

Johnny Tremain Study Guide

Johnny Tremain by Esther Forbes

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Overview

Johnny Tremain enables the reader to envision daily life in the tumultuous days just before the American Revolution. The book deals with a particularly crucial time in Johnny's life, as he makes decisions involving his future and his values. Although Johnny's story takes place over two centuries ago, many of the problems he encounters as he matures remain relevant today. The hero of Johnny Tremain presents a positive model as he experiences hardship and despair but eventually grows into a sensitive and responsible young man.

About the Author

Esther Forbes was born on June 28, 1891, in Westborough, Massachusetts. She attended the University of Wisconsin from 1916 to 1918. Forbes worked as an editor for the Houghton Mifflin publishing company from 1920 until 1926, when she married. The marriage ended in divorce in 1933.

By that time, Forbes had already developed a reputation as a historical novelist. Her first book, *O Genteel Lady* (1926), was about a Boston editor who sacrificed her passion for writing and for the man she loved to marry a stodgy Harvard professor. Her next book, *A Mirror for Witches* (1928), was about Doll Bilby, a woman accused of witchcraft in seventeenth-century Salem. These early books dealt with women and their psychological attractions to "demonic" spirits. Forbes's later books, in which she paid meticulous attention to minor details, revealed her skills as a historian.

Influenced by her mother's work as a historian, Esther Forbes wrote *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* in 1942. A popular and critical success, the book won the Pulitzer Prize in history. *Johnny Tremain* is a briefer, fictionalized version of that history. In the novel, which won the Newbery Medal in 1944, Johnny assists the rebels in Boston as they prepare for the American Revolution. Forbes's last published work, *Rainbow in the Road* (1954), was a description of the unspoiled New England countryside before the advent of the railroad. She died on August 12, 1967, in Worcester, Massachusetts.

Forbes's books have been translated into at least ten languages, and sections of them appear in several anthologies.

Although they offer extraordinary historical details, Forbes's books are most notable for their depictions of personalities and the relationships of characters. The history serves as a backdrop for her characters. In *Johnny Tremain*, the author vividly portrays a young hero who is as realistic and believable to readers today as he was to the first readers of the book over four decades ago.



Plot Summary

Fourteen-year-old orphan Johnny Tremain is smart, cocky, and the best apprentice silversmith in Mr. Lapham's workshop. Unfortunately he knows it and while his skill and efficiency have made him the household's primary breadwinner he bosses the slower apprentices until the pious Mr. Lapham has to lecture him on the sin of pride. The two youngest Lapham daughters usually tease him but on one occasion Johnny does confess his great secret to Cilla the daughter closest to his age. He shows her a silver cup engraved with the crest of the Lytes, rich Boston merchants, and tells her that his dying mother told him that although he is connected to them he should seek them out only in the most extreme emergency.

An order for an ornate sugar bowl from John Hancock the richest man in the colonies could be the making of the workshop but the work falls almost entirely upon Johnny. He seeks advice from the best silversmith in Boston, Paul Revere but Mr. Lapham seems more interested in reading his bible than in meeting the deadline. Running out of time and aided by Mrs. Lapham, Johnny takes the risk of illegally working on Sunday but one of his disgruntled fellow apprentices deliberately gives him a cracked crucible and the spilled silver horribly burns Johnny's hand.

When the bandages are removed Johnny's burned hand is deformed and useless. His status in the shop drops to that of errand boy and the Laphams suggest he find a new trade but his hostile attitude and useless hand combine to keep him from finding work.

Stopping in the print shop of *The Boston Observer* a newspaper advocating resistance to British rule Johnny becomes friends with Rab Silsbee the printer's assistant and nephew. When Johnny appeals to merchant Lyte for aid and presents his cup as proof of kinship he is accused of having stolen it some weeks earlier and is thrown into jail. Rab helps him finding a lawyer and bringing Cilla as witness and Johnny is freed and hired to deliver the *Observer*. He finds himself in the thick of Boston politics with the most important conspirators, The Observers meeting in the very attic where he and Rab sleep.

As tensions mount in Boston Johnny first finds himself taking part in the Boston Tea Party then becoming part of Sam Adams's information network. He learns that his mother was Mr. Lyte's niece but he no longer admires their life and possessions. When the British army moves to capture the colonists' weapons Johnny is part of the network, which is able to send word ahead so that the Minutemen have time to assemble and successfully fight back. Rab is fatally wounded in the fighting and dies. As the book ends a young doctor is preparing to operate on Johnny's hand and Johnny having inherited Rab's gun is preparing to carry on in his place.



Chapter 1 Up And About

Chapter 1 Up And About Summary

It is morning on Boston's Hancock's Wharf. In the home and shop of the silversmith, Mr. Lapham the apprentices are still in bed and Mrs. Lapham the silversmith's widowed daughter-in-law is too stout to climb the ladder. Sixteen-year-old Dove, the oldest apprentice is slow and lazy and Dusty Miller is only eleven. When Mrs. Lapham calls it is fourteen-year-old Johnny Tremain she asks for help. Even though he has only been apprenticed to Mr. Lapham for two years instead of Dove's four, Johnny already is the smartest, the most energetic, and the most skilled at working silver. Because of this he doesn't have to do menial chores like going for water or helping in the kitchen. Dove who is lonely and could use a friend resents and is jealous of Johnny. Dusty Miller worships and admires Johnny but when Johnny gets too bossy even Dusty sometimes sympathizes with Dove.

The Lapham household is not rich but everyone has clean clothes and enough to eat. The apprentices eat with Mr. Lapham, Mrs. Lapham and Mrs. Lapham's four daughters. The oldest two, Madge and Dorcas are solid, cheerful girls though Dorcas tries to be refined. The two youngest girls, Cilla and Isannah tease Johnny constantly and are delighted on the rare occasions when they can get him mad. It is expected that someday Johnny and Cilla will marry and he will inherit the business. Right now though Cilla cares much more about her little sister Isannah who has beautiful, curly blonde hair but is often sickly. Mister Lapham often has the apprentices read from the Bible at breakfast and Cilla is teaching herself to read by following along when Johnny reads. This morning Mr. Lapham has Johnny read passage after passage about the sin of pride and then has him take an oath promising God to be more modest. When the others are gone Cilla and Isannah tease Johnny and are delighted when he gets angry.

Johnny is determined to try to be humble for one day but forgets himself when John Hancock, one of the richest men in Boston, comes to order a replacement sugar bowl for his tea set. Mr. Lapham was once a great silversmith but doesn't bother to remember exactly what people order and may make the wrong object or the right object the wrong size. It is up to Johnny to notice and remember the details of all orders. John Hancock has brought the tea set's creamer, which is much fancier than most of the silver Johnny sees. To his amazement he learns that Mr. Lapham made the set years ago. When Mr. Lapham seems unsure whether he still has the skills to make a replacement Johnny steps in and tells John Hancock that the sugar bowl will be ready in a week's time on Monday morning.

Despite the difficulty of the job and a heat wave, which makes work difficult and swimming tempting Johnny sticks to the task of molding a wax angel for the sugar bowl handle. When he finally does manage to sleep he is wakened by Cilla. The heat has made Isannah sick and Cilla knows her mother won't be sympathetic. Johnny grumbles but carries Isannah down to the end of the wharf where there is an ocean breeze. As



the night passes Johnny tells Cilla a little about his background. Unlike anyone else Cilla knows Johnny has a middle name, Lyte and is related to the rich Boston merchant Jonathon Lyte, whose emblem is an eye rising out of the sea surrounded by rays with the slogan, "Let there be Lyte." Johnny was born in Maine and even when his seamstress mother was very ill she continued to educate him finally bringing him to Boston to apprentice him to a good silversmith. After he carries Isannah home he shows Cilla his secret prized possession - a silver cup with the Lyte emblem on its side. He tells Cilla his mother told him never to lose or sell the cup and only as a last resort to show it to merchant Lyte and ask for help and he swears Cilla to secrecy.

