River, and the Spirit of his father, asking if he should break his withes and fight the slavers. However, At-mun believed this was not what he should do, because many At-mun-shi could die in the process.

Once they reached the ocean, the captives were placed in a pit, where food was thrown down to them once a day, and they had to fight for their share. This was done to break the spirits of the most willful of the captives and to weed out the weak. When the slave ship's captain came to trade for his cargo, the slaves were removed from the pits, stripped naked, washed, and oiled and placed on display. The ship's captain only wanted the strongest and the youngest. The because the two monthtwo-month trip could be harsh, and it was in his best interest to arrive with as many living captives as possible.

At-mun and a few of his fellow At-mun-shi people were placed on board the *White Falcon*. At-mun had attempted to keep the spirits of his people up, however the longer they were kept hostage, the more the people's return stares became dulled. Finally, until they no longer responded to At-mun's verbal and silent pleas of resilience. At-mun himself was also beginning to lose hope, to forget where he had come from and his native language. However, At-mun stubbornly held on to two things: the memory of his sister's face so that he would know her when he saw her again, and his own birth rightbirthright, repeating his name over and over to himself during the long journey.

The *White Falcon* made many stops when it arrived at the American colonies, first at the Carolinas and ending with in Boston. At-mun did not get off the ship until the final stop, because he was one of the strongest, and the captain chose to rid himself of the weakest first. When placed on the auctioneer's block, the auctioneer told the waiting crowd that At-mun was young and strong, and that he could not talk, which. This would be a plus for any potential buyer, because he could not complain. A man in the crowd came forward and asked if he were to pay thirty pounds could he buy the boy without bidding. The auctioneer sold At-mun to this man, receiving twice what he had hoped. The man took the boy home, without the money he had come to sell his fine woven cloth for.

## The Middle Passage Analysis

At-mun struggled to keep his people together, choosing not to try to fight the slavers, despite an opportunity that had presented itself. This again foreshadows the man At-mun will become and defines his very character. At-mun also made the decision to remember only two things, his birthright and his sister. Not only does this foreshadow At-mun's character, but it also foreshadows his future actions.

This biography paints a picture of the early years of slavery in the Americas, in this chapter the act of collecting the slaves, removing their free will, and transporting them on slave ships. The irony of At-mun's sense of peace and pleasure at seeing a world he might not have seen otherwise again shows the strength of his character, as the writer saw it through her research into Amos's life. Then when a man offerA man offerings to buy At-mun without participating in the haggling of an auction is again foreshadowing into the kind of life At-mun is to experience, while he lives as a slave in the American colonies.



# Boston 1725-1740

## Boston 1725-1740 Summary

Caleb Copeland's wife was not surprised when her husband brought home a young, African boy instead of the money for the cloth he went into town to sell. Celia Copeland took an instant liking to the boy, thinking that he would be the same age as her son, had they not waited to have children. Celia set the boy up in a small room off the kitchen, though the boy did not know to sleep on the cot, preferring the floor, and did not know to use a fork with which to eat.

Celia decided that she would teach this boy just like she taught her own children. They called him Amos, because when Caleb asked him his name, he did not understand the syllables At-mun spoke. In time, Amos became a part of the family, working hard to learn how to weave cloth with Caleb and learning to read and write with the children. Despite the fact that everyone believed he could not speak, Amos learned English quickly and began to read aloud during his lessons with the children.

Caleb offered Amos his freedom many times during the fifteen years of their time together. However, Amos refused, believing in his tribe's tradition of having an older, wiser man to learn from. Amos collected the money the Copelands paid to him, and every time he heard of a slave auction in which a young girl was to be auctioned, he would ask Caleb to allow him to go into town. Amos hoped that one day he would find his sister, Ath-mun, on the auctioneer's block and be allowed to buy her.

Amos attended church faithfully with the Copelands, though he was not allowed to sit with them during the service. Although taught and raised just as the whites, the black people of the community were never allowed to worship with the whites, therefore they created their own community in which they would often meet not only to worship, but to sing and tell stories of Africa. The people of this community called Amos, Mr. Fortunatus, because of his good fortune of never suffering in his role as slave. Soon, they shortened it to Fortune, and it would be the name Amos that he would take when he gained after gaining his freedom.

When Caleb Copeland died, Celia and her daughter were forced to sell Amos to pay off his debts. Amos was amused by the description the auctioneer gave of him and even bid on himself a few times to drive up the price. Finally, a man named Ichabod Richardson, who was a tanner, purchased Amos.

## Boston 1725-1740 Analysis

Amos became a good Christian during his time with the Copelands, something that will remain with him the rest of his life, foreshadowing again not only Amos's character, but his future. It is important to note in this chapter the irony that Amos was raised with white children and devoted himself to what was then considered a white



religious belief, h. However, he was not allowed to worship with the rest of the white community. Not only is this ironic, it foreshadows Amos's actions toward the end of his life.

Amos was lucky in his treatment by the Copelands, which his fellow slaves noted by dubbing him Mr. Fortunatus. It is important to note this as well, since it too foreshadows future events in Amos's life, not just the taking of Fortune as his last name. Also, it could be considered ironic that Amos did not take the freedom often offered to him by the Copelands, only to be sold as a piece of property at the time of Caleb's death. Why Only Amos knows and understands the reasons why he decided not to take the freedom that was offered to him. did not take the freedom offered to him could only be truly known by Amos himself, aTlthough the writer does suggests it was because Amos felt he needed an older, wiser mentor to learn from and lean on. However ironic his refusal was, Amos was most assuredly a lucky man that he found such a kind family, who did regret selling him at the end of Caleb's life. This experience most definitely must have defined Amos's outlook on the world and foreshadowed a future that no one could have seen up to this point.



# Woburn 1740-1779

## Woburn 1740-1779 Summary

Ichabod Richardson was more stern than the Copelands, though a quiet and kind man. Amos settled in quickly with Richardson and his wife, asking only that he be allowed to travel to Boston when the slave ships came in. Richardson agreed, as long as Amos behaved himself.

Richardson taught Amos his tanning profession, a knowledge that would sustain Amos the rest of his life. Over the thirty years Amos would remain with the Richardsons, Amos worked hard and behaved well. During this time, the colonies were becoming unhappy with the iron fist with which the English king ruled, and Amos continued to search for his sister at every auction that advertised young, African women. One day, Amos asked Ichabod Richardson for his freedom. After Ichabod agreed to it, with a few requirements on Amos's part, Amos gave Mrs. Richardson a small mirror. Mrs. Richardson offered Amos a chance to look at himself. It was then that Amos realized how old he had become, and that his sister must also have aged, though he had been searching for a young woman all this time.

