

My Brother Sam Is Dead Study Guide

My Brother Sam Is Dead by James Lincoln Collier

(c)2015 BookRags, Inc. All rights reserved.



Contents

My Brother Sam Is Dead Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Overview.....	4
About the Author.....	5
Plot Summary.....	6
Chapter 1.....	7
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	11
Chapter 4.....	12
Chapter 5.....	14
Chapter 6.....	16
Chapter 7.....	18
Chapter 8.....	20
Chapter 9.....	22
Chapter 10.....	24
Chapter 11.....	27
Chapter 12.....	29
Chapter 13.....	31
Chapter 14.....	33
Epilogue.....	35
"How much of this book is true?".....	36
Characters.....	37
Objects/Places.....	41
Setting.....	44
Social Sensitivity.....	45



[Literary Qualities..... 46](#)

[Themes..... 47](#)

[Themes/Characters..... 49](#)

[Style..... 50](#)

[Quotes..... 53](#)

[Adaptations..... 55](#)

[Topics for Discussion..... 56](#)

[Essay Topics..... 57](#)

[Ideas for Reports and Papers..... 58](#)

[Further Study..... 59](#)

[Copyright Information..... 60](#)

Overview

The Collier brothers have written a moving fictional account of the Revolutionary War's disruption of a small Connecticut village. America gained its independence at a great price. Students may think of all the colonists as patriots dedicated to liberation, but as *My Brother Sam Is Dead* makes clear, such was not the case. The revolutionaries met with great opposition from many loyal supporters of England, their mother country. The emotions that divided the emerging nation also caused internal dissent among family members whose loyalties differed. The Meeker family in *My Brother Sam Is Dead* illustrate the fact that war involves conflicts that lack clearcut divisions of territory or loyalty. The father, Life Meeker, remains loyal to England and the king, while his elder son, Sam, joins the fight for independence. Tim, the younger son who wishes to remain loyal to both, gets caught in the middle.

Families are torn apart, and young couples are separated as characters struggle with wide-ranging emotions and disparate political loyalties.

Most books for young adults about the American Revolution depict only a single point of view, usually that of the colonials who rebelled against the Crown and fought wholeheartedly for American independence. Christopher Collier thought it important to incorporate, in a single work, several different colonial outlooks on the war, and he persuaded his brother James to collaborate. To this end, the book portrays characters who belong to three major factions: the Whigs, simple, freedomloving farmers marching into confrontation to fulfill what they see as God's plan of liberty and equality; the Tories or Imperialists, loyal to the British from beginning to end; and the Progressives, who encourage rapid social change. The authors encourage readers to think, as each generation must, about the issue of war in both the past and the present.

Although the Colliers wrote *My Brother Sam Is Dead* as an antiwar statement, the book presents many viewpoints about the subject.

About the Author

James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier were born into a family of writers. Their father, Edmund Collier, was an author of children's books, and their uncle Slater Brown was a novelist and the hero of E. E. Cummings's *The Enormous Room* (1922). Their aunt Susan Jenkins Brown authored a biography, and their cousin Gwilym Brown was a long-time *Sports Illustrated* staff writer. Their ancestors include the colonial diarist Samuel Sewall and the seventeenth-century poet Anne Bradstreet. Their grandmother was courted by nineteenth-century author Henry David Thoreau.

The Colliers work well together, with few conflicts in their writing relationship, because their individual roles in creating books are clearly defined. James develops the story, language, and structure, while Christopher researches the historical era and adds detail. *My Brother Sam Is Dead*, their first collaboration, was named a 1975 Newbery Honor Book and an American Library Association Notable Book.

James Lincoln Collier, born in New York City on June 27, 1928, graduated from Hamilton College in 1950. He has contributed more than five hundred articles to such publications as *Reader's Digest*, the *New York Times Magazine*, *Holiday*, and *Sports Illustrated*. In addition, he is the author of more than two dozen books for children and adults.

Rock Star, a novel about a young jazz musician, won the Child Study Association of America's Children's Book Award in 1971. In addition to his writing, Collier has played the trombone professionally and has participated in jam sessions from San Francisco to Leningrad. He founded the Hudson Valley Brass Ensemble, which specializes in Renaissance and Baroque music. Collier served in the U.S. Army from 1950 to 1951, worked in publishing from 1952 to 1955, and began his career as a free-lance writer in 1958. He currently lives in New York City and is the father of two sons.

Christopher Collier was born in New York City on January 29, 1930. He received a bachelor's degree from Clark University, and a master's degree and a doctorate from Columbia University. A former junior and senior high school teacher of social studies and English, Collier is now a professor of history at the University of Bridgeport. He specializes in early American history, especially the American Revolution and the history of Connecticut, and in 1971 wrote *Roger Sherman's Connecticut: Yankee Politics and the American Revolution*, which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize. Collier and his wife now live in Orange, Connecticut, in an old house they have restored.

He is the father of two sons and a daughter. Like his brother James, Christopher Collier is by avocation a musician; he plays the trumpet and the flugelhorn.



Plot Summary

This Newbury Honor book, published in 1974, explores the ambiguities of war through the experiences of the Meeker family. The peaceful life of the Meeker family is disrupted when their older, dynamic son Sam leaves school and his family to join the Patriots and fight for independence from Britain. When Sam announces his intentions, his family is dismayed. His father is against the war, not only because he is loyal to the king, but mostly because he believes that war requires a price that is too high to pay. Tim Meeker, the narrator of the story, is conflicted over his brother's decision to join the war. Sam has always been a person he looked up to, but now Tim begins to see that his brother is not perfect.