Chapter 1 Up And About Analysis

In addition to setting the scene in colonial Boston and within the household of a silversmith slightly past his prime the opening chapter almost immediately introduces the theme of pride. While Johnny is shown to be an appealing boy, smart, energetic, and kind enough to help Cilla in her attempts to read and take care of her little sister he has flaws as well. His skill makes him impatient with others who are less skilled and his superiority brings out a bullying streak. Rather than befriending the boys he works with he glories in bossing them around and because he is good he can get away with it. But Mr. Lapham's lectures on pride are the first appearance of one of the book's major themes the difference between proper and improper pride. Instead of taking pleasure in his skill and sharing it with Dove and Dusty, Johnny uses his abilities as a way of emphasizing the other boys' weaknesses. Mr. Lapham's bible verses and lecture foreshadow the catastrophe Johnny brings on himself. In addition, the contrast between appearance and reality is first introduced, with the silver of Johnny's cup, the light of the rising sun, the riches of Johnny's possible relatives, and the gold of Isannah's hair all suggesting greater worth than they may actually possess.



Chapter 2 The Pride of Your Power

Chapter 2 The Pride of Your Power Summary

Johnny is unhappy with the angel he has crafted for the sugar bowl's handle. Even though Mr. Lapham assures him it's good enough Johnny seeks out the best silversmith in Boston, Paul Revere for advice. To Johnny's surprise Revere knows his name and after showing him how to solve the problems with his design offers to take him on as apprentice buying out Johnny's remaining time with Mr. Lapham. Though Johnny is amazed and flattered he explains that the Laphams need him too much for him to leave.

Time is running out though and Johnny's bad relations with Dove make things worse. Since no one can work on Sunday, Johnny needs to work as fast as possible on Saturday to finish in time but first Dove tells him with satisfaction that they're out of charcoal for the furnace and then when Johnny sends him to get some Dove takes as long as possible and comes back with charcoal too bad to use. Worst of all Mr. Lapham decides to go back to the tradition of beginning the Sabbath at sundown on Saturday saying God is more important than getting a piece of silver done in time. Worried that they might lose a good customer Mrs. Lapham agrees to give Johnny the five hours he needs to finish by helping him work on Sunday afternoon when Mr. Lapham is at church.

With the girls watching for snoops and constables and Dove and Dusty Miller bribed to help with the promise of being allowed to deliver the finished bowl and collect a tip Mrs. Lapham and Johnny hurry the preparations to cast the sugar bowl. They are so absorbed in preparing the furnace and the mold that when Johnny orders Dove to bring a crucible to melt the silver they don't notice him deliberately choosing an old cracked one. As the crucible collapses and the silver spills Johnny reaches out slips in some spilled wax and brings his hand down on top of the furnace. Not daring to call a doctor, Mrs. Lapham calls in a midwife to treat Johnny's hand. A week later, when they unwrap it, they find that Johnny's thumb has grown fast to the palm of his hand. His future as a silversmith is over.

At first the Laphams are sympathetic but as Johnny's strength returns Mrs. Lapham increasingly uses him for the unskilled chores Dove and Dusty used to do. Finally Mr. Lapham tells Johnny, gently but firmly, that he needs to find a new occupation something he can do with a damaged hand. Johnny understands that he will also need to find a new place to live.

Chapter 2 The Pride of Your Power Analysis

The question of personal responsibility surfaces for the first time in Johnny's downfall. Although Dove gave him the cracked crucible Dove only intended to spoil the sugar bowl and Dusty silently approved. In addition, Johnny's injury was the result of slipping

on the wax that he himself had neglected to clean up. Even Dove's hostility is at least partly Johnny's fault. Dove is clumsy and lonely and Johnny had it in his power to be his friend. Throughout the book it is the small details from a spill of wax to a missed message that will have the largest consequences, both personally and politically.



Chapter 3 An Earth of Brass

Chapter 3 An Earth of Brass Summary

Unwilling to settle for performing only unskilled work Johnny searches for some trade possible for his damaged hand. Often he has nothing to eat but whatever Cilla slips into his pocket. Master after master turns him away, not just because of his hand, but also because of the chip on his shoulder. At home Mrs. Lapham is negotiating with a Mr. Percival Tweedie to be taken on as a partner in the shop (and to marry one of her daughters, of course). When Johnny tells her his insulting opinion of Tweedie, Mrs. Lapham boxes his ear and throws him out. On an impulse Johnny steps into the printing office of the *Boston Observer*. Rab Sillsbee, the printer's assistant shares his lunch with Johnny who feels he has found a friend if not a job.

On Long Wharf he spots his kinsman Jonathan Lyte hurrying to meet the ship bringing his daughter Lydia, the belle of Boston, back from London. Johnny realizes that while he's been turned down by nearly every tradesman in Boston he hasn't approached the merchants. He decides to start at the top and goes to the warehouse of John Hancock. His ability to read and do arithmetic in his head impresses an office clerk and Hancock himself but when he is unable to write well with his damaged hand Hancock scolds him for wasting his time and sends him away; however, a few minutes later, Hancock's slave Jehu finds Johnny and gives him a purse of silver coins. Johnny buys himself a magnificent dinner and immediately regrets having spent so much just on food. He spends the rest of the purse on a new pair of shoes, an illustrated book for Cilla, and limes for Isannah. Their pleasure makes it seem like old times but when Johnny reaches to pick up Isannah she screams and orders him not to touch her with his "dreadful hand." Despairing, Johnny walks all over Boston to wear himself out and ends up in the cemetery where his mother is buried. He falls asleep on her grave. Waking in the night he remembers her instructions that as a last resort he should seek out Jonathon Lyte and he goes back to sleep hopeful.

Chapter 3 An Earth of Brass Analysis

Johnny is exploring Boston and possible livelihoods but he also is entering a world where good and evil are not clear and separate. On the one hand, John Hancock scolds him and doesn't hire him. On the other hand, he does send a purse of money to him. (It is worth noticing though that he does this by way of a slave.) Johnny can't help watching the Lytes but admits that he finds little to admire beyond their money although the beautiful Miss Lydia fascinates him. His pride keeps him from accepting any job, which he could perform and his hand keeps him from the skilled work he feels he deserves. It is worth noting that Johnny's travels in search of work provide the author with the opportunity to paint a wider picture of pre-revolutionary Boston than just the workshop would have allowed providing the reader with a sense of the societal normality which the Stamp Act is going to destroy.



Chapter 4 The Rising Eye

Chapter 4 The Rising Eye Summary

When Johnny visits merchant Lyte he is treated rudely until he mentions and describes his cup. At that Sewall's manner changes and he asks Johnny to visit his house with the cup that night. When he returns to the Laphams to fetch the cup, Mrs. Lapham scolds Johnnie for insulting Mr. Tweedie and orders him to stay away from Cilla. Still when he comes downstairs again, Cilla and Isannah tease him as they used to and Johnny feels better as he goes to tell Rab his good news. While Rab warns Johnny that Lyte is dishonest and powerful, a bad combination, he also lends Johnny a good shirt and jacket to wear that night. At the Lyte's, Johnny sees three cups which match his but is told that a fourth was stolen on August 23. He is arrested on the spot.

Rab visits Johnny in jail wearing around his neck a medal showing a tree. This is the sign that he belongs to the Sons of Liberty, a secret society opposed to the way England is ruling the colonies and since the jailers are also members Johnny is given good treatment. Rab also arranges for the lawyer Josiah Quincy to represent Johnny at his trial. Remembering that he showed Cilla the cup on the morning of July third Johnny realizes he has a witness who can prove he didn't steal it on August 23. Although Rab discovers that Jonathan Lyte has placed a large order with the Laphams and that Mrs. Lapham has said she'll lock Cilla up, if necessary, to keep her from testifying Rab assures Johnny that all will be well.

Johnny is nervous at the trial. Merchant Lyte seems to own the courtroom joking with the judge and there is no sign of Cilla. But exactly at eleven as Johnny is giving his testimony Rab and Cilla arrive. Not only is Cilla convincing but Isannah (who has been coached by Rab) flies into the courtroom and charms the judge echoing Cilla's testimony. Johnny is acquitted and in the street, Miss Lyte having admired her and driven off Isannah kisses Johnny's burned hand.