Richardson and Amos agreed that over the period of six years, Amos would pay an indenture into a fund for Mrs. Richardson, in order to help her survive should Ichabod Richardson die. Mrs. Richardson did not like the idea, however, Amos agreed most willingly. However, only a few short years into the agreement, Ichabod Richardson died. Mrs. Richardson immediately gave Amos his freedom without requesting that he fulfill his payment of the indenture. Then, Mrs. Richardson requested that Amos remain at her home in order to use her husband's shop and tools, until such a time that Amos could buy his own home and shop.

During the years of his slavery, Amos had met through the black community a slave woman, who he loved. Amos refused to marry her, while he was a slave and unable to care for her the way a man should. After he received his freedom, Amos approached his love, Lily, and told her his intentions. He then and then asked her owner how much her freedom would cost. After Amos bought Lily's freedom, they were married. However, Lily passed away just a short time later.

Amos, while delivering leather to a white man's home, met a slave named Lydia. She who was lame from poorly healed broken legs, an injury she suffered on a slave ship. Amos went to her owner and asked how much it would cost him to buy her. The man said fifty pounds. Amos agreed to pay it, because he wanted to marry Lydia. Amos worked hard to save the money, because it was such a large amount of money. Finally, he had it, and Amos and Lydia were then married. However, Lydia died within the first year of her freedom.



## Woburn 1740-1779 Analysis

Ichabod Richardson was a kind man to Amos. However, it was ironic that Richardson forced Amos to buy his own freedom, in a sense putting Amos back on the auction block and forcing him to buy himself. Amos did not mind, though it seems, because he most willingly participated in this agreement. Amos received his freedom, once again finding himself in a most fortunate situation compared to other slaves of the time, again earning the name Mr. Fortunatus. However, his good fortune would not always hold, as symbolized by the deaths of not one wife, but two.

Amos searched for his sister all the years he was a slave, touching on the theme of love, showing how much he must have truly loved his sister. However, Amos eventually realized how old the two of them had become, and that he might never find her. Amos grieved in his own way, by singing, and looked forward to his freedom. When Amos had his freedom and freed two women in order to give him what was most precious to him, and to them, as well, . Amos's action not onlyThrough his actions in aiding the women, he touch on the theme of freedom, but by freeing these two women he also symbolically gaveives freedom to his own sister by freeing two women who might have died in slavery had he not bought their freedom.



# Journey to Keene 1779

## Journey to Keene 1779 Summary

By 1779, Amos Fortune had his freedom, had a thriving tanning business, and his own home. Amos also had a good horse, one he bought from a man looking to tan the horse's hide. whom Amos talked him into selling him the horse, instead.

Amos had fallen in love again, this time with a woman, named , Violet, younger. She was younger than him with a four- year- old daughter. Amos had agreed to pay Violet's owner fifty pounds for both Violet and her daughter, Celyndia. Amos was close to having the money on the day he traveled to Keene to make a delivery. On the road to Keene, Amos found a small community nestled at the base of a mountain. To Amos, this place looked like paradise. Amos asked God to give him a sign, to tell him if this should be the place he would live out the rest of his days.

In Keene, Amos went to find the cobbler to whom his leather was consigned. The cobbler was quite impressed with Amos's work and said how he wished such a good tanner lived closer to Keene. The closetclosest tanner was not very good. Amos saw this wish as a sign that he should move to Jaffrey, the small community he had passed a few miles back.

When the cobbler went to pay Amos, he complained that this was the last of his money. Amos gave back more than half the money in exchange for the cobbler's church clothes, which he had long outgrown. In November, Amos wore the fancy clothes, when he bought Violet and Celyndia's freedom. He and married Violet the next day.

## Journey to Keene 1779 Analysis

Amos was free now and taking advantage of his freedom, as much as he could. When he saw Jaffrey, Amos saw it as a symbol of his freedom, of all the possibilities that lay out ahead of him and his future family. All Amos wanted was a sign, and he got it, when the cobbler groused that there was not a good tanner close enough. However, there is foreshadowing of problems in this chapter. when Amos runs into an unkind stableman, who charges him too much for stabling his horse, and an inn that will not allow him to stay in one of their rooms. Amos had his freedom, however, he was not as free as a white man would have been in his place.

Again, Amos waited until he could buy Violet's freedom before he married again. This touches on the theme of freedom, of how important freedom was to Amos. This also is symbolic of Amos's character and his determination to bring freedom to all the women he loves, as he could not do for his own sister.



# The Arrival at Jaffrey

## The Arrival at Jaffrey Summary

Amos saved up for months before he packed up his family and moved to Jaffrey, aware that they would not be able to take many orders, until they could establish their new home. The journey was long and hard, with many hardships that included a lack of food and safety. Amos was not a young man anymore, being seventy-one by this point, and he was concerned about reestablishing himself and finding a customer base. However, Amos still believed this was the best thing for him and his family.

When they arrived at Jaffrey, the town constable greeted Amos. The constable told them they were not welcome, that the town did not have room for another family of free blacks. The constable told Amos this, because it was his duty to protect the town. He needed and to keep the town from having to care for a poor family that could not care for themselves. However, when Amos told him he was a good tanner, the constable told him to go talk to the parson.

The parson was much more generous in his welcome of Amos. The parson agreed that they were in great need of a good tanner in town. The parson took Amos to see a piece of land he owned and allowed Amos the right to use it free of charge, until he could buy a piece of land of his own. Amos took Violet and Celyndia to see the land. While they began to unpack the cart, the parson and several other neighbors came over and helped them build a temporary shelter.

## The Arrival at Jaffrey Analysis

Amos took a big chance moving to Jaffrey, as shown by the constable's greeting. However, this part of Amos's character has been foreshadowed throughout the biography. Amos was a strong man, a man who survived being taken from his home and shipped millions of miles to a new world with a new language and new ways. Amos could survive this, as well.

The constable's greeting was not unfriendly, though it did symbolize the prejudice and ignorance already a part of the American culture. Amos had his freedom; however, he did not enjoy as much freedom as a white man would in his place, irony that still exists in parts of American culture today. This also, once again, foreshadows the actions Amos will take shortly before his death later in the biography. Other foreshadowing in this novel is represented by the parson's warm welcome and the aid of the neighbors in helping the Fortune's build a shelter. Although prejudices existed, there was also kindness in this town that Amos saw as a paradise, the very first time he laid eyes on it.





# Hard Work Fills the Iron Kettle 1781-1789

## Hard Work Fills the Iron Kettle 1781-1789 Summary

The first summer in Jaffrey, Amos and Violet spent rebuilding the tanning business and building a cabin for them to live in. The entire cabin seemed to be filled with one part or another of the tanning business, because that was what was most important. They had to start earning money in order to survive in their new home.

While her parents concentrated all their time on the tannery, Celyndia tested the boundaries of her freedom. Celyndia made friends among the local children and often went off to pick berries. Celyndia had not grasped the full meaning of her freedom when she first received it, however, the longer she lived in Jaffrey, the more she discovered the meaning of freedom.