While Father argues that principles are not worth the cost of war, Sam and the other Patriots in the town argue that freedom is worth giving your life for. Tim is caught between his father and brother, especially when he discovers that his brother has stolen the family's gun. Tim is torn between the morality and obedience he was taught and his love for his brother. Although Tim wants to be loyal to Sam, the changing atmosphere of the war is making life increasingly difficult.

Gradually, war changes life in Redding. People have to be wary of what they say and whom they trust. Yet, on the outside, the war does not effect the Meeker family for quite some time. The war is far away, but the conflict within the family remains. Even when he sees his brother, Tim always feels he has to choose between doing what is best for his family, doing what he feels is the right thing to do, and doing what is best for Sam. Tim is still a young boy, struggling to define for himself what is right. Honor and glory are the same thing to Sam, but Tim begins to realize that they may be two different things.

The first sign that the war will change the family comes when Father and Tim must journey to Verplancks Point to sell their cattle. On the way there they are attacked, and Tim realizes that the war has made his world a dangerous place. When Rebels capture his father, Tim must take his place as head of the family. He and his mother struggle to keep their tavern business going, with increasing hunger and violence all around them.

When Rebels take Tim's father away, Tim begins to feel that he must side with the British, even though Sam is a Rebel. When the British come to town, though, and capture and kill some of his neighbors, Tim realizes that there is very little right on either side. For the people caught in the middle, the war is hostile and senseless. Even young children are taken away, and men die for next to no reason.

Through all of this, Tim has retained his love for his brother, but even when he and Mother beg, Sam will not come home and help them. Sam is after the glory of war, and he stands stubbornly by his idea that the principles he is fighting for are worth his life and worth the suffering the war is causing. These ideals are thrown into turmoil repeatedly, especially when Sam is accused of stealing his own family's cattle for food. Although Tim and Mother try to save Sam, the politics of the army and the violent attitude of the war lead to Sam Meeker's execution.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The novel begins on a rainy evening in April. Dinner at the Meeker tavern is interrupted by the arrival of Sam Meeker. Sam has been away since Christmas, and his sudden arrival and scarlet uniform are a complete surprise to his family. The narrator, Tim Meeker, can see how proud and excited his brother is, as Sam immediately begins to recount the defeat of the British in Massachusetts. He describes how the "Lobsterbacks" went to Lexington to look for Adams and Hancock and then to Concord to take ammunition stores. After leaving Concord, they were attacked by Patriot soldiers hiding in the trees and "massacred" all the way back to Boston. At first Tim and Sam's father does not believe that the British could have been defeated by a group of rebels, but Sam heard the news from Captain Benedict Arnold, the captain of Sam's company, the Governor's second foot guard.

Father and Mr. Beach, the minister, want to know who fired the first shot, but Sam does not know or think that it is important. The local farmers, Mr. Beach and Father are not happy about the rebellion and feel that it is foolish to begin a war over a few taxes. Sam argues with the adults and says that freedom is worth fighting for. Mr. Beach tries to calm the tension between Sam and Father, but Father believes that what Sam is saying is treason and that the king is endorsed by God.

In spite of the tension and talk of war, Mother and Tim are happy to see Sam. Tim has always admired his smart and daring older brother and looks forward to Sam's visits home from school, when Tim can hear of Sam's triumphs at Yale, his victories in debate, the parties he attends and the pretty girls he knows. Although he loves his brother, Tim can see that Sam is sometimes stubborn and rebellious, speaks too quickly and does not always give their parents the respect that he should.

While the Meekers do have to work to keep the tavern running smoothly, their lives are easier than the lives of the farmers, and they do not have work as hard to survive. Tim is happy to have Sam home to help him with chores, but when Sam comes out to the barn he is still in his uniform. Sam gathers eggs, while Tim milks the cow. As they work, they talk about the approaching war. Tim is worried that Sam will fight with Father and tells Sam that he should respect their father and listen to him. Tim says that it is not right to argue with their father because Father is good to Sam and gives him money for school and books.

Sam admits to Tim that he is going to fight the "Lobsterbacks," and he has come home to get Brown Bess, their father's gun. Sam must have a gun to join the fighting. He argues that it is the family's gun and that he has the right to take it, but Tim knows that Sam is wrong. His family, particularly Father, needs the gun for protection. When Sam realizes that Tim disagrees with him, he sends him off to bed.



Tim falls asleep and wakes to hear his father and brother arguing. Sam insists that it is worth dying for principle and freedom, but Father argues that the cost of a war is terrible in terms of pain and suffering. He speaks of his own war experience years ago, when there was a glorious victory but a terrible price in terms of lives. He tells Sam that he had to carry his best friend home, sewn in a sack, and orders Sam to take off the uniform and return to his studies. Stubbornly, Sam refuses, saying that he is a man and can no longer be ordered around. At this refusal, Father tells Sam to leave and not to come back until he is dressed as his son, not a stranger. Later, Tim hears his father weeping, a sound he has never heard before, and realizes that things have changed and bad times are coming.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The chapter opens with rain that sounds like drums, which may foreshadow the coming war. Tim's admiration for his brother is apparent from the moment Sam steps into the tavern, but from this point on, his feeling about his brother begin to change. Sam is at an age between child and adult, when he is smart and brave, yet stubborn and sometimes selfish. The debates with Father and Sam's argument that he has a right to take the gun show him as rash and immature. Instead of considering his family's needs, he is looking for the glory of war. As narrator, Tim remarks that his father takes the gun with him for protection when he travels to Verplancks Point, a statement that will later prove prophetic.