Chapter 4 The Rising Eye Analysis

After Johnny's symbolic night in the graveyard all his hopes are dead and the rising eye seems to symbolize his new hope of a connection to the Lyte family. By the midpoint of the chapter, with Johnny in jail, Chapter Four's title might seem ironic. But Johnny himself observes that this is not the case. Isannah's cruel comment about his, "dreadful hand" hurts worse than Mr. Lyte's predictable bad treatment and Rab's assistance, even in jail, begins to form a new web of friends for Johnny. The chapter moves from graveyard, to mansion, to jail cell, then reverses to courtroom, to tavern, to open street. The promise implied in the symbolic hope of the cup's rising eye is fulfilled though not in an expected way.



Chapter 5 The Boston Observer

Chapter 5 The Boston Observer Summary

Still out of work Johnny tries to sell his cup to merchant Lyte for twenty pounds but Lyte calls in two of his clerks and instructs them to be witnesses when he says Johnny voluntarily returned the cup to him. He then calls in Captain Bull planning to get him to take Johnny to Guadalupe but as the awkward captain is attempting a bow Johnny sees his chance and bolts from the room. Cutting across lots and through back alleys Johnny makes it safely to the office of the *Boston Observer*. Although Johnny has never ridden and the *Observer's* horse, Goblin has a bad reputation Uncle Lorne hires him on Rab's recommendation.

Rab gives Johnny a few riding lessons and, more importantly, helps Johnny to understand Goblin's fears. Knowing that Goblin is more frightened than he is makes Johnny bold and soon he is fitting into the Lorne household, delivering papers, babysitting, reading their books, and out at the family farm in Lexington even going to dances. He learns that The Observers, a secret committee opposed to English rule often meets in the attic where he and Rab sleep. He also discovers that while Rab usually seems calm and quiet he can show a fierce joy in dancing - and in fighting for the right reason.

Chapter 5 The Boston Observer Analysis

Because the reader is limited to Johnny's point of view it might appear that Chapter Five simply lists the range of Johnny's new jobs and acquaintances from Goblin to the Observers. It is worth noting, however, that one of his most important lessons is never explicitly stated. Rab succeeds in teaching Johnny to ride by getting him to think of the world from Goblin's point of view. Until now, Johnny has existed in the closed self-centered world of a child. His ability to consider the world through the sensibilities of a horse not only makes it possible for him to earn a living and the respect of, among others, the British soldiers it also makes it possible for him to begin to see the point of view of other people around him, which is a key step to beginning to become an adult.



Chapter 6 Salt-Water Tea

Chapter 6 Salt-Water Tea Summary

Johnny and Rab are awakened on a Sunday by Sam Adams knocking on the print-shop door. The first of three English ships carrying tea is entering the harbor and he wants Uncle Lorne to print a flyer calling for a meeting of The Sons of Liberty. The colonies have declared that the tax on the tea is unjust since they have no representatives in the English parliament and so they have forbidden the tea to land. The Observers will meet that night and Johnny notifies each member by pretending to be billing them for their *Boston Observer* subscription. He also meets with Cilla and notices he has been less concerned with keeping up their weekly meetings.

Rab and Johnny are not allowed into the Observer meeting but are called in at the end. After being sworn to secrecy they agree to organize a group of boys and apprentices to meet on December 16 and help destroy the tea on the ships. Johnny is afraid his bad hand will keep him from helping but Rab points out that he has twenty days to practice chopping. Come the 16th he is given the job of getting close to the public meeting and when Sam Adams gives the signal running back to the *Observer* blowing a silver whistle as he goes. He's afraid he's been left behind but Rab has waited and they join the other disguised boys, Paul Revere, and many spontaneous volunteers at the docks. The colonists swear to damage nothing but the tea the ships' crews agree to stay below and the Boston Tea Party begins. During the chopping Johnny notices one boy filling his pockets with tea and recognizes Dove by his hands. Rab tosses him overboard and the colonists clean up and go home-- except for Paul Revere, who rides to New York and Philadelphia to spread the news.

Chapter 6 Salt-Water Tea Analysis

Rather than assemble the Observers and then stop the story to tell us about each the author uses Johnny's round of, "bill collection" a technique which allows the story to keep moving and also permits the reader to see each man in his home environment. While this enables us to observe, for example, that Mr. Molinaux's house is run-down and that he seems to enjoy shouting at the boys stealing his apples, it also provides more important information and foreshadowing. Johnny, for example, standing in Dr. Warren's surgery feels that, "Even a horse boy merely entering that surgery would feel confidence in him and his skill." Although Johnny does not allow Dr. Warren to examine his hand at this point the reader has been prepared for a later encounter.

Johnny's increasing ability to see more than one point of view suggests his growing maturity and permits the reader to consider the complexities of the situation in Boston. The argument could even be made that Johnny is more mature than Sam Adams who is good-naturedly willing to distort the truth to bring about a war, which he sees as necessary. But Johnny begins to realize that no one is completely good or evil. He

hears the sounds of a group of Sons of Liberty beating a single Tory who was brave enough to chase them but the gangs of "Indians" who destroy the English tea promise to damage nothing else, keep their promise, and even sweep up after themselves. It may be symbolic of Johnny's growing flexibility and ability to deal with imperfection that he starts to train his left hand to do the work his right hand used to do.



Chapter 7 The Fiddler's Bill

Chapter 7 The Fiddler's Bill Summary

To Boston's shock England responds to the Tea Party by closing Boston Harbor punishing guilty and loyal alike. Now food can come into the city only over one road and many whose work depends on the port's business begin to go hungry. Boston fills with British soldiers. Nevertheless, Uncle Lorne continues to publish the *Observer*. Men in the country towns are forming militias and drilling and Johnny earns money carrying messages for English soldiers at high fees and, by reading them and keeping his ears open in the stables is able to supply information to the Observers.

Johnny comes home to find Cilla and Rab friendly and laughing together and is surprised to discover that he feels jealous. Cilla explains that Lydia Lyte took a fancy to Isannah and that she and Cilla now live with the Lytes while Dorcas ran off and married Frizel, Jr., as soon as Mr. Tweedie picked her. Rab walks her home and Johnny is suddenly much more interested in their weekly meetings.

After fighting one bully Johnny gets along well with the English stable hands in the barn where Goblin is housed. To his surprise Dove is hired. The English have the right to "commandeer" any horse they want and Lieutenant Stranger takes Goblin out for a ride to see if he will suit Captain Smith. Johnny, helping the washerwoman hang sheets, manages to let one flap and frighten Goblin so that he throws Lieutenant Stranger who is a good sport about it. Johnny, visiting the Laphams learns Madge is in love with a British soldier, Sergeant Gale.

Going to visit Cilla in the Lyte's kitchen Johnny is fetched to the parlor where Lydia and her rich friends are preparing for a costume ball. Shocked by Isannah's skimpy costume Johnny scolds and slaps her amusing rather than irritating Miss Lyte. When he stands up for Cilla though he is told to leave but Bessie the cook lets him know that the Sons of Liberty are brewing trouble for the Lytes at their country house.

Chapter 7 The Fiddler's Bill Analysis

Changes in public life are mirrored by changes in Johnny's private life. He had daydreamed that his relation to the Lytes would enable him to give Cilla gifts. Instead, it is Isannah who has been adopted and Cilla who is treated as a servant. While Johnny is earning respect for his own abilities and is taking a part in trying to form a more just society Isannah has been taken into a world of fashion and parties and has already forgotten her grandfather's principles. Yet even in the kitchen of the Lyte house, where Bessie is in charge, the changes in the outside world have begun to penetrate.



Chapter 8 A World to Come

Chapter 8 A World to Come Summary

The Lytes do go to their country house in Middleton but return to Boston barely ahead of a mob. Mr. Lyte has had a "fit" and his daughter is concerned for him. Cilla gets Johnny to return to Middleton with her to help retrieve the silver she was unable to save. While Cilla packs the silver and cleans up from the mob Johnny finds a family Bible. From it he learns that his grandfather was merchant Lyte's older brother and that Johnny's mother married a Frenchman named LaTour. He refuses to take his own silver cup when Cilla offers it to him recognizing that the house and everything about it belongs to the past. He and Cilla close the shutters and return to Boston.