Amos worked hard all week long on his tanning, spending hours scraping the hides with Violet, or stirring the hides in the pits where they soaked for months at a time, or making sure they dried in the yard properly. However, on Sunday, Amos always attended church in his finest clothes, with Violet and Celyndia at his side. At the church, there was a special pew at the back reserved for blacks only. Sometimes, people would come from Dublin to sit with them, but most of the time the Fortune's shared the pew with the Burdoo family.

Amos was finally made a member of the church in 1879. On that day, he took his family out to the Burdoo home to share their good news. The Burdoo's consisted of a widowed mother and her five children. When the Fortunes arrived, Lois Burdoo complained to Amos how difficult it had become to care for her family. Lois had no income, and she had to rely on the town to help her family survive. Lois was unsure the town would continue to do so.

Amos had been making good money since coming to Jaffrey. Amos put all his money into an iron kettle he kept hidden in the ashes of the fireplace, saving it for the day he could buy a farm of his own. That night, Amos counted the money in the kettle. Violet heard him and knew what he planned to do. Violet prayed that God would help her with what she knew she had to do. Violet took the kettle and buried it in the woods, where only she could find it.

## Hard Work Fills the Iron Kettle 1781-1789 Analysis

Amos worked very hard to reestablish his business in Jaffrey, as it was foreshadowing in earlier chapters suggested that he would. Amos wanted desperately to have a farm of his own, which to him was the ultimate symbol of his freedom, once more touching on the themes of freedom and respect. However, Amos had a big heart that could get him into trouble sometimes.



Lois Burdoo was an indigent woman, who symbolized slavery in the fact that she depended on others to care for herself and her children. Violet saw her as lazy and unwilling to care for herself. To Amos, Lois Burdoo represented everything he had tried to save Lily, Lydia, and Violet from. This foreshadows events at the end of this chapter and events in future chapters in which Amos attempts to help Lois, despite his wife's reservations. It is ironic that Violet does not want Amos to help Lois, even though it was Amos who bought her own freedom.



# Amos on the Mountain

## Amos on the Mountain Summary

The next morning, Amos told Violet that he intended to take the money he had saved for a farm for them to buy Lois a house in town. Violet responded that she did not like the idea and that she had hidden the money. Violet said that Amos had helped so many people, that it was time for him to help himself. Amos became angry and took some bread and water up to the mountain.

Amos sat on the peak of the mountain all night, praying and begging God for a sign of what he should do next. Amos knew that Violet had a valid point, that he. He needed to buy a farm so that Violet and Celyndia would be taken care of should he die. However, Amos also felt motivated to help Lois, because she could not help herself.

While Amos slept, a loud noise sounded near him. Amos woke with a start. There had been talk in the village about noises on the mountain caused by opposing wind gusts. However, Amos saw the noise as a sign from God. Amos went back down the mountain. Violet told him she put the kettle back, because she knew when he came down, he would have made a decision. She and she could not stand between him and his money. Amos told her that she was right to use her freedom to express her wishes, and that the money was both of theirs. Then, Amos told her he intended to buy a farm for his family. That very afternoon, Violet and Amos bought their farm and became landowners for the first time in Amos's eightieth year.

## Amos on the Mountain Analysis

Amos gave Violet her freedom. Then, and then he ironically suffered, when she expressed it by hiding their money. Amos lived his life by the Christian believes belief that one should help their neighbors before themselves. However, Violet felt it was time for Amos to look out for himself. Violet loved Amos and was afraid his kindness would cheat him out of the basic rights all free men take for granted. Violet prayed that she was doing the right thing and then expressed the freedom that Amos bought for her. By doing this, Violet forced Amos to see that he had to take care of his own family first and allowed himself the one symbol of his freedom, a theme of his biography, by buying a farm of his own.



# Auctioned for Freedom

## Auctioned for Freedom Summary

Amos built a home on his new farm with the help of his neighbors. Over the next few years, Amos added to the home and the comforts within from the money he made with his tanning. Amos took on two of the Burdoo boys as helpers in his business. Celyndia attended school, despite occasional moments of prejudice that made her unhappy.

After years of trying to help the Burdoo's, the town finally forced Lois to put her two oldest children up on vendue. They in which they would be auctioned to the lowest bidder in order to aid the town in caring for them. The town would provide clothes and medical help for these people, while the winning bidder would provide food and shelter in exchange for services rendered by the indigent person.

Amos learned of this vendue and attended it. Amos bid on Polly Burdoo with the lowest bid of one pound sixteen. Polly attempted to be a good servant for Amos and his family. Violet tried to teach the girl how to use the loom and do housework, however, the girl would often stare into space for long periods without realizing what she was doing, unable to complete a project. Then, Polly became sick. Amos held her hand with Violet and Celyndia when she died. Amos prayed his thanks to God that she had died free. Violet argued that Polly had been born free. Amos said that poverty is not freedom. Amos then told Violet about the night on the canoe when he could have fought the slavers and chose not to. Amos said a man is not free, until he knows how to live and how to walk with God.

## Auctioned for Freedom Analysis

Amos bought Polly at the auction in what at first seemed an act of kindness to keep the girl from working in a saloon or for some unkind person. However, when Polly died and Amos talked of how she had not been free until taken from poverty, Amos made his intentions clear. It is ironic that Polly was born with the one thing most people of color at that time wanted and still could not enjoy its true meaning. Amos gave that to her by buying her at the vendue, which is. It's another turn of irony, in Amos having to buy a free woman in order to offer her true freedom. This also touches on all three themes of the biography, , including freedom, respect, and love. One final time, Amos symbolically offered freedom to his sister. Once and once more, a woman died free because of his kindness.



# Evergreen Years 1794-1801

## Evergreen Years 1794-1801 Summary

Violet and Celyndia continued to weave their linens on their loom and sell their goods to people who came to do business for Amos. Amos also continued to do well, though he was beginning to feel his age. Amos still had the Burdoo boys to help him, and he took on an apprentice, the son of the doctor, who helped him when both Lily and Lydia died. Amos added the indenture papers to his growing list of important papers, including his own manumission papers, those of Lily, Lydia, Violet, and Celyndia.

Amos thought of his sister often in his later years and knew he would see her in the next life, . it was something he looked forward to. However, Amos knew he had more to do before he went. One day, when he went to deliver leather to a man in a bar, Amos decided what he must do as a result of the man shorting him of his due and throwing the money on the floor. Amos knew he could not allow hate to grow in his own heart, and that he did not want it to grow in the hearts of others like him. Amos went to a Deacon he knew well and asked him to help him make his will.

Amos left all his possessions to Violet, allowing the parson to decide what to write on both his and Violet's headstones after their death. Then, Amos took out the money he had saved in a special fund and divided it. One hundred dollars so the church could purchase a silver communion service. The rest he wanted to go to the school, in order for all children to have what they needed in order to learn. Amos died shortly thereafter. In the graveyard, there still stand the grave markers for both Amos and Violet, with simple epitaphs written on them. The church did buy the communion service, and the school fund is still in use.