Religion is a theme that runs through this chapter. Tim tends to look at the world based on a religious morality. Sloth and boasting are sins, and honor is important. Still, both he and Sam demonstrate laziness and pride when Tim does not fix the egg basket and when Sam boasts about his telling points at Yale. Although this morality does not stop Tim from sinning, it does show that he consciously tries to do what is right. Obedience is part of this morality, and it is a concern of both Tim and Father. While one is concerned with obedience to a parent, the other is concerned with obedience to the king. Sam's lack of obedience is part of the initial wedge between him and his family.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Father's name is Eliphalet Meeker, but he is called Life. Mother's name is Susannah. Tim tells the reader about Redding, a small town divided into Redding Ridge and Redding Center. The Center is home the Presbyterian Church, while the Ridge, where the Meekers live, has an Anglican church. The Anglican Church is the church of England, and most of the people in the ridge area are Tories and loyal to the king, because it is closely tied to their religion. For as long as Tim can remember, he has been hearing arguments about the king, the war and the colonies, and there seem to many different sides. Some people want to stay with England, and others want to break from England. Still others want to stay English but have more independence. It is difficult to tell who is right, or if anyone is right.

On the way to church, Father asks Tim if Sam told him he was going to fight. Tim does not want to get Sam in trouble, so he simply says and that Sam says that they should be free. Father tells Tim that Sam is full of it and that going to war for a few pence in taxes is not worth it. Principles are not useful to dead people, says Father, and there are always injustices in the world. Europe has had wars for centuries, but they do not have peace.

At church, Tim sits in the balcony with the other children and the blacks and Indians. Jerry Sanford, a younger boy from town, asks Tim about the fight between Sam and Father, and Mr. Beach preaches for a long time on being loyal to the king and obeying the father. Tim knows that Sam has sinned in yelling at their father, and he worries that God will punish Sam. As Tim leaves the church, Tom Warrups, an Indian who lives in town, stops him and tells him that Sam is at his place but that Tim shouldn't tell anyone. Tim wants to see Sam, so he tells his parents that he is going to help Jerry Sanford move a log.

Tim cuts across back fields and sneaks over to Tom Warrups' shack. Inside, he finds Sam holding hands with Betsy Read. Sam is disdainful about their father, but Tim points out that since their father cried, he probably knows something that Sam does not. Betsy pushes Tim to pick a side - his father's or Sam's, but Tim cannot choose and does not really understand what the war is about. It seems complicated to him, but Sam says it's easy. Either they will be free, or they will not. Even Betsy knows it is not that simple, although her grandfather is the head of the militia and her family members are all Patriots. Tim says that a lot of local people don't want to fight, but Sam says that it is just because this area is filled with Tories. Most other areas are ready to fight, and Sam believes that people should be ready to die for their principles.

Sam asks which side Tim will be on, but Tim cannot answer. Then, Sam suggests that Tim help out the Rebels by finding out who is on the Patriots' side, and he tells Tim that he could be a hero. Tim is uncomfortable and tries to leave, but he sees that Sam has



stolen their father's Brown Bess. Sam says he needs it to fight, but Tim tells him that it is wrong to have taken it. It belongs to their father, and the family needs it. Betsy asks Tim if he wants his brother to be killed. Tim is conflicted and cries, but he promises not to tell their parents and runs home.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Tim's internal conflict becomes clear in this chapter. While there are many different arguments about the war, the pressure to choose a side is strong. Father may be a Tory, but he is also against war in general because of the pain war causes. Father sees Sam as young and stubborn, and while his principles may be right, his methods are wrong. Sam's absolute belief that the war is right and Betsy's pressure to choose a side tear at Tim. Even though he can see his brother's point and knows that freedom and principles are important, Tim also knows that his father is older and wiser and that Sam should not have taken the gun.

Tim is also conflicted about the religious morality that he uses to judge right and wrong. He fears that Sam will be punished for his lack of obedience to his father and to the king. According to Mr. Beach and the lessons Tim has learned, Sam has sinned. Although he is worried that his brother has done wrong, Tim is willing to put aside his own concerns to protect his brother. This can be seen when Betsy pressures Tim to choose a side. When Tim wants to take the gun home and return it to his father, she asks him if he wants his brother killed. Tim loves his brother, and the pressure to let him take the gun and go to war is extreme. Although Tim lets Sam take the gun, he is left with doubt and misgivings.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

In Redding, war is a topic of constant discussion, but to Tim, it is mostly far-off battles. There are some arguments, and even fights, over the war, and Father's paper, the *Rivington's Gazette*, has been banned. These disturbances are minor, and in the summer of 1775 the war is still far away from Redding. The Meekers do not talk about Sam, but Tim misses his brother terribly and tries not to think about the possibility that Sam may be dead. Tim is constantly busy with the chores of the tavern, such as gathering wood, cleaning and caring for the livestock. He does not like his chores, but Tim knows it is easier than farming. He still finds time to run off and play with Jerry Sanford.