Rab, desperate for a good gun, is caught trying to buy one from a British soldier. To his disgust, although the middleman is tarred and feathered he is told to, "Go buy a popgun, boy" and sent home. Cilla tells Johnny that Madge ran off and married Sargeant Gale and that her mother, in order to keep him in the business, has married Mr. Tweedie herself. She says that while she likes Rab, Cilla Sillsbee would be a terrible name though Priscilla Tremain would be a good one. The Observers meet for the last time and it becomes clear that they feel war is now inevitable. James Otis, though uninvited, makes a speech, which was sane and eloquent about what is worth fighting for and what is worth dying for.

Chapter 8 A World to Come Analysis

Little by little Johnny's attachment to the Lytes has been decreasing. Here, burning the page from the family Bible, which contains his mother's name, closing the shutters on the house where she played as a girl, Johnny is symbolically closing the eyes of his dead hopes. Johnny's mother played in this house as a child but she is dead. The Lyte's way of life is dead. By refusing to link himself to it, refusing even to take back the cup, which is his by rights he turns his back on the old way of life. It is dawn as he and Cilla leave but the image of death is repeated in the Minute Men Johnny meets on the road who are preparing for the coming battles.



Chapter 9 The Scarlet Deluge

Chapter 9 The Scarlet Deluge Summary

Paul Revere organizes a spy system and soon the smallest details from British conversations, wastebaskets, and orders to servants begin flowing in. Johnny continues to help Dove in the stables and Dove (who claims to be loyal to the English) often passes on information without realizing its value. Lieutenant Stranger frequently rides with Johnny privately and teaches him to jump Goblin but in public remains stiff and aloof. As Johnny is cutting through the English encampment on his way to deliver *The Observer* an officer stops him, finds the papers, and accusing him of treason orders him to be flogged. Helped by the groom, Pumpkin, Johnny escapes. Back at the stable Pumpkin tells Johnny that many of the enlisted Englishmen, himself included, would like to desert. Johnny arranges to trade a disguise and a place to hide and work in exchange for Pumpkin's uniform and gun. Although the disguise disappears and the gun and uniform are left Pumpkin doesn't show up to ride out to the Silsbee's farm and Johnny assumes he found another hiding place...until he sees him being executed for desertion on Boston Common.

Chapter 9 The Scarlet Deluge Analysis

The occupying British forces have seemed reasonable enough but deep divisions exist in their society divisions, which the colonists are already beyond. Johnny can stand up to Miss Lyte, or Mr. Tweedie, or even Mr. Lyte and survive so the class divisions, which cause Lieutenant Stranger to befriend him in private and ignore him in public make no sense to Johnny. Poor Pumpkin is unable to escape to a peaceful life and the reality of death continues to close in on Johnny.



Chapter 10 Disperse Ye Rebels

Chapter 10 Disperse Ye Rebels Summary

April 15, 1775. General Gage orders all light infantry and grenadiers to be taken off duty supposedly to be drilled in, "new evolutions." Many though suspect that this is the beginning of the spring movement to put down the rebellion by confiscating rebel weapons and stores. Rab leaves for Lexington with his new gun. All Observers still in Boston are in danger but Revere is determined to find out where the soldiers are headed and to warn the Minute Men in advance. He plans to cross under cover of darkness to the Charleston shore and wait for the sign. By watching for lanterns in the North Church tower to signal whether the troops are moving by land or by sea he and Billy Dawes will know which way to ride to warn the Minute Men to assemble and be ready. Picking up information from Dove, Johnny is able to help - the British will be moving by water that night headed for Lexington and Concord.

Chapter 10 Disperse Ye Rebels Analysis

By whittling all of her characters to fit their roles and then carefully setting them in place the author is able to integrate fictional characters and historical events so convincingly that it is difficult to remember that those characters are fictional. Johnny's interview with Dove is particularly ingenious in its use of information that a dull stable boy would be liable to know contrasted with the connections a bright boy with the right information could then draw. Thus the reader comes to care about the movements of the historical Captain Smith because of the clue gathering of a fictional boy.



Chapter 11 Yankee Doodle

Chapter 11 Yankee Doodle Summary

Paul Revere gets word to Dr. Warren before the British have information that there has been fighting at Lexington and Dr. Warren and most of the remaining Observers are able to get out of Boston before soldiers come to arrest them. Twelve hundred soldiers on the Common get off to a slow start due to miscommunication between officers. In the end they march off three hours late playing "Yankee Doodle."

All Boston waits for word and around noon rumors that the British have taken a beating begin to circulate. Soldiers begin going from door-to-door to arrest leaders of the rebellion and are furious to find that they are gone. Johnny finds the office of *The Boston Observer* ransacked but Mr. Lorne is well, though frightened, inside the featherbed his wife is pretending to mend. By evening Johnny can stand on Beacon Hill and see the retreating British troops racing for Boston.

At the Lyte house everything is in confusion as the Lytes prepare to take ship for London taking Isannah with them. Cilla and Bessie, however, sit in the kitchen not helping. Good Whigs, they are determined to stay in Boston. They agree to take in Mr. and Mrs. Lorne and let them continue printing the *Observer* from the coach house. Miss Lyte gives Johnny more information on his background, mentions that his mother was her favorite cousin, and leaves forever.

Chapter 11 Yankee Doodle Analysis

Under increasing pressure, appearances begin to change, and real identities, sometimes surprising ones, appear. The British, so pleasant when they had the upper hand, begin behaving roughly as it appears they may not only have been defeated but also humiliated. Mr. Lorne, on the other hand, is constantly frightened but continues to do what he sees as his duty publishing the *Observer*. Isannah, forced to choose between the reality of Cilla's love and the glittering surface of life with Miss Lyte, chooses surface. Miss Lyte herself, while revealing Johnny's heritage and her own rudeness, does reveal a genuine affection for her father. Finally, by changing her relationship with Johnny from that of the glamorous Lydia Lyte to Aunt Lydia she snaps the ties of his crush on her freeing him for more genuine affections.



Chapter 12 A Man Can Stand Up

Chapter 12 A Man Can Stand Up Summary

Disguised as a British private in Pumpkin's uniform Johnny makes his way to the river looking for a boat to take him to the Charleston shore to search for Dr. Warren and Rab. He sees boatloads of wounded enlisted men thrown ashore like cordwood while the officers are cared for. He nearly betrays himself by offering to help Lieutenant Stranger but catches himself in time. Once across the river he finds a tavern keeper who is also a Son of Liberty and for the first time finds out what happened that day.

The British reached Concord, fought a skirmish at North Bridge, destroyed such munitions as hadn't been hidden, and waited for reinforcements. But when noon came without Percy's reinforcements and more and more Minute Men poured in Colonel Smith decided to try to make it back to Boston. All along the way the Minutemen shot at them from behind barns, trees, stone walls, and by the time they met their reinforcements in Lexington it was all they could do to cover the retreat to Boston.

Everyone seems to have seen Dr. Warren but no one knows where he is and no one seems to know what has happened to Rab at all. Johnny sees signs of fighting everywhere as he searches. Finally, he finds Dr. Warren in Lexington with his head bandaged from a bullet, which grazed his scalp. He warns Johnny that Rab has been seriously injured and then takes him inside to see him. Sitting up in a chair Rab doesn't look as bad as Johnny had feared but a trickle of blood keeps oozing from the corner of his mouth. After giving Johnny his gun and telling him he never even got to fire it Rab asks him to go out to the Silsbee farm and see how his grandfather is doing. Everything at the farm seems undamaged but no one is there but the calves, dogs, and housecats. After feeding the animals Johnny walks back to Lexington and is not surprised to learn that Rab has died. Too stunned to feel much Johnny is examining Rab's gun when Dr. Warren for the first time gets a good look at his hand. He tells Johnny that only scar tissue is immobilizing his thumb and that by operating he can give Johnny back much of the use of his hand, maybe not enough to be a silversmith but enough to shoot a gun. As Johnny waits for Dr. Warren to ready his instruments he looks out and sees a makeshift group of farmer-soldiers, tired but determined, with Rab's grandfather in command on their way to the siege of Boston.