## Evergreen Years 1794-1801 Analysis

Throughout the biography, Amos's character and actions foreshadow his final gift in this chapter. Amos was aware of the prejudice in the world around him, a victim to it himself many times, as well as his daughter. Amos wanted to change that behavior any way he could by setting an example. By leaving the money to the school, Amos ensured that children in that town would always have what they needed. By leaving the money for the communion service, Amos left a symbol that everyone is equal in the eyes of God.



# Characters

## Amos Fortune

Amos Fortune was an African youth when the book begins, the son of the king. His father ruled a village of people, called At-mun-shi. Amos's name in this village was At-mun, however as soon as he was taken captive by the slave hunters, he began to forget this name. At-mun held on to every memory he could, to the memory of his people, of his beloved sister, Ath-mun, and to the fact that he became king at the moment of his father's death during the slaver's raid. At-mun held onto his name, until he was given a new name. The and the memories of his life in Africa began to fade, everything but the remembrance of the word, Ath-mun.

Amos grew into a good man under the care and affection of his first owners, the Copelands. Mr. and Mrs. Copeland taught Amos how to write, read and speak the English language, how to write it and read it, and they. They also taught him about Christianity and hard work. Amos was offered his freedom many times over the fifteen years he spent with the Copelands; , however, he refused to take it. Amos wanted to learn all he could before he gained his freedom. He and he wanted to save all the money the family gave him, so that if he ever found his sister, Ath-mun, on the auctioneer's block, he could buy her.

Amos was sold to another man after Mr. Copeland died, in order to pay off the family's debts. With this new family, Amos learned to be a tanner, a trade that would sustain him for the rest of his life. Upon receiving his freedom from the Richardson's, Amos took over Mr. Richardson's shop, until he could afford one of his own. Amos, who is now near sixty, married for the first time, a woman his own age, named Lily. He whose freedom he purchasedpurchased her freedom before their wedding. After Lily died, Amos again paid for the freedom of another woman, Lydia, who also died not long after their marriage. Finally, Amos fell in love with a woman twenty years younger than him, who had a four-year- old daughter. Amos pays for the freedom of both woman and child, and married marries again.

Amos moved his family to a small town in Massachusetts, finally ready and capable of owning his own property. Amos worked hard on a borrowed piece of land to earn the money he needed to buy a large farm for himself and his family. Despite his own generous nature, Amos finally achieved everything he always wanted. Amos wanted to leave a legacy. Amos left the majority of his savings to the local church and school, in order to leave a living legacy for everyone.

## Violet Fortune

Violet was Amos's third wife. Violet had been a slave most of her life and was unsure of life as a free woman. Violet worked hard, discovering new freedoms every day of her



life. Violet and Amos built a good life together, both of them working the tannery together after their move to Jaffrey. Violet also worked with a loom, creating beautiful bedspreads, dresses, and linens for her new home. Later, these works of art would become a source of additional income for Violet and her daughter.

Violet was also a Christian woman, who went to church every Sunday with her daughter and her husband. She and was very proud of her husband, when he was elected a member of the church. However, she had no patience for people who did not work hard for all they needed. When Amos decided he must help an indigent family with the money that he worked hard for and saved for a farm of his own, Violet took the money and hid it from him. Violet prayed long and hard about her decision to hide the money, believing she had done the right thing. However, Amos did not agree, and the two argued for the first time in their marriage. Finally, Amos saw the sense in what she had done, exercising her freedom in a clear and precise way for the first time. Amos bought the farm and helped the indigent family in another, kinder way.

## **Caleb Copeland**

Caleb Copeland was a good, kind man, who saw something in At-mun the moment he was taken to the auctioneer's block. Caleb felt drawn to this poor, African child, who could not speak. He and decided that instead of taking home the money he had just gotten for the sale of his fine woven cloth, he would buy the boy outright, with no haggling, and take him home to help his family. Caleb renamed At-mun, Amos, when he could not understand what At-mun was trying to tell him his name was.

Caleb was a Christian man, who decided that Amos should attend church with him and his family. Through the experience of living with the Copelands and going to church weekly, Amos learned to read and write English. He also and learned about the Christian faith. He remained a strong believer until the time of his death. which he believed strongly in until his death. Amos stayed with the Copeland family until Caleb's death fifteen years later, refusing his freedom as offered by Caleb many times, because he wanted to continue his search for his sister and wanted the time to learn under an older mentor. Amos was well treated by the Copeland family, never abused or caused to suffer the indignations many other slaves suffered during their years of servitude.

## **Celia Copeland**

Celia Copeland was the wife of Caleb Copeland. Celia took it upon herself to teach Amos the ways of Western culture, beginning with the concept of a fork and spoon. When Amos first came to their home, Amos slept on the floor and ate with his fingers. Amos could not speak, except for the name At-mun, because he did not know the English language and had forgotten much of his own language during the long months of travel from Africa. Celia taught Amos, along side her own children, how to read and write. Her while her husband taught him how to weave cloth.





When Caleb died, Celia very much wanted to give the then thirty year old thirty-year-old Amos his freedom. However, many debts remained after Caleb's death, and Amos was a valuable piece of property to her. Celia sold Amos on the auction block for more than her husband originally paid, thanks in part to Amos's humorous behavior on the auctioneer's block during the sale.

## Roxanna Copeland

Roxanna Copeland was the daughter of Caleb and Celia Copeland. Roxanna learned to read alongside Amos and her brother. It was Roxanna who one day, reading a passage from the Bible, who reminded Amos that he was a king. She said that, and that in God's eyes, he would always be a king. Amos kept this truth close to his heart the rest of his life. In and in the spirit of this knowledge, Amos attempted to free as many people from the bonds of slavery as he could.

## Ichabod Richardson

Ichabod Richardson was Amos's second owner. Richardson was a tanner, who taught Amos the trade, a trade that would sustain Amos the rest of his life. Richardson promised Amos the day he bought him and took him to Woburn that, one day, if Amos worked hard and behaved for him and his wife, that Richardson he would free him. Amos forced Richardson to keep his word, eventually striking a deal with him in which Amos would pay a certain amount of money into a fund that would guarantee Mrs. Richardson's support after his death. In return, Amos would earn his freedom in six years. However, Richardson died before Amos could finish paying into this fund. Mrs. Richardson, who never agreed with the details of the deal, gave Amos his freedom without requiring him to finish paying what he owed. Not only that, but Mrs. Richardson allowed Amos to remain on her property and to use freely her husband's tools, of his trade until Amos could buy his own home and property.