During this summer, Betsy Read hangs around the tavern a lot, trying to listen to the conversations of the men. She is trying to find out who is a Patriot and who is a Tory, but Mother often sends her on her way, saying, "Idle hands make the Devil's work." One day, Betsy motions Tim outside and asks him if he would keep it a secret if Sam came back. Tim misses his brother, but he tells Betsy that he wishes Sam would return the gun. Betsy dismisses him, saying that Sam needs the gun. She makes Tim to swear to keep Sam's return a secret. Because Tim wants to see his brother, he promises to keep it a secret. For weeks, Tim watches Betsy, waiting for a signal that Sam is back, but when he tries to ask her she hushes him. Then one day, Betsy comes in to buy beer, and she gives Tim a small nod, a signal that Sam has returned.

Chapter 3 Analysis

This chapter describes the sense of false normalcy that surrounds Tim's life, and Redding in general. Although there is a war going on and his brother is gone, Tim's life goes on as usual, and he acts like a normal child. The biggest difference is that the family does not mention Sam. When Tim puts off his chores or runs out to play with Jerry Sanford, he demonstrates that he is still a child, with the normal concerns of a young boy. He is still young enough to be mostly unconcerned with the war, but gradually he is being forced to wrestle with adult issues. The war is slowly changing the world around him, and the changes in his family are forcing him to keep uncomfortable secrets. In spite of these changes, Tim is still constant in his belief that Sam was wrong to steal the gun. This theft weighs heavily on his conscience, and even though Tim wants to see his brother, the first thing he says to Betsy is that he hopes Sam will bring the gun back. Instead of thinking about a joyful reunion, Tim is concerned about his brother and the morality of what he has done.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Tim is excited that Sam is back and has to struggle to keep the secret to himself. He has difficulty thinking of an excuse to sneak away, but while he is chopping wood, he hears the sound of horses. A party of about twenty rebel troops approaches. Tim ducks and hides, but he sees four men stop at the tavern and go inside. Tim is nervous, but he wants to see what is going on. He takes the ax and goes back to the house. As he approaches, he hears shouting. He peers through the back door and sees the men threatening his parents. The men are holding his mother by the fireplace, and one man is threatening Tim's father with a sword, demanding that he give them the family gun. Father refuses, and the soldier hits him with the flat of the sword, cutting his face. Tim is very frightened, but at his moment he sees how similar Sam and Father are. Both are rebellious and do not like being told what to do. Tim wishes his father would stop yelling at the soldiers and worries that his parents may be killed. The soldiers do not believe it when Father tells them Sam took the gun to join the Rebels, since they know that Redding is filled with Tories.

Tim runs to Tom Warrups' shack to find Sam. When he arrives, he finds Sam sleeping soundly with the Brown Bess tucked under his arm. Since Tim knows that Sam is a very sound sleeper, he pulls the gun out from under him and starts to run back to the tavern. He can hear Sam running behind him and looks back to see him right behind. He doesn't think that Sam will follow him where he can be seen, and he prays for God to help him.

Sam does follow him and demands that Tim give back the gun before he hurts himself. Tim threatens to shoot his brother, but Sam tells him the gun is not loaded. Tim can barely hold the gun because it is so big, and he begins to cry. He tells Sam that the Continentals will kill their father if he doesn't give them the gun.

Sam jumps on Tim and wrestles the gun away. He is angry that Tim might have shot him and tells Tim that he cannot go to the tavern because he is not supposed to be in town. Sam was buying cattle. His captain had to make a detour, so he came home to see Betsy. He doesn't think that the soldiers kill anyone when they search for weapons, but if Sam goes down to the tavern they will hang him as a deserter. Sam refuses to give back the gun because he must have it if he wants to fight alongside his friends. Tim becomes very angry and says that Sam is a coward, and his family ought to be more important than his friends are. He convinces Sam to come down to the tavern with him. When they arrive at the tavern, the soldiers have gone, and it is quiet. Suddenly, Father is at the door, and he and Sam are face to face. Sam turns and runs away, even though Father shouts for him to come back.



Chapter 4 Analysis

The danger of the war finally appears in Redding. Even as Tim is happy that his brother is in town, other soldiers on his brother's side cause problems for the family. The threats to his mother and father, and Tim's urge to protect them, show that he will have to grow up quickly if he wants to help his family. The history between the brothers and the close bond they once shared is apparent when Tim takes the gun from the sleeping Sam. He knows that his brother will sleep soundly from years of sharing a bed with him, and his memories are those of a fond brother.

In spite of those years of fellowship, Tim finds himself pointing a gun at his own brother, forced to choose between protecting his parents and giving in to the brother he loves. Even Sam is frightened when he sees what Tim has been driven to. Although Sam gets the gun back, Tim still wonders if Sam is wrong. The fact that Tim puts his family first and takes the gun from Sam shows that he is already more mature than Sam in many ways. Tim makes a choice to face his brother and argue over the gun, while Sam runs away from their father without saying a word.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Tim now sees the war as a reality that is effecting his town. Other people lost guns to the soldiers, and while the people in town do not hunt often, the guns are necessary to keep the wolves away from the livestock. Food is beginning to become hard to find, and soldiers from both sides have been stealing cows. The Meeker family has to raise prices to accommodate the scarcity of food. In spite of these changes, the biggest change for Tim is that he misses his brother. He has always looked up to Sam, and even now he wishes that he were grown up enough to do something as heroic as fighting in the war.