Chapter 12 A Man Can Stand Up Analysis

If Johnny's closing up of the Lyte's house at Middleton symbolized death - the death of a way of life and of his desire to be part of the family - this final chapter, for all its death and destruction, is rich with symbols of a new beginning. It is April and trees are leafing out. While the Silsbee homestead is temporarily deserted animals roam that Eden. Even the defeated Colonel Smith's sensible horse, Sandy although stuck in a clay pit is patiently being rescued. Most important Johnny's right hand will be repaired. Like the

new nation being formed it may not be perfect and there may be some pain but there is hope.



Characters

Johnny Tremain

A fourteen-year-old orphan apprenticed as a silversmith when we first meet him, Johnny is skilled and intelligent but also arrogant and cocky. When an injury to his hand destroys his future as a silversmith it also shakes his sense of identity. Instead of being the head apprentice, adored, and respected he finds himself out of work and despised. Instead of being welcomed as a long-lost member of the Lyte family he finds himself thrown into jail. On the brink of changing into a thief and vagabond he is saved by his association with Rab Silsbee and through him becomes acquainted with the Sons of Liberty and Boston's revolutionary movement.

Over a period of two years Johnny changes and grows. In the void left by the future he'd planned and the past he thought he'd come from other values develop. Rab's quiet example, the excitement of espionage and danger, and new skills like riding begin to change Johnny from a self-centered child into a man capable of complex emotion and action. He simultaneously cherishes a crush on the glamorous Lydia Lyte and is surprised by the changes in his feelings for Priscilla Latham whom he has known for years. His feelings about the unappealing Dove move from contempt for his slowness to hatred for his role in ruining Johnny's hand and finally to a certain pity.

It is his friendship with Rab Silsbee though, which does the most to save Johnny and introduce him to a larger world. Starting from rock bottom, deprived by his accident of the status due a skilled silversmith Johnny is in danger of turning to a life of crime. Instead, through Rab's quiet intervention Johnny finds, if not a trade, at least employment. He is able to read the Lornes' books and hear completely new political ideas debated. Best of all for a bold young man fond of action he is able to play a role in the changes taking place in Boston. His intelligence and speed make it possible for him to become valued as both a messenger and a spy and he is able to be of use to the cause he has come to believe in. Despite starting as an arrogant young know-it-all and then changing for the worse into a maimed and self-pitying ne'er-do-well, Johnny eventually becomes a young man able to value others besides himself and able to decide wisely which people are worth valuing.

Rab Silsbee

Rab Silsbee is a printer's assistant and member of The Sons of Liberty. Calm and self-contained to the point of seeming lazy, Rab is keenly observant and able to get a great deal done without fuss. His admiration for Cilla shocks Johnny into noticing how pretty she has become. To Johnny's surprise Rab is a good fighter and enjoys it just as he is a good dancer and enjoys it. Johnny admires Rab in all things but never feels he completely understands him. Still, Rab rescues Johnny from jail and unemployment, teaches him to ride, and introduces him into the revolution. Rab's death gives Johnny



the courage to face the operation, which may restore some use to his hand and enable him to play a larger role in the coming revolution.

Although Rab is the major force in Johnny's life after the accident and the person Johnny most admires his self-containment leaves him at least partly a mystery to Johnny and, therefore, to the reader. Rab is more an influence than an instructor and Johnny comes to see the value of imitating some of Rab's qualities, his tendency to think before speaking, his calm in the midst of excitement, and above all his courage in the face of danger.

Mr. Lapham

Mr. Lapham is an elderly silversmith to whom Johnny is apprenticed. A pious man his days as a master silversmith are behind him and he prefers to spend his days reading his bible. He is more concerned for the spiritual lives of his family and apprentices than for their financial well-being.

Mrs. Lapham

Mr. Lapham's stout daughter-in-law who runs the house and the apprentices is Mrs. Lapham. She is a hard worker but must find a way for the silver shop to be successful if her, "fatherless daughters" are to survive. When Johnny is injured she locates a Mr. Tweedie and works hard to get him to sign on as a partner hoping he will marry one of her older daughters. When both daughters run off and get married Mrs. Lapham herself marries Mr. Tweedie to be sure of keeping him in the business.

Madge

Madge is 18-years-old, hearty and cheerful. Runs away and marries an English soldier, Sergeant Gale, when faced with marrying Mr. Tweedie.

Dorcas

Dorcas is 16-years-old and tries to act refined. Runs away and marries Fizzle Jr. when faced with marrying Mr. Tweedie.

Cilla

Cilla is supposed to marry Johnny, protects and cares for her little sister. Rab Silsbee finds her attractive, which excites Johnny's jealousy. She herself is capable of great loyalty and affection, both to her sister Isannah and to Johnny but when the book ends she seems to have gained some wisdom in how best to manage these affections.



Isannah

Isannah is a beautiful girl, with pale-blond curls, but she is sickly and too fond of attention. She is adopted by Lydia Lyte and is going to be taken to London to train as an actress.

Dove

Dove is a 16-year-old apprentice, heavy and slow, who is jealous of Johnny. No one even remembers his first name. After he causes the accident that ruins Johnny's hand he is briefly top apprentice but after Mr. Lapham dies Mr. Tweedie fires Dove who takes a job as a stableboy for the British soldiers. Although he swears allegiance to England and points out Johnny as a rebel, Dove is unpopular in the stables too and only Johnny's growing kindness makes his life bearable. He would never deliberately help the rebels but simply by chatting with him Johnny is able to piece together a variety of small facts into useful information.

Dusty Miller

Dusty is an 11-year-old apprentice, who admires Johnny but sympathizes with Dove.

Percival Tweedie

Percival Tweedie is brought in by Mrs. Lapham to replace Johnnie after the accident. He is a meek, nervous man whom Johnny regards with envy and scorn. When none of her daughters will marry him and secure the future of the business Mrs. Lapham marries him herself.

John Hancock

The richest man in New England and a member of the Observer committee, Hancock is a generous man tipping apprentices handsomely. Even when he is irritated with Johnny for wasting his time within minutes he has sent him a purse of money wishing him well. He is prone to terrible headaches but is one of the founders of The Observers and is willing to risk losing his money and property in the cause of freedom.

Jonathon Lyte

Jonathon is a rich local merchant and, it turns out, the uncle of Johnny's mother. Bad tempered, ill, and greedy he has a reputation for trying to appear to be a good patriot while making money dealing with the British. A "fit" when a mob attacks his house renders him a chronic invalid and he tells Johnny (through his daughter Lydia) that he



regrets having prosecuted him for theft and acknowledges that Johnny is a member of the Lyte family.

Lydia

Jonathon Lyte's daughter, the belle of Boston, Lydia is beautiful and cold, she is strangely attracted to Isannah and adopts her almost as a pet. Frustrated in her own desire to be an actress she plans to have Isannah trained for the London stage. Her one redeeming trait is her fierce affection for her father. Otherwise, she is class-conscious, vain, and unsympathetic. Even the woman who raised her, Bessie the cook has no affection for her. Johnny is attracted by her beauty and scorn but by the end of the book he has learned to look beneath her pretty surface to the marred individual within.

Mrs. Bessie

Mrs. Bessie is the cook for the Lytes. A supporter of the Sons of Liberty, she knows in advance that the Lytes will be attacked at their summer house in Middleton. Although she approves at the last minute she gives them enough warning for them to escape if only barely. As the Lytes leave for London, Bessie is being left in charge of their house since the mobs are less likely to attack with a Whig in residence. She in turn is glad to let the hunted Lornes move into the carriage house and continue printing the *Boston Observer* from there. Mrs. Bessie's low opinion of Lydia Lyte is significant since she has cared for the motherless girl from childhood.

Jennifer Lorne

Jennifer is Rab's aunt. A plump and affectionate woman who bravely hides her husband from a search party of British soldiers she takes care of Rab and Johnny and gives Johnny some of the mothering he so deeply misses.

Uncle/ Mr. Lorne

Mr. Lorne is the publisher of the *Boston Observer* married to Rab's aunt. Although Mr. Lorne is a fearful man he continues to publish the *Boston Observer* thereby risking British reprisals.

Lieutenant Stranger

Teaches Johnny to jump on horseback. Friendly in private, maintains class distinctions in

public.