## Lily and Lydia

Lily and Lydia were Amos's first and second wives. Lily was a woman Amos met while socializing with other slaves in Woburn and Boston before he gained his freedom. Amos loved Lily very much. However, he postponed their marriage until he could afford to buy her freedom, wanting Lily to enjoy the same rights Amos himself had gained. However, Lily was a sickly woman, and she died shortly after their wedding. Not long after Lily's death, Amos was making a delivery of his leather to a nearby land owner landowner. While in the kitchen enjoying some time with the household slaves, Amos met Lydia. Lydia walked with a limp, because her legs had been broken on board the slave ship after an attempted escape into the ocean. Amos fell in love with Lydia right away and offered to buy her from her owner. The man stated a ridiculously high price. However, Amos agreed to pay it, because he did not want to haggle over a fellow human being. Within a year of marriage, Lydia also died as well.





## Celyndia

Celyndia was Violet's daughter. Celyndia was just four when Amos bought her freedom and did not understand the magnitude of what he had done for her. Celyndia constantly questioned her mother and new stepfather about her rights, asking for permission to chase butterflies and wondering when they would be going to another 'big folks' house. Celyndia eventually adjusted to her new life, enjoying her freedoms, except when she would be teased and abused while attending school. Life was still difficult for Amos and his family, full of prejudices that were both obvious and subtle. However, Celyndia was a good child who worked hard and learned to work the loom with her mother in order to contribute to the household and to the small amount of income she and her mother generated from the fine linens they created together.

## Polly

Polly was one of six children of an indigent widow Amos befriended through his church. Polly and her family were miserable after the early death of their father. Their mother had no income and relied on the kindness of the town and her few friends to provide for her family. Violet did not like Polly's mother, . She thought her lazy and incapable. However, Amos had a big heart and worried a great deal about Polly and her family. When Polly's mother allowed for her two oldest children, Polly and her brother Moses, to be put up for vendue, Amos went to the auction and bid a mere pound and six sterling for Polly.

In Amos's home, Polly attempted to work hard for the family. However, Polly would constantly go into some sort of waking trance and forget what it was she was supposed to be doing. Soon, Polly became very ill. Amos, Violet, and Celyndia were at Polly's side, when she passed away. Amos was happy that he had purchased Polly's care at the vendue, because he had wanted her to die in freedom and not as the indentured slave of some neighbor.

## Ath-mun

Ath-mun was At-mun's younger sister. Ath-mun was born with a useless leg. In the tradition of the At-mun-shi people, Ath-mun should have been killed at her father's hand shortly after birth. However, due to his deep love for his daughter, Ath-mun's father elected instead to kill a much beloved dog in her place to appease the gods. On the day the slavers raided the village, At-mun went to his sister's side to protect her. However, the slavers dragged him from her arms and took him away, leaving the young girl to rise to her rightful place as princess and lead her people. Once At-mun became Amos, he searched for his sister every time a new slave ship came to the Boston harbor, hoping if she did come to the colonies as a slave, he would be able to buy her and give her freedom in this new land. Amos never found Ath-mun.



# Objects/Places

## Bamboo Withes

Bamboo withes are the ties that the slavers used to bind At-mun, when he is first taken captive.

## Lash

While the slavers were leading the At-mun-shi people out of their village, they beat At-mun with the lash, leaving scars he would carry his entire life.

## The Pits

The slavers would place the newly acquired slaves into the pits in order to subdue their spirits and to weed out the weaker ones. The slavers only fed the people once a day and would do it in such a way that they would have to fight over it to survive.

*The White Falcon*

*The White Falcon* is the slave ship in which At-mun was transported to the American colonies. The ship made six stops along the coastline of America. Only and only the healthiest, At-mun included, made it all the way to Boston.

## The Bible

The Bible is the book Mrs. Copeland used to teach both Amos and her own children how to read and write. It is several passages in the bible that helped Amos remember who he was and kept him from becoming bitter about his lack of freedom.

## Auctioneers

It was on an auctioneer's platform that At-mun was taken when he left the slave ship, and where Mr. Copeland bought him without bidding. At-mun also spent most of his free time searching the auctioneer's advertisements and auctions searching for his sister.

## Tannery

Amos learned the tanner's trade from his second owner, Mr. Richardson, and took that knowledge with him when he left, in order to make his living as a free man. Amos was an excellent tanner, one that people. People came from all over to have their hides cured into leather by Amos.



## **Manumission**

Manumission is the paper that declares a slave a free man. Amos carried his own manumission papers and that of his wives, all of his life.

## **Vendue**

Vendue is the act of auctioning off the indigent of a town to the lowest bidder, in an attempt to share the expense of caring for these indigent people them in exchange for the person's free labor.

## **Boston**

Boston is the port where At-mun finally left the slave ship. It's and is the city near which he lived with the Copeland's during the first fifteen years he was in America.

## **Woburn**

Woburn is a small community outside of Boston, where Amos lived for another thirty-nine years, . Part of that time, part of which he was a slave owned by the Richardson's. The rest of his time there, and there he was a free man, working for himself.

## **Jaffrey**

Jaffrey is the small town Amos moved his family too in order to provide good tanning service to the people of the area. He and where he eventually came to own a farm of his own there.

## Setting

Amos Fortune's story begins in 1725 in the At-mun-shi village, near the Gold Coast of equatorial Africa, during the spring ritual celebrating the earth's rebirth. Slavers, taking advantage of the one night the At-mun-shi abandon their weapons, capture the strongest men and women of the tribe and sell them to the captain of the *White Falcon*, a slave ship.

From July 1725 to April 1740, Amos lives in Boston as the slave of Celia and Caleb Copeland, Quakers who teach him Christianity and weaving. Amos then spends the next twenty-nine years as the slave of Ichabod Richardson of Woburn, Massachusetts, who teaches him the tanning trade. After he is freed in 1769, Amos stays in Woburn, working as a tanner, until March 1781. He then moves his family to Jaffrey, New Hampshire, and remains there until his death on November 17, 1801.



## Social Sensitivity

In addition to addressing the horrible injustices of slavery, Yates also portrays Amos encountering racism after he is freed. Although Amos Fortune earns respect, particularly in Jaffrey, he and his family suffer economic discrimination and personal degradation because they are black. Some instances of this racism are blatant, as when one of his customers refuses to pay full price for his leather and forces Amos to pick up his money from the floor; others are cloaked in hypocritical custom, such as the Christians' long delay in granting Amos church membership and the refusal to allot the Fortune family a pew; and still others are matters of ignorance, such as the remarks of the schoolchildren to Celyndia and Amos.

Because such racism—blatant and subtle—still exists, readers might experience frustration with Yates's portrayal of Amos as a type of exemplary Uncle Tom figure. White slavers have deprived Amos of his name, his language, his home, his family, and his religion, yet he constantly accepts humiliation and uncritically relies upon white society's God. But Yates's depiction of Amos is meant to point out the hypocrisy of those who claim to embrace Christian and democratic ideals while holding racist attitudes. Amos obviously understands Christian and democratic values more fully than any other character does.

## Literary Qualities

Yates's biographical novel is based on a framework of factual information about Amos Fortune and eighteenth-century New England that she pieced together through diligent research. Her efforts led to the rediscovery of Fortune's papers, which had been lost. She reprints several of these documents in the text of her novel. The inclusion of these items lends authenticity and a flavor of Amos's times to the work.