One day in April 1776, Mr. Heron, a rich and respected neighbor, stops by the tavern. He asks if Tim is continuing with school, but Father is not certain that he can spare Tim, since he needs help around the tavern. Mr. Heron offers to take Tim on as an apprentice to become a surveyor in a few years. Tim is modestly embarrassed and tells Mr. Heron that he is not as smart as Sam is. Father and Mr. Heron talk about Sam and the war, and Mr. Heron asks if Tim could walk some "business papers" to Fairfield. He offers to pay Tim a shilling, but Father says no, it is too dangerous. Tim wants to do it, to have something to boast about to Sam. Father says that Mr. Heron is mixed up in the war, but he doesn't know how, and that Tim should stay away from him.

Tim keeps thinking about Mr. Heron, and he wants to take the messages so that he can have some of the glory and be like his brother. He asks his father again, but again his father says no. It is too risky, he tells Tim, and children have been killed in this war or shipped off to prison ships where they die of diseases like cholera. Even though Tim knows his father is right, he still wants to deliver the messages. Two weeks later, Jerry Sanford tells Tim that the shad are running in the river, and Father allows Tim to go fishing. He is pleased when the boys catch a lot of fish, and Tim has an excuse to get away.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The ambiguity of the war is slowly becoming evident. The war goes on, but it is unclear who is winning. The people of the town are caught in the middle. Both sides seem to be attacking the people of the town, taking their guns and slaughtering their cattle, so it is uncertain who is an enemy and who is a friend. Even when the people try to protect themselves and their livestock, the soldiers are gone before they know what happened. The people have no power to stop the war, to save their cows or even to keep their guns. It may be this sense of powerlessness that drives Tim to disobey his father and decide to work for Mr. Heron. He wants a bit of the action and glory for himself, and the morality of disobeying his father fades in comparison to what he could achieve. Although he is betraying his father, Tim is concerned when he cannot tell which side



others are on. It disturbs him that Tom Warrups lives on the Reads' land, and the Reads are Patriots, yet Tom delivers messages for Mr. Heron, a Loyalist.

This chapter also demonstrates how the relationship between Father and Sam has affected Tim's relationship with his father. Tim disagrees with his father and wants to work for Mr. Heron, but Father wants to protect him. While Father shouted at Sam to get Sam to obey him, he realizes that shouting did not work and that Sam is gone. Tim notices that his father catches himself and lowers his tone during their disagreement about Mr. Heron. He knows that his father cares about him and does not want to lose another son.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Tim tries to find a chance to talk to Mr. Heron without his father around, and fortunately Mr. Heron comes into the tavern on his own. Tim tells him that he wants to deliver messages for him and lies that Father said it would be okay, as long as he didn't know. Mr. Heron knows that Tim is lying, but he agrees to give Tim a shot anyway. He muses that Tim is a lot like Sam and tells him to come over early the next morning. Tim asks his father if he can go fishing the next day, and Father says yes. Tim feels bad about lying to his father, but right now glory seems more important than honor.

Tim goes to Mr. Heron's house first thing in the morning, carrying his fishing line and hooks and trying not to be noticed. Mr. Heron pulls him in the back door and gives him a message to deliver to Mr. Burr in Fairfield. He tells Tim that he must go quickly if he wants to be back before nightfall. Tim starts out for Fairfield full of confidence. The weather is beautiful, and if he gets back early enough he may still be able to catch some fish. He stows his fishing gear and starts down the road with the letter tucked in his shirt. After a while, he begins to worry that the letter is not secure, and as he tries to find a new place to tuck it, he sees Betsy Read walking down the road.

Betsy teases Tim about carrying a letter to a girlfriend and asks what he is doing on the road to Fairfield. Tim tells her he is going fishing. He stumbles over the lie, so she knows he is not telling the truth. Betsy is more interested in telling Tim where she is going, though. She is going to Horseneck, which is further south than Fairfield, to see Sam. As soon as she tells Tim, she says that she shouldn't have told him, since he is a Tory. She heard about Sam from Mr. Heron. Tim thinks it is odd that Mr. Heron knows where Sam is, since he is a Tory. He asks Betsy why Mr. Heron did not tell him about Sam.

Betsy wants to know when Tim saw Mr. Heron and realizes that the letter Tim is carrying must be his. She demands that Tim give her the letter, so she can read it and make sure that it is not about Sam. Again, she asks if Tim wants Sam to be killed. Tim waivers a little, but says no, reminding her that opening other people's mail is illegal. Suddenly, Betsy jumps on Tim, taking him by surprise and knocking him the ground. He struggles with her and nearly pins her, but she snatches the letter and runs away. As she sprints down the road she tosses the crumpled, dirty letter over her shoulder. It says, "If this message is received, we will know that the messenger is reliable."

Chapter 6 Analysis

Mr. Heron emerges as a mysterious character in this chapter. He is well known for being a Tory, but he knows Sam's whereabouts. The other characters do not seem to know what to think of him. At one point, Betsy sets off to Horseneck on his words, but she



seems to doubt his intentions. During his conversation with Tim, Mr. Heron seems oddly hesitant to state which side he is on, and the fact that he send Tim with a message to a Mr. Burr hints that he might be more involved with the Rebels than Tim suspects.