Pumpkin

Private in the English army, horse groomer. Pumpkin does not wish to remain in the army. A farmer at heart he prefers the smell of manure to gunpowder. Johnny helps him escape in exchange for his gun but Pumpkin is caught and executed.



Objects/Places

The Silver Cup

One of a set of five, each silver cup is engraved with the Lyte crest, an eye rising up from the sea, with the motto "Let there be Lyte." Johnny's dying mother gave him one and it proves his connection to the Lyte family but Mr. Lyte has him falsely arrested for theft.

The Boston Observer

This is the newspaper advocating freedom from British rule. Johnny is able to find work delivering the *Observer* and through his time there acquires new friends, an involvement in the coming revolution, and a new set of values.

The Afric Queen

The Afric Queen is an inn with wonderful food and an excellent stable where many of the British officers keep their horses. Since that is where Goblin is stabled Johnny spends much of his time there and unlike Dove gets along well with the stable boys and officers.

The Attic

Johnny and Rab sleep in the attic of the Boston Observer, which is full of chairs. These chairs are used by the members of the Observers a secret society of Boston's most prominent men opposed to British rule.

Goblin

A beautiful but skittish horse, Goblin has had four owners in a single year. Rab who bought him for nearly nothing teaches Johnny to ride Goblin by instructing him about Goblin's fears. Learning to ride Goblin gives Johnny a job and his first practice in seeing the world from someone else's point of view. In learning to make use of Goblin despite his flaws Johnny also learns to make use of his injured hand and his new life.

Lexington

Lexington is the site of Rab's grandfather's farm, as well as the first battle of the American Revolution.



Rab's Gun

After Rab is arrested trying to buy a British soldier's gun Johnny trades Private Pumpkin a 'farmer disguise' and a way to get out of town in exchange for his gun and uniform. Rab customizes the gun but is wounded in the first shots at Lexington and never gets to shoot it. He leaves it to Johnny.

The Somerset

A large British ship, a man o'war capable of using its guns to attack or defend objects on land. Paul Revere must manage to row past it unobserved in order to reach his horse and notify the Minute Men about the approaching British troops.

Boston Common

Boston Common is a large grassy area where Boston residents can graze their animals and where soldiers can form ranks.

North Church

British soldiers are guarding all routes out of Boston so in order to signal that the British troops were moving by water Robert Newman hung two lanterns in the North Church tower the now legendary, "one if by land and two if by sea."

Setting

The novel begins in Boston in 1773, the year of the Boston Tea Party. At the beginning of the story, Johnny is serving as an apprentice to a silversmith, and many of the early chapters describe the smith's home and shop. When Johnny is forced to seek work elsewhere, the setting changes to Hancock's Wharf and some of the businesses located there.

After Johnny becomes a rider for the Boston Observer newspaper, the narrative follows him to the homes of some of Boston's most affluent and prominent citizens. The story ends after the 1775 Battle of Lexington, which marked the beginning of the American Revolution.

Social Sensitivity

Since Johnny Tremain concerns the Revolutionary War, it necessarily deals with death. The story focuses on events leading up to the war, but conflicts between the Tories and the rebels sometimes turn violent. One Tory falls victim to the revolutionaries and is tarred and feathered. Later, rumors circulate that the Lyte family will be run out of Boston on rails. But through most of the book, Johnny never witnesses any violence; he just hears stories about it.

By the end of the story, the violence is no longer detached and distant.

Pumpkin, a pleasant young British recruit whose only desire is to have his own farm, falls victim to the firing squad. Johnny, intruding on this scene, is profoundly affected by the death and begins to doubt his own courage. Then, Rab is seriously wounded. Although he does not die in the story, the wound is clearly fatal. Forbes presents the violence inherent in the story with sensitivity. She does not depict war as glamorous and exciting but as dangerous and deadly.

Literary Qualities

Johnny Tremain combines believable characters, historical events, drama, humor, and sharp images to create an appealing and meaningful novel. Innumerable descriptive details convey a strong sense of life in eighteenth-century Boston. These details lend realism to the story as Forbes depicts characters performing daily tasks such as fetching water and feeding livestock.

By portraying everyday life in the colonies, Forbes shows how history affects ordinary people and how, likewise, these people's valiant efforts can change history. Forbes's technique of basing her lively fictional narrative on carefully researched historical facts lends authenticity to the story.

Vivid images invigorate the narrative.

For instance, the description of British soldiers on the street following the Battle of Lexington conveys how overwhelmed Johnny is by the escalating violence: "The narrow course of Tremont Street was filled to the brim and overflowing with the waiting scarlet-coated men.

Like a river of blood." One of the most striking symbols appears when Johnny witnesses the activities of the firing squad and is terrified by the "round eye of death at the end of a musket."

The scene where Johnny spends some of his silver coins on a feast reveals Forbes's use of authentic detail, apt metaphors, and humor. She describes Johnny's meal, typical colonial Boston fare, in detail: five squabs, pastries, a wreath of jellied eels, a "tipsy parson— white bread tied into little knots, buttered and baked," and a pot each of coffee and chocolate. Before Johnny eats, Forbes uses the metaphor of a gnawing kitten in his stomach to describe Johnny's hunger pangs. Once he has overfilled his stomach, Forbes adds a humorous twist to the kitten metaphor: "The kitten was no longer gnawing inside him, trying to get out. In fact, it was no longer a kitten. 'I feel as if I had swallowed a Newfoundland dog and it died on me.'"



Themes

Pride

In the very first chapter Mr. Lapham establishes a major theme when he has Johnny read Bible verse after Bible verse about the sin of pride. The subject of proper and improper pride runs throughout Johnny Tremain. On the one hand there is, "the pride of your power" an arrogance which is apparent in things as small as Johnny's pleasure in using his superior status to boss and belittle his fellow apprentices and as large as the British army's attitude toward the colonists. The entire Lyte family demonstrate their enormous pride by engraving everything they own, from carriages and cups to gloves and walking sticks with the family crest, in contrast with the even richer John Hancock, whose attention is not concentrated on his own magnificence but on the needs of others. Even when the skill which gave rise to his pride is destroyed Johnny's pride, in its most destructive form, remains, keeping him from applying for the manual labor he might still be able to do.

On the other hand, there is proper pride in the form of self-respect, which mirrors the opposite examples of improper pride at every turn. Paul Revere and Johnny form a bond as they consider the design of a handle for the sugar bowl because each recognizes the pride in workmanship, which drives them to do the job properly even after Mr. Lapham has said it is good enough. A few hotheads object to the Stamp Act and manage to mobilize local opinion as far as the Boston Tea Party but the rest of the colonies are uninterested. Still, when England takes the unjust step of closing Boston harbor proper pride unites the colonies and they are soon sending food overland to Boston. In punishing small crimes the British begin to use tar and feathers a humiliating punishment, which strikes at a person's pride and dignity.

The pride which causes Lydia Lyte to treat Johnny scornfully, even as she admits that her father has lied and cheated him of his birthright, bears no resemblance to the pride at the heart of James Otis's moving speech to the Observers in which he imagines them beginning a movement for freedom not just for Englishmen but for the enslaved and oppressed around the world. The motive for this fight will not be money or power but the self-respect and pride to which each person has the right, "that a man can stand up."

Liberty

It is not surprising that the theme of liberty should run throughout a book set at the dawn of the American Revolution. It is interesting though that the advantages and disadvantages of liberty should be so thoroughly treated. The protagonist is an apprentice and, as is made clear early on, apprentices are some of the least free people on earth. Their parents have paid a fee and for seven years the boys belong to their master. Their very clothes are not their own. If the master chooses to scold them, beat them, starve them, it is his right. His one obligation is to teach them his trade in seven



years. Johnny dreams of the freedom to stroll the streets, swim when he wants to, and decide what to do next.

Only after his accident does Johnny discover the disadvantages of liberty and the responsibilities, which suddenly land on him. He has been worked but he has been taken care of. Now he is free and on his own and initially this makes his life much harder. The parallels with the colonies are clear. For most of the book Boston is divided between the impulse toward independence and the impulse to remain a British colony with no need to govern itself but with no say either in how it is governed. As tensions rise the stakes become clearer. Even at the end of the book it is apparent that not only will freedom come at a cost but it will also continue to require great effort and attention. It is worth noting that many of the most enthusiastic assistants to the revolutionaries are slaves and women despite the fact that their own liberty will be much less than that of the men they are helping.