In style and narrative technique, Yates acknowledges the influence of the Bible, British poet William Blake, and British novelist George Eliot. Yates's meticulous research allows her to portray the various physical settings in the kind of vivid descriptive detail used by Blake and Eliot. She also captures the atmosphere of each setting in lyrical language.

In particular, the portrayals of the Atmun-shi village, Amos's capture, and his night of meditation on Monadnock Mountain incorporate rich language that approaches poetry.

The themes of fortitude and respect for people and nature indicate the biblical influence on Yates's work. One of the strengths of *Amos Fortune: Free Man*, however, is that Yates does not impose these themes on the narrative; rather, she integrates them into Amos's life.

Specific descriptions of Amos Fortune's actions, feelings, and thoughts render him a plausible, well-rounded character. The reader sees Amos's pride in being the chief's son, his bewilderment when his people refuse to speak to him after their capture, his perseverance as he continues to search for his sister, his intelligence as he learns two trades well, his loyalty when he chooses to remain with the Copeland family, his generosity as he assists several helpless women, his resourcefulness when he begins his tanning business in Jaffrey with a minimum of tools, and his emotional dexterity as he deflects racial snubs without apparent bitterness. Generally, Yates sketches other characters only to the extent required to tell the story of Amos's life in an interesting manner. Of the secondary characters, only Violet Fortune is portrayed in any depth.



# Themes

## Freedom

The most important thing to Amos in his lifetime was freedom. Not only did he desire his own freedom, Amos desired freedom for all the people around him, especially those he loved. Knowing this, it is hard to say why Amos rejected his freedom when it was first offered to him. The author suggests except to say that he knew he would need a trade in order to care for himself, and he did not yet feel he had reached that point in his life, and because. Plus, Amos needed to save up money in order to free his sister should he ever find her. It was not until Amos realized that he, and also his sister, had grown had grown old, and so must have his sister, that he began to ask for his own freedom.

Amos also insisted on buying the freedom of the women he loved before he would marry them, so that they would know the joy he had come to experience. To Amos, God had intended for all men to be free. He and he did not understand the white man's refusal to agree to this fact. Freedom was a precious commodity to Amos, something to be cherished, to be and enjoyed. Amos did not believe that a wife could truly enjoy a marriage without the freedom to be a true wife. Amos's own manumission papers and those of his wives would be a treasured possession of Amos's until the day of his death.

## Respect

Respect was another theme that was highly priced by Amos in his lifetime. Amos worked hard for his living, worked hard for and all he owned, and. He felt that he was due the respect that his station in life required. Amos never understood the ignorant views some white people had in regards to free black people. Amos felt that he had paid his service to the kind people who owned him in slavery, and that he had a right to be treated just like any person who had the freedoms afforded in this great country that he had Amos watched grow right before his eyes. However, Amos often suffered the prejudice and injustices many free black men suffered during his life time, not. He wasn't allowed to sit with the white people at church, . He wasn't not allowed membership in his church, until he had been a faithful servant of the church for many years, and not. He wasn't allowed an avenue to recuperate his losses, when a customer refused to pay for his services.

While not receiving the respect Amos deserved during his lifetime, Amos showed the utmost respect to the people around him, whether they deserved it or not. Amos loved life and the people around him, but. However, it was his love of God and the Bible that taught him how to be a good man. Amos kept his head held high and never had a bad word to say about anyone, no matter how they treated him. By living his life this way, Amos eventually won the respect of many people in the town where he lived and the surrounding communities. However, it was his generosity upon his death that won him the lasting respect of many, future generations. that came after him.

## Love

Love sustained Amos during his terrible ordeal of being kidnapped by the slavers. Amos knew he had to be strong for his people, that he had to keep them safe during this that terrible time. Amos could have fought against the slavers, but he knew if he fought, many of his people would be killed. Amos chose to remain a supporter and counselor to his people rather than put them in a position to lose their lives. However, by the time Amos and his people made it to the American colonies, most of the people had forgotten their native language, and Amos could no longer speak to them.

Once in Boston, Amos discovered affection for the Copelands, and a love for the teachings of the Bible that helped him continue on in his new life. If not for the Bible, Amos might not have found meaning in his new life. His and his future might have been tainted by the anger he saw in his fellow slaves. However, it was not only this newfound religion that kept Amos going. Amos still remembered the little sister he left behind. His and his love for her spurred him on to continue searching for her in order to purchase her freedom, when she came to this the new world.

When Amos finally realized that he would never see his sister again, he transferred the love and hope he had for her to the other women in his life. First initially, there was Lily, the first love of his life. Amos worked long and hard to free Lily from the bonds of slavery and make her his wife. Amos was saddened by her death, but happy that she died a free woman. Amos's second wife again passed away during the first year of their marriage. However, she also died a free woman. Amos's wanted all the women he loved to know freedom before their deaths, including the poor indigent girl he took in when he realized her life would be short. It was love for freedom and love for the women in his life that spurred motivated Amos on and helped him in his determination to make sure they all had freedom, at least for a little while.





## Themes/Characters

When Amos first arrives in America, Caleb Copeland, a Quaker weaver, impulsively buys him at the Boston slave market. Caleb and his wife Celia oppose slavery and several times offer Amos his freedom. The Copeland children, especially Roxanna, help Amos overcome his shyness, and he becomes a part of their family. When Caleb Copeland dies, financial considerations force his family to sell Amos to Ichabod Richardson, a tanner. The Richardsons, too, treat Amos relatively well, and Ichabod Richardson eventually promises him freedom in exchange for payments into a trust fund set up for Mrs. Richardson.

When Richardson dies, his wife signs a quitclaim, freeing Amos from the necessity of further payments, and offers him the chance to purchase the tanning business. In Jaffrey, New Hampshire, the Reverend Laban Ainsworth befriends Amos and welcomes the Fortune family to the community, renting them an acre of land for a tannery and organizing the neighbors to build a house for the family. Amos chooses the Reverend Ainsworth to write his epitaph.

Amos's first two marriages result from his desire to help women who remind him of his crippled sister, Ath-mun.

Amos works to buy and marry first Lily, the sickly slave of Jonathan Twombly, and then Lydia, a crippled seamstress and Josiah Bowers's slave. Each woman dies about a year after marrying Amos, but he hopes that freeing them will result in a sort of cosmic balance of kindness toward Ath-mun, if she needs it.

Amos's third wife, Violet, is younger and stronger than the other two. On November 9, 1779, Amos buys Violet and her daughter, Celyndia, from James Baldwin. Violet helps with the tanning business, and both she and Celyndia become skilled weavers. Amos gradually teaches them the meaning of freedom, and eventually Violet uses that freedom to make him reconsider his decision to use their life's savings to buy a home for Lois Burdoo, a widow whose family has remained poor despite the town's frequent assistance. After a sort of consultation with Monadnock Mountain, Amos acknowledges Violet's superior wisdom in this instance and uses the money to buy land and ensure his own family's financial security.