These events reveal how much like his brother Tim is. Even Mr. Heron notices that Tim is headstrong and brave like Sam, and he tells the boy so. Although Tim is angry with Sam for choosing the glory of war over obedience and loyalty to his family, he finds himself wanting the same things that Sam wants. Although he is ashamed of lying to his father, Tim goes forward with his plan to work for Mr. Heron because at this point in his life, glory seems more important than honor.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The end of the summer has arrived. Tim has tried to avoid Mr. Heron, but whenever he does see him, Mr. Heron is polite and does not mention the letter. Although food and supplies are short, the war still seems far away. Two letters have come to Mother from Sam, one making a defeat in New York sound very glamorous and the other detailing the difficult winter they are having in his camp. Mother and Father fight over the letters. Mother wants to write back to Sam, but Father argues that he needs to learn a lesson. Even though Father left home at the same age as Sam, he does not consider Sam an adult. Mother says how alike and stubborn Father and Sam are and decides to write him.

Father and Tim begin to plan the annual trip to Verplancks Point on the Hudson River. Tim has never been on such a long trip before because either Sam or Tom Warrups used to accompany his father on the journey. Each year, Father gathers cattle in October, mostly from farmers who use cattle to pay their bills. They drive the cattle 40 miles to Verplancks Point and sell them there. Then, they buy supplies for the tavern and the store, such as rum and cooking and sewing supplies. The journey normally takes three days in each direction, and they will stay with friends or family. Tim is excited that he will meet some cousins for the first time, but the trip is not an easy one. The closer to winter they sell the cattle, the more money they can get in return. If they wait too long, though, the snow may make the journey difficult. Father is also concerned about cow-boys, men who claim they are gathering beef for the patriots but who are really stealing. He does not want to take Tim, but he cannot make the journey alone.

On the morning that Tim and Father set out for Verplancks Point, there is already a half-inch of snow on the ground. The ground is muddy, and the cattle are loud. Father and Tim do not hear the cow-boys as they ride up. Tim stops the wagon, and the cow-boys surround them. When Father tells them he is from Redding, they call him a Tory and say that the cattle will end up with the Lobsterbacks. Father does not care who buys the cattle, saying it is not his business what happens to a cow after someone else buys it. The cow-boys insist that it is important and tell Tim and Father to walk into a field. Tim is frightened but goes into the field as Father tells him. Father has dismounted from his horse and stands amongst the men on horseback. He seems calm, and Tim wonders if perhaps Father is just as frightened as he is. One of the cow-boys hits father, and Tim shouts for them to stop. He begins to run for help when he hears horses galloping. He turns to see the cow-boys ride off, while another group of horsemen approaches. These men are Loyalists, and they stay with Father and Tim until they reach the state line, where another group comes to escort them on their journey.



Chapter 7 Analysis

Father has a difficult choice to make in this chapter. While he needs to provide for his family and keep his business going, traveling to Verplancks Point is dangerous, and he will not have the help he had in previous years. Although Father is reluctant to take Tim on the journey, Tim is excited over the idea. Once again he has a chance for excitement, but when the excitement comes, in the form of the cow-boys, Tim is frightened.

During the conflict with the cow-boys, Tim again sees how like Sam is Father is. Instead of weakly obeying the bandits, Father stands up to them. At the same time, Father does look after Tim and sends him out to the field. The fear that Tim feels during this scene reflects how real and risky the war is becoming. Tim realizes that the glory and excitement of war are not good things and that war is dangerous, even for those who do not fight. Even though Father is attempting to stay neutral, saying that he does not care who buys the cattle, he is not allowed to move forward. The war forces everyone onto a side, even if that side might change.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Tim and Father arrive after dark to spend the night with the North Salem cousins, the Platts. It is a big, talkative family, and they want to know all the news about the Meekers and what the war is like in Redding. Father tells them about the cow-boys, and Mr. Platt tells them that thievery and hostility have taken over Westchester County. People have been attacked and houses burned, and the need for retaliation keeps the fighting going. The locals have had to form a Committee of Safety to keep things under control.

Tim and his cousin Ezekiel go out to the barn to sleep. They talk about the war. Ezekiel tells Tim that his father said Sam was too smart to join the Rebels, and they were upset when they heard. Tim wonders which side he would join if he were to fight in the war. He thinks he would be a Loyalist, but he wonders what he would do if he came face to face with Sam.

The next morning, Father and Tim set out for Peekskill, which is a hard day's journey ahead. Escorts join them throughout the day to make sure they are not attacked. When they reach Peekskill, they can see the Hudson River, and Tim is amazed. The river is beautiful, and the boats are interesting. The towns are large and filled with people. Tim wishes that they could live there, but Father says fishing is a hard life. The port in Verplancks is bustling. There are many soldiers in New York who need food, so the price of cattle keeps rising. Father tracks down Mr. Bogardus and leaves Tim to explore the wharf on his own. Tim watches the fishermen working fast and hard, and after a while he begins to get cold and tired. Finally, Father returns with the good news that they were able to get a large wagon load of goods for the cattle. They sleep in the tavern, and the next day they travel through the cold to spend the next night with Father's friends in Mohegan. Father is worried about the weather and wants them to get home quickly, but at the same time he does not want to pass through Ridgebury again and risk being attacked by the cow-boys. There are rumors that a man was attacked and killed for his cattle on that road.