Nevertheless, from Madge and Dorcas Lapham insisting on choosing their own husbands to the Observers risking their lives property and honor to gain independence from English rule the impulse to liberty runs through every level of the plot. Arguably, little Isannah earns the harshest judgment for having no mind of her own, no impulse toward liberty, only a desire to be noticed and admired. Better even to be Dove swearing allegiance to the British but rebelling against them in his secret heart.

The Worth of the Individual

One of the subtler threads running throughout *Johnny Tremain* is the theme of the worth of the individual. When we think of the revolution we tend to think of the Founding Fathers; of colorful and famous individuals like Sam Adams and Paul Revere. But this was always a revolution to insure the rights not just of prominent men and property holders but also of every man no matter how powerless. Even though Johnny is a likable character in the opening scenes, full of confidence and wit, his tendency to treat Dove with contempt clashes with our notions of an admirable protagonist. By the same token the reader judges the Lytes and John Hancock in part by the difference in how they treat people. Hancock rewards even apprentices and, in Johnny's case, apparent beggars. Mr. Lyte is genial with judges and important merchants and his daughter sparkles with officers and rich young men but they both treat tradesmen with contempt. Miss Lyte assumes she can take Isannah from her mother because she fancies her and Mr. Lyte seems to regard Johnny's borrowed clothing as virtual proof of his guilt.

Of course the notion of individual worth has roots in the English common law we have inherited. Standing on Boston Common looking at the English flag Johnny is reminded of the Magna Carta and of repeated English struggles to insure individual rights. But the class system which developed in England makes it difficult for officers such as Lieutenant Stranger to treat a "stableboy" like Johnny with the same manners in private as in public even though he recognizes the young man's strengths as a horseman.



As a messenger for Paul Revere's spy network Johnny comes to recognize the worth of the role that each person plays from barmaids to wealthy merchants. And finally, there is Lexington itself where the image of a ragged line of ill-armed farmers facing down the might of the British military brings Johnny to tears. Struck by the sight he commits himself to joining that cause even as Dr. Warren despite being exhausted from his efforts with the wounded prepares his instruments to help one more unique and invaluable person.

Themes/Characters

When the novel opens, Johnny Tremain, the fourteen-year-old protagonist, is intelligent and talented but also arrogant. A silversmith's apprentice, he is perceived as a leader by the other apprentices, who both resent and admire him. After an accident at work cripples his hand, he must find another means of supporting himself. He develops new skills, learning to ride a skittish horse, "Goblin," in order to get a job delivering newspapers. As Johnny becomes a skilled rider, he begins to accept his disability. To keep Goblin under control, he must use his crippled hand: "He could not keep it proudly in his pocket while careening about on a horse like Goblin." The only character in the story who changes, Johnny learns humility as through adversity and struggle he discovers his true strengths and weaknesses.

The secondary characters remain unchanged throughout the story. Johnny's fellow apprentices at Mr. Lapham's silver shop—the lazy, vindictive Tory, Dove, and the somewhat dimwitted Dusty—stay the same, even after they leave the silver shop. These characters are important, however, because the changes in Johnny's perceptions of and reactions to them indicate his development. As he matures, Johnny makes a greater effort to understand others and becomes kinder and more tolerant toward Dove and Dusty.

Two of Johnny's friends—Priscilla Lapham, one of the silversmith's daughters, and Rab Silsbee, a printer's apprentice—contribute significantly to his development, though they do not change much themselves. Priscilla, known as Cilia, teaches him the meaning of loyalty and love, especially when she defies her mother's orders and comes to help Johnny when he is tried for theft. Rab teaches him about friendship and sensitivity. An accomplished fighter, Rab nonetheless avoids fights unless absolutely necessary. Rab's riveting presence invigorates everyone around him. He becomes a role model for Johnny, who tries to emulate the older boy's leadership qualities.

In addition to the fictional characters, historical figures who led Boston's rebels also appear in the narrative.

Johnny encounters Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, John Adams, James Otis, and John Hancock. Revere, a silversmith, offers Johnny an apprenticeship in his shop before Johnny's accident ruins his chances of becoming a silversmith, and Johnny tries to get a job in John Hancock's counting house after the accident. Johnny's injury renders him incapable of even writing Hancock's name, but Hancock gives him a purse full of silver coins after refusing to hire him. As a rider for the Observers, a group working toward American independence, Johnny has the opportunity to join the meetings of these historical characters. Johnny's interactions with these famous figures and his important contributions to their efforts suggest that America gained independence because of the courage of anonymous heroes.



Johnny Tremain deals with the themes of struggle and maturity. Just as Johnny strives to become an independent adult, the Boston Whigs struggle to win independence for their land.

At the end of the narrative, Johnny reaches adulthood; several years later, the colonists, too, will have earned their independence.



Style

Point of View

Johnny Tremain is written in a limited third-person point of view. That is while Johnny does not narrate his story the reader is told his thoughts and feelings without knowing any more about the thoughts and feelings of others than Johnny himself knows. Since the book begins when Johnny is fourteen and ends when he is sixteen it is not surprising that there are times when the reader understands Johnny's feelings even better than he does himself. For example, Johnny is puzzled that he sometimes is indifferent to Priscilla Lapham and at other times finds his visits with her the high point of his week not noticing that he is indifferent when she is readily available and most interested when someone else, Rab or even Pumpkin, seems interested in her and awakens his jealousy. There are brief passages where the point of view becomes omniscient, pulling back to fill the reader in on historical facts of which Johnny might be unaware but which affect events in Boston and Johnny's life but for the most part the author maintains the reader's interest in Johnny by limiting the narration to a limited third person point of view.

Setting

Except for brief scenes at the Sillsbee farm in Lexington *Johnny Tremain* is set entirely in the city of Boston. The point is made that Johnny is a town boy and the town itself becomes a character of sorts. Through his wanderings while looking for work after his accident Johnny explores every corner of Boston from the wharves to the cemetery. Not only do we get a vivid picture of pre-revolutionary Boston, its shops and apprentices, taverns and alleys, but the stage is set as well for Johnny's later escapes and shortcuts while assisting the revolutionaries.

Johnny Tremain's settings also mirrors Johnny's expanding life and awareness. Initially, he knows little of the world beyond the silversmith's and its wharf. After his accident he is thrown into the wider world of Boston to look for work and once he has met Rab and joined the staff of the *Observer* his knowledge of a greater range of streets mirrors his growing awareness of the world of politics and change.

Language and Meaning

Boston in the 1700s was a city, which valued language. The rhythms of the King James Bible were in everyone's ears and speeches were the way to persuade the population many of whom could not read. Johnny can listen to the Reverend Sam Cooper who, "was putting more politics than gospel into his sermons that fall and more fear of 'taxation without representation' than God into his congregation." Johnny himself is known for his ability to insult someone without using any curse words calling Dove, for



example, a "pig-slug." Rab on the other hand is notable for his ability to influence Johnny's most hotheaded behavior while saying almost nothing.

The author, however, does permit some eloquence where it is appropriate. Sometimes she uses actual quotations as in the public meeting right before the Boston Tea Party where Johnny hears Josiah Quincy say, "I see the clouds roll and the lightning play, and to that God who rides the whirlwind and directs the storm, I commit my country..." while he is waiting to hear Sam Adams give the signal, the phrase, "This meeting can do nothing more to save the country."

Johnny Tremain's central theme comes down to the use of language. In Chapter 8 James Otis, once brilliant and the founder of The Observers, but now so often mad that he is not included in the group's decisions gives a speech about what is worth fighting and dying for. His final words, "We give all we have, lives, property, safety, skills...we fight, we die, for a simple thing. Only that a man can stand up," echo in the final chapters of the book and finally serve as the title of the concluding chapter.