Although there are several free black people in the various towns where Amos lives, Yates depicts only the Burdoo family in any detail. They serve primarily as a contrast to Amos and his family.

Moses and Lois Burdoo lack the perseverance and thrift that characterize Amos and Violet. Even before Moses's death, the Burdoos are poorly clothed and fed, and after his death the town must assist the family. Finally the two oldest children, Polly and Moses, are included in the annual auction in which the town pays the lowest bid for a year's food and clothing, and the bidder is entitled to the individual's work for that year. Amos offers a ridiculously low bid so that Polly will have a year's freedom with the Fortune



family, and Moses ends up indentured to Joseph Stewart, a fair man but a stern disciplinarian. Amos hires the younger son, Philip, to help in the tannery.

Throughout *Amos Fortune: Free Man*, Yates develops the theme of respect for nature as exemplified by the At-mun-shi way of life. The villagers fight only to remain free and kill only for food, burning the entrails to make amends to the spirit of the prey. Each spring they temporarily discard their weapons to celebrate the earth's rebirth. Amos retains their gesture of reverently kissing the ground, long after he has forgotten all At-mun-shi words except his own name, At-mun. Likewise, his affection for Monadnock Mountain, which looms over Jaffrey, and his ability to predict the weather reflect his continued kinship with nature.

The book's foremost theme is the importance of individual freedom. The son of a chief, Amos is a prince until his abduction. He understands that his role as a prince is to serve his people, not to rule their lives. He values his own freedom and that of others. Much later, Amos refuses to accept manumission (freedom) papers until he possessed sufficient skills to guarantee his economic independence as well. Even before he is free, he saves his money to buy the freedom of his sister Ath-mun—should she ever turn up on a slave ship in the Boston harbor—and then of women who remind him of her. In addition, Amos considers poverty and disgrace another kind of slavery, so he takes in a free black girl, Polly Burdoo, when her family cannot afford to keep her.

Despite his good works and his skill as a tanner, Amos remains humble. He remembers that he was a prince in Africa, but after living in submission as a slave for forty-five years and converting to the Christianity of his white masters, he learns to view God as his ruler. He always holds his head high, exhibiting self-respect, and he responds nonviolently to racial slights. He takes great pride in his craftsmanship and remains sensitive to the feelings of others. As a result, Amos wins the respect and trust of everyone he encounters. Of all the characters in the novel, he understands most fully how to live by Christian and democratic ideals.

Through Amos's nobility of character, Yates develops the themes of responsibility, self-respect, and concern for nature and individuals. Resourceful and courageous, he approaches even the most mundane task with enthusiasm and creativity. Yates explores the more complex aspects of his personality through extensive details about his hopes, fears, frustration, and mistakes.

Amos emerges as a well-developed and believable character.



# Style

## Point of View

The point of view of the biography, *Amos Fortune: Free Man* is omniscient third person. The book is told from Amos's point of view with minor deviations in which the author offers information that the reader might not have known otherwise, and to show certain situations from another character's point of view.

While the majority of the novel is told, as opposed to drawn in scenes to show the reader what the writer wants to tell them, there are some scenes in which the writer has strayed into novel territory by describing scenes that she could only have imagined. In this way, the writer moves into Amos's head and imagines his emotional reactions to the situations of his real life. Not only this, but the writer also strays into the emotional states of the people around Amos, most notably his wife, Violet. By choosing to tell the novel this way, the writer shows history to children, who might not otherwise understand the complexity of Amos Fortune's life.

## Setting

The biography begins in a small village in Africa in the middle of a springtime ceremony. The book then moves to Africa's coast and then to Boston. However, the physical location of the book does not impact the story, until the end when Amos takes a huge risk and moves his family, taking a huge risk, to a small community nestled beside Monadnock Mountain. Here, Amos and his family bought property of their own, property that no could take from them. It is at this point that setting becomes important to the story.

Another aspect of the book that could be considered part of the setting is the time and attitudes of the people in the book. The book covers the years 1725-1801, therefore, Amos arrived in a colony that would, within thirty years, become enmeshed in a revolutionary war against England and begun to struggle with the very idea of slavery. During this time period, many people would have liked to have seen slavery abolished. Others and others wanted to see it increased, in order to help spread the development of the new country. This struggle affected free black men in adverse ways, including a developing prejudice and ignorance toward black people. Amos, though he never suffered harsh treatment while in slavery, suffered the ignorance and injustices of a free black man. when mHe was powerless when people refused to pay for his tanning services, he was forced to sit in the back of the church, and his daughter was laughed at and abused at school. It was theseThese injustices that led Amos to leave a small part of his savings to the local school, in order for all children to receive a good education, no matter his or her skin color.

## Language and Meaning

The language of the book is simple English designed to be accessible to young readers. At times, the writer uses words her readers might not be familiar with. In and in these instances, the writer wrote explanations within the text. There are very few African words within the text, because At-mun quickly forgot his own language through the horror of his abduction and transportation to the American colonies. The writer's failure to use complicated words and foreign languages is a plus for the young reader. The book could not be easier to read, therefore, any aged child of any age could enjoy the book and still be able to gain the knowledge and insight the writer intends.

The writer introduces each chapter with a description of what would happen within its pages. Several chapters are headed with dates to show denote passing time. Others are named for scenes that will take place within the chapter. By naming her chapters in this way, Ms. Yates draws the reader's attention to what is important within the pages the reader is about to read.

## Structure

The structure of the biography includes ten descriptively named chapters that cover the life of Amos Fortune from the age of fifteen until his death at ninety-one. There is also an acknowledgement at the beginning of the book that reveals a few of the people who helped Ms. Yates in the research of the biography.

The story of Amos's life is linear with very few flashbacks. There are places in which Ms. Yates jumps over whole years, sometimes decades, of Amos's life. This keeps in order to keep the story short and concise. Ms. Yates also creates scenes and situations that she has devised through her research and her imagination that give almost a novel- like quality to Amos's life. This makes in order to make the book more entertaining for her chosen intended audience.



## Quotes

"She leaned against him, hoping to hide the deformed leg that--but for her father's love--would have caused her to have been drowned as an infant. Only the sacrifice of the imperfect to the God of Life could assure protection for the perfect." Africa 1725, pg. 5

"One of the white men raised his arm and a hundred muskets blazed into the night. The dancing people stopped and looked skyward. Then they fell to their knees, bewildered, fearful only of one thing that they had offended the Spirit of the Night." Africa 1725, pg. 9

"He was still a prince, though chains bound him, and she was a princess. Neither one could escape the work they had been born to do." Africa 1725, pg. 13

"At-mun tried to hold together those of his people with him in the pit. But as the days passed they seemed less and less able to respond to him and eyes that had once looked at him with reverence looked at him in a daze, then looked away." The Middle Passage, pg. 22

"At-mun found that as the days and weeks went by he could recall less and less of his early life. But there were two things that he felt he must burn forever upon his memory--the face of his sister, so he would know her when they met again, and his birthright."