The next day it begins to snow hard, forcing Father and Tim to adjust their route. Father rides ahead to scout for the cow-boys, leaving Tim alone. It is cold, and the snow is thick. It becomes more and more difficult to move the oxen. The journey seems endless, and the snow is so hard to travel through that Father decides to stop at the Platts' for the night and take the route back through Ridgebury. They hope that they can get an escort or that the snow will keep the cow-boys from riding. Finally, they arrive at the Platts' house and enjoy a hot meal and safe night in the warm friendly kitchen.



Chapter 8 Analysis

Tim again finds himself wondering what side he would join if he were to fight in the war. Although he often feels like a Loyalist, because his family is mostly Tories, Tim realizes that he would be against his brother. He does not know what he would do if they came face to face in battle. Realizing that the soldiers can be people with faces and families means that Tim still cannot choose a side.

The visit to Verplancks Point is exciting for Tim. At first he wishes that he could live there, but watching the fishermen, Tim learns that his life is easy by comparison. All this time that Tim has been searching for glory and adventure he has thought that it would be fun, but the conflict with the cow-boys has shown him that excitement can be frightening. The lives of others are often more difficult than he realizes.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

The next morning the ground is covered with a beautiful blanket of snow, which means a cold and wet journey for the Meekers. Tim and Father say goodbye to the Platts and begin the trip home. Father rides ahead to look for the cow-boys, while Tim stays with the wagon. If Father sees the cow-boys, he will ride back or shout, and he and Tim will hide. Tim is wary as he travels. He does not like being alone so much, and he is constantly looking for places to hide or checking to make sure that the cow-boys are not sneaking up behind him.

After lunch, Father and Tim travel through Ridgebury. Many people see them as they pass through town, so Father begins to scout again on the other side. Tim distracts himself from the cold and boredom by naming all the countries in the world. After a while, he notices that Father has been gone a long time. He tries to reassure himself by thinking that it might not have been too long or reasoning that Father might have stopped to talk to someone or gone to look for an escort. However, Tim knows that his father would not leave him alone without telling him, and he is worried. His father might be hurt, so Tim leaves the wagon and runs ahead.

Tim can easily see the horse tracks in the snow, and he follows them to a place where hemlocks border the road. There, he sees many hoofprints, churned up mud and a trail into the wood. The cow-boys must have lain in ambush and attacked Father when he rode by. Tim begins to pray, worried about his father. He does not know if Father is dead or hurt or if the cow-boys are still nearby waiting for him to pass by with the wagon.

Tim needs to decide what to do. Even if he left the wagon and ran, it would take hours to get home. Tim tries to think of what Sam would do and decides that the daring thing would be to follow the tracks and find his father. Since Tim does not have any weapons, it would not be a smart thing to do. Next, he thinks of what his father would do. Father is depending on Tim to get the wagon home so that they have enough supplies to last the winter. Tim realizes that he must hope that his father will escape on his own, and he knows that Father would want him to do the responsible thing and continue onward.

Tim returns to the wagon and begins the journey home by himself. When he passes the hemlocks again, he begins to look for tracks leading off the road that might indicate another ambush. Night falls, but Tim feels safer in the dark, since he cannot be seen as easily. He tries to think of a story to tell the cow-boys when he sees them. It is dark and cold, but Tim doesn't know anyone in the area. He must press on. Finally, he sees the cowboys waiting for him up the road. He calls out to them first, "Are you the escort? Am I ever glad to see you."

The cow-boys surround Tim and ask him about the escort. He tells them that his father said that an escort of a dozen men would join him soon and that he should fall flat when



the shooting started. This makes the cow-boys nervous, since it sounds like an ambush, but they are not sure whether or not they should believe Tim. Finally, a dog barking in the distance scares them, and they ride away. Tim listens to them leave, and he is proud that he fooled them. He is scared and lonely, too. He eats a little and has some wine to stay warm, and then he walks until he finally reaches home.

Chapter 9 Analysis

There is a clear point in this chapter where Tim makes the transition from child to adult. Before he realizes that his father is missing, Tim is very much a child, daydreaming as he walks along. Once he knows what has happened, Tim has to make the first adult decision of his life. He could follow his brother's example and go charging off to fight. However, Tim realizes that his brother's approach is always wrong. As his parents have said, Sam can be rash and does not think things through. Realizing this allows Tim to make an intelligent decision and look at what his father would do. Tim might want to run home to the tavern, or he might want to go after his father. He knows, though, that neither of those choices will lead to a good resolution. Instead of being a child and running home to his mother or acting like his brother and risking his life, Tim has to take responsibility and do what is best for the family. By making this difficult decision, Tim becomes the man of the house, the person who has to take care of the family and make sure that the business will survive.

Tim also demonstrates that he is able to think things through and plan ahead. Much like his father considered all the options when planning their route home, Tim has to plan his own journey and decide what to do if he encounters the cow-boys. Father's decision to ride ahead placed him in danger but protected his son and the tavern's supplies. Likewise, Tim knows that he has to plan the best way to protect himself and do as his father would wish. The tale he tells the cow-boys shows that he has learned how to think ahead, just like his father.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Life around the tavern is different with Father gone. Mother believes that he is still alive, because there would be no reason for the Rebels to kill him, but since he is gone their lives are very different. Both Tim and Mother must work all the time to keep the tavern running. Business is good, with many messengers and travelers passing through town, but the value of paper money is going down. It is a struggle to keep from losing money. The laws that the Rebel government has passed mean that people can pay with commissary notes, which will not be worth anything unless the rebels win the war. Another law says that prices cannot be raised, even if that means the item is sold for less than it was bought. Tim and Mother are getting by, but they keep writing to Sam, hoping that he will come home now that his father is gone and his family needs him.