Structure

Organized into twelve chapters the structure of *Johnny Tremain* mirrors the changes in Johnny's life and consciousness. It begins in the cozy world of the silver workshop where the boys may work days without stepping farther than the town pump. Their knowledge of world events is limited to the elderly Mr. Lapham wishing that these political fellows would just quiet down and be good loyal subjects of King George. Johnny's accident forces him into a wider world and like the ripples of a rock thrown into a pond each chapter carries Johnny further into the world. This is true on a literal level - by the final chapter Johnny has taken himself out of Boston and out of safety to learn what has happened in the large world of events and the small world of his friends. At the same time it is also true of Johnny's inner life and awareness. He moves from the simple arrogant values of a child progressing to a more complex moral awareness which recognizes that individuals like Dove and larger groups of people like the British army can have good points with their bad, and bad points with their good. Just as the revolution moves out of the attic and into the fields of Lexington, Johnny moves beyond his purely personal concerns to renouncing any connection to the Lytes and their riches even willing to undergo the pain of having his hand operated on so that he can take up the job of continuing Rab's fight.



Quotes

"She'd say 'Johnny, if there is not one thing left for you and you have no trade and no health, and God Himself has turned away His face from you, then go to Merchant Lyte and show him your cup and tell him your mother told you before she died that you are kin to him.'" (Chapter 1, p.29)

'Johnny, I don't want you to be always riding them boys so hard. Dove tries, but he's stupid. Ain't his fault, is it? If God had wanted him bright He would have made him that way. We're all poor worms. You're getting above yourself - like I tried to point out to you. God is going to send you a dire punishment for your pride.'" (Chapter 2, p. 37)

Since his accident he had unconsciously taken to wearing his hat at a rakish angle. This, and the way he always kept his right hand thrust into his breeches pocket, gave him a slightly arrogant air. The arrogance had always been there, but formerly it had come out in pride in his work - not in the way he wore his hat and walked. (Chapter 3, p.59)

Oddly enough, Johnny slept well on his straw pallet in the jail. The night before, lying and weeping among the graves of Copp's Hill, he had reached bottom. He could not go lower than that. No matter what happened, he could not help but now go up. He knew Isannah's childish squeals were nothing compared to the serious charge Mr. Lyte had brought against him, but the squeals had just about broken his heart. The accusation of burglary he could take. (Chapter 4, p. 84)

"You know you usually go about with that hand in your pocket, looking as if you had an imp of Hell hidden away, and then someone asks you and you pull it out with a slow flourish, as if you said 'This is the most disgusting thing you ever saw.' No wonder you scare everybody. Tonight happens you just forgot." (Chapter 5, p.111)

"I see the clouds roll and the lightning play, and to that God who rides the whirlwind and directs the storm, I commit my country..." (Chapter 6, p. 133)

"This meeting can do nothing more to save the country." (Chapter 6, p.134)

"For the dead should not look at the living - nor the living too long upon the dead." (Chapter 7, p. 175)

"We give all we have, lives, property, safety, skills...we fight, we die, for a simple thing. Only that a man can stand up." (Chapter 8, p. 192)

Adaptations

Forbes's Pulitzer Prize-winning biography, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In*, details the life of the famous silversmith and his activities before and after the American Revolution. While writing this biography, Forbes became intrigued by the roles that the apprentices had played in the revolutionary activities, an interest that inspired Johnny Tremain. Unlike Johnny Tremain, *Paul Revere* is specifically geared to an adult audience, but could be used by teachers to supplement classroom use of Johnny Tremain.

Walt Disney Studios filmed an excellent adaptation of Johnny Tremain in 1957 that starred Luana Patten, Jeff York, Sebastian Cabot, Dick Beymer, and Walter Sande. In addition, a movie was made of Forbes's *The Running of the Tide* (1948); a ballet was based upon *A Mirror for Witches*; and a musical entitled *Come Summer* was adapted from *Rainbow in the Road* and produced in 1969.



Topics for Discussion

1. Isannah Lapham is only a minor character. What function does she serve in the story? How can she be compared to her sister Cilia?

2. At the end of the story, Rab becomes one of the first casualties of the American Revolution. Why did Forbes choose to have a major character killed?

Would the story change significantly if Rab lived?

3. In many ways, Johnny, Rab, and Cilia seem far older than they really are.

What kinds of adult responsibilities do they have? How does war cause young people to grow up faster?

4. Forbes said that she tried to make Johnny a realistic and fully rounded character. Was she successful in her intentions? How is Johnny similar to boys his age today?

5. Mr. Lapham predicts that Johnny will be punished for his vanity. Is Johnny's accident bad luck or is Johnny himself to blame?

6. When Johnny tears up the pages from the Lyte family Bible, he says "This is the end. The end of one thing—the beginning of something else." Explain what he means.

7. Any death in wartime is tragic, but the death of the redheaded soldier Pumpkin seems particularly sad. Why does the death of a British soldier have such a profound effect on Johnny?

8. How are the apprentices such as Johnny and Rab able to obtain secret information? How is Johnny Tremain a testimony to the "unsung heroes" of the American Revolution?

9. Johnny is unsuccessful when he goes job hunting. Does the reader sympathize with him? Is the reader intended to learn something from these experiences?

10. Explain what James Otis means when he says that the colonists are willing to go to war so "that a man can stand up." How does that phrase later have a special significance for Johnny?

11. In his work delivering newspapers, Johnny becomes better acquainted with some of the British soldiers. How does he feel about them? What do these feelings suggest about the "enemy"?

12. Is Johnny right to try to establish a relationship with the Lyte family?

What effect, if any, do you think this would have after the Revolutionary War?



Essay Topics

Grandfather Lapham warns Johnny repeatedly against the sin of pride. Is pride necessarily bad? When is pride something to resist? How does Johnny's pride affect his life, both as a silversmith and afterward?

Cilla says Johnny is easier to draw than Rab because he is "a child yet - Rab's grown up." Besides being a year older, how is Rab more "grown up" than Johnny? Is Johnny grown up by the end of the book? What has changed?

How does Johnny's attitude toward Dove change as he grows older? Which of the two boys changes most?

Although the revolutionary organizations have names like The Sons of Liberty and The Minute Men, women also play a part. In what ways were women able to promote the cause of revolution?

Why does the British attitude toward the people of Boston change after the first rumors of the Battle of Lexington?

What factors contributed to untrained farmers succeeding in routing the trained and well-equipped English troops at Concord and Lexington?

What do you feel are Lydia Lyte's motives for taking in Isannah? What do you imagine their future together will be like?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Johnny Tremain gives extensive detail about the life and work of silversmiths in eighteenth-century Boston. Research the apprenticeship system as it existed in America. Describe the activities of other colonial artisans, such as candlemakers, shipwrights, or coopers.

2. Although Johnny and his friends are fictional characters, the author includes the activities of many famous people and events in the story. How is Johnny Tremain really a novel about the anonymous heroes of the Revolution rather than about the famous statesmen?

3. Esther Forbes wrote her most famous books, *Paul Revere and the World He Lived In* and *Johnny Tremain*, in the 1940s, when World War II was being fought. The two books were inspired by the author's concern with the meaning and nature of human freedom.

What messages is the author trying to convey with the books? How could she have hoped to influence her readers?

4. Some of the minor historical figures, such as Dr. Warren, Billy Dawes, Josiah Quincy, James Otis, and Dr. Church, actually participated in the events described in *Johnny Tremain*. Research one of them and explain what happened to him after the novel.

5. The women in the story play quiet but highly significant roles in the war effort. Research and describe how women made important contributions to the American Revolution.

Further Study

Forbes, Esther. "The Newbery Medal Acceptance." *Horn Book* 20 (July-August 1944): 261-267. Forbes describes how she came to write *Johnny Tremain*.

Gemme, Francis. *Forbes's "Johnny Tremain"*. New York: Monarch Press, 1966. This analysis offers in-depth information about the historical events and the characters described in the novel. The book also includes a detailed summary of the novel.

Horn Book Papers. Vol. 1. Boston: Horn Book, 1955. This work offers a critical evaluation of the novel and includes biographical data about Forbes.

Jordan, Alice M. "Esther Forbes, Newbery Winner." *Horn Book* 20 (July-August 1944): 268-270. This article provides biographical data about Forbes.

Lippman, Bertram. "*Johnny Tremain*": A Critical Commentary. New York: American R.D.M., 1966. This commentary analyzes plot and character, and includes biographical information about Forbes.



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