The Middle Passage, pg. 27

"Amos knew many a slave who had been freed, given his article of manumission by a grateful master in return for years of faithful service, and given the tools of a trade so he might set himself up and be on the way to a self-respecting life. But Amos had deep within him the inheritance of the At-mun-shi, of looking up to someone older and wiser as a protector."

Boston 1725-1740, pg. 47

"Amos' friends used to call him Mr. Fortunatus because he had had good fortune in being well treated. And Amos responded readily to the name. His friends could use it if they liked, he thought, for they were not apt ever to see his back bearing the marks still of the beatings he had had in the early days." Boston 1725-1740, pg. 49

"He had had slaves before and he prided himself on knowing how to treat them: teach them a trade through the week, make Christians of them on Sunday, pay them--not what he would a white man but what he deemed a just consideration for their service, and give them their freedom before they became too old to enjoy it." Woburn 1740-1779, pg. 53

"It was a strange thing to wake up on that morning of the ninth of May and know that he was a free man. Amos took the paper out of his pocket and read it again to assure himself, then he returned it to his pocket. It was a paper that he would carry on his person until the day of his death." Woburn 1740-1779, pgs. 67-68



"Lily died within the year but Amos had the satisfaction of knowing that she died free."

Woburn 1740-1779, pg. 73

"Amos had no other thought than to pay the full price. He would not bargain over human flesh nor was it for him to question Mr. Bowers' decision." Woburn 1740-1779, pg. 79

"I wanted her to die free. I knew she didn't have long when I bid on her, but she's had almost a year of freedom."

'She wasn't ever a slave,' Violet reminded him. 'She was born free.'

He shook his head. 'She wasn't free when she was so poor.'" Auctioned for Freedom, pg. 161

"Hate could do that to a man, Amos thought, consume him and leave him smoldering. But he was a free man, and free at a great cost, and he would not put himself in bondage again."

Evergreen Years 1794-1801



## Topics for Discussion

1. Why do At-mun and the At-mun-shi fail to fight or attempt to escape while the slavers transport them to the African coast? What might have happened if they had tried to escape?

2. Why does Amos forget the At-munshi language?

3. Why does Amos refuse the manumission offered by Caleb Copeland? How might his life have been different if he had been freed earlier?

4. Is Amos's decision to buy Lily and Lydia merely a sentimental gesture?

Does he waste his money?

5. Why does Amos feel a special kinship with Monadnock Mountain? What advantages does he gain from his closeness to nature in general and the mountain in particular?

6. Which of his own principles does Amos overlook when he considers spending his savings to buy a house for Lois Burdoo? Is Violet right in opposing him?

7. Is the auction system a good way for the community to assist the poor? What are the advantages and disadvantages of this system?

8. Why does Amos leave money to provide a silver communion set for the church and extra funds for the school?

How does this choice reflect the primary values in his life?



## Essay Topics

Think about the themes of the biography. Why do you suppose these things, love, respect, and freedom, are so important? Do you think they would still be important to Amos, if he had not been a slave?

Do you think the book would have been as easy to read if it had been more of a straightforward non-fiction narration? Do you think the writer placing herself into the mind of Amos and Violet was appropriate to the genre? What if she had written it in another style? Would you have felt the same way about Amos?

Discuss slavery in the Southern states, as compared to slavery in the Eastern states. Is there a difference in the way the slaves were treated? Does this difference have anything to do with the time period? Or is it the differences in the attitudes of the people who were slave owners?

Why do you suppose Amos refused his freedom the first fifteen years of his time in slavery? Do you think it has anything to do with the family with whom he lived? Did it have anything to do with his search for his sister? Did it have anything to do with fear?

Do you think Mrs. Copeland should have sold Amos after her husband died? Did Mrs. Copeland have the right to sell Amos? Should she have given him his freedom?

Why did Amos buy the freedom of all his wives before he would marry them? Do you think he should have married them before he could buy them and buy them later? Why was it so important to Amos that his wives be free when they died?

Do you think Violet had the right to take Amos's money and hide it in the woods? Was she expressing the freedom he had bought for her, or was she attempting to take his freedom to choose how to spend his own money? Did Amos do the right thing in the end?

Why did Amos bid on Polly at the vendue? Was bidding on Polly like buying a slave? Was Polly a slave? Was Polly truly free when she died?



# Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Read another biography of a slave, such as Ann Perry's Harriet Tubman.

How does this biographer's approach differ from Yates's? How is it similar?

Compare and contrast the authors' attitudes toward slavery.

2. Amos is first purchased by Caleb Copeland, a Quaker. The Quakers were active in the abolitionist movement from its beginnings. Using library reference sources, explain methods Quakers used to oppose slavery or describe the efforts of one particular Quaker in the abolitionist movement.

3. Slavery in eighteenth-century New England differed from slavery in the nineteenth-century South. Consult accounts by a former slave, such as Frederick Douglass (*Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, 1845) or Booker T. Washington (*Up from Slavery*, 1901), and compare his attitudes and experiences with those of Amos Fortune.

4. Amos becomes a tanner. Today that process is much more mechanized.

Using library reference sources, describe how leather is tanned today.

How does that process differ from the techniques Amos used?

5. Amos regrets that he is too old to fight when the Revolutionary War begins, but many of his black friends do fight. Research and report on black soldiers who fought in the American Revolution.

## Further Study

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale Research, 1973. Brief biographical sketch, list of works, autobiographical commentary, and bibliography.

Kirkpatrick, D. L., ed. *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*. 2d ed. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983. Brief biographical sketch and analytical comments about major works, along with a list of works.

Kunitz, Stanley J., and Howard Haycraft, eds. *The Junior Book of Authors*. Rev. ed. New York: H. W. Wilson, 1951. Autobiographical sketch with very brief critical comments.

Miller, Bertha Mahony, and Elinor Whitney Field, eds. *Newbery Medal Books: 1922-1955*. Boston: Horn Book, 1955.

Includes a brief description of Amos Fortune, a biographical essay by William McGreal, and Yates's Newbery Medal acceptance paper.



## Related Titles

Yates has written several carefully researched biographical novels of individuals who faced extreme difficulties with unusual courage and concern for the welfare of others. Three such biographies are *Amos Fortune: Free Man*, *David Livingstone*, and *Prudence Crandall, Woman of Courage*. These qualities are also seen in the portrait of her husband, William McGreal in *The Lighted Heart*.

A number of Yates's fictional characters display similar courage. Carolina Putnam of *Carolina's Courage* makes friends with a Native American girl, giving her favorite doll to this girl and so helping to secure the safety of her own family and their entire wagon train. *Patterns on the Wall*, *Mountain Born*, and *A Place for Peter* also feature sensitive characters who demonstrate closeness to nature and a sense of responsibility toward others.



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