Tim and Mother talk to Colonel Read about Sam. Colonel Read is a Patriot, but he is against the war. He quit as the head of the militia. He warns Mother that even if Sam wants to come home, he may not be allowed to. Tim is not certain that Sam would come home, even though Father is missing and they need him. Sam is determined to throw the British out of the country, and he can be very stubborn. Tim still cannot figure out what Sam is fighting for. Aside from having to pray for the king in church, Tim thinks that he is free. The Assembly has declared it illegal to pray for the king and Parliament, but Mr. Beach continues to pray anyway, even if he gets in trouble. Even Betsy Read does not know where Sam is, so they have no way of knowing what he would do if he found out about Father.

Tim's life begins to change the morning after he arrives home without his father. Instead of putting off his chores or sneaking sweets, he begins to plan what he needs to do that day. He realizes that with just him and Mother to run the tavern, he is now the man of the house and must make the decisions. He is now a grown-up and has to be responsible. Tim is proud to be grown-up, but at the same time he misses his father. He is angry with the Rebels for starting the war and angry with Sam for leaving his family. Sam is getting the glory while Tim gets the work, and it does not seem fair.

On April 26, 1777, Tim hears the sound of drums and sees the British soldiers approaching. There are not many Patriots in Redding, but Ned, the Starr's black man, runs off. Jerry Sanford, Mr. Rogers and Captain Betts gather in Captain Betts' house. The soldiers arrive in a large column, and Tim is frightened to see how many there are. He is worried that their local Rebel militia might try something. The Redcoats are impressive, and Tim would like to talk to them. Instead of going to the tavern, though, a few of them go to Mr. Heron's house.

Tim and the other children talk to some of the soldiers. As Tim talks to an Irish soldier from Dublin, an officer rides by and shouts at the children to go away. The officer charges over to the Betts' house and storms inside. He and several soldiers drag



Captain Betts, Mr. Rogers and Jerry outside, tie their hands behind them and march them away. Tim and his mother are worried that they will hurt Jerry and angry with Mr. Heron for telling the British who the Rebel leaders are. Even though Tim has decided that he is a Tory, because of what happened to his father, he is now angry at the British troops for taking away a little boy.

Tim watches the British on the training ground through the tavern window. Suddenly, he sees a horseman appear on the ridge. As the horseman turns and begins to ride away, he is shot by the British and falls to the ground. The troops ride off in the direction the man came from, and the townspeople run to the fallen man. He is still alive, so they carry him to the tavern and send Tim to Dr. Hobart's for help. Tim runs to the doctor's house, cutting through fields and taking care not to be seen. Before he reaches his destination, he can see a line of British troops firing at Captain Starr's house and a group of Rebels inside, firing back at the British. Tim can see people he knows in the house, including Captain Starr and Ned. Suddenly the British charge the house. Tim hears an order to kill the fighters in the house and sees one of the British soldiers stab and then behead Ned.

Tim is scared and vomits on himself. He is cold and terrified, but he realizes that there is another man dying at the tavern. As he gets up to run to Dr. Hobart's, he can see the British outside the Starr's house, taking their possessions and setting the house on fire. Tim realizes that he no longer feels like a Tory.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Tim realizes that he is an adult now and has to make the decisions for the tavern. While he does not like it, he does what he must for his family. Tim realizes now the price of chasing after glory, and he resents that Sam is away while Tim has to struggle to keep things together. It does not seem fair that Sam gets the glory, while Tim must grow up quickly and bear the responsibility of being the man of the house.

Tim has demonstrated that being brave and doing the right thing does not necessarily mean joining the war. Tim must be brave and take care of his family, but Sam demonstrates his courage by leaving them. Others in the neighborhood also demonstrate that being brave and standing up for your beliefs does not necessarily mean fighting the war. Mr. Beach, who was against the war, stands up for their beliefs by continuing to pray for the king and parliament in church, even though it is illegal, and the Rebels keep stopping him. These quiet consistent acts of responsible courage show a clear difference between the drive for glory and courage of taking responsibility.

The war strikes home again when the British come to Redding. Tim is struck by how odd it is that some of his neighbors are having breakfast with the British, while a few doors down, other neighbors are plotting to kill them. Tim realizes that what happened to Father made him angry at the Rebels and turned him into a Tory. Seeing what the British do to his neighbors and friends makes him realize that he is not a Tory either.

Even when he chooses a side, Tim is unable to escape from the harm that comes from war.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Tim fetches Dr. Hobart, and while the doctor rides quickly to the tavern, Tim walks back slowly. He cleans himself up in the barn and goes in to the tavern to find that many of the townspeople have gathered there. Dr. Hobart gives the injured man rum to drink and then removes the ball. The injured man is drunk, but he manages to tell the story of riding up to try to warn them that the British are after the munitions store in Danbury. General Arnold and General Silliman have been chasing the British, trying to catch them before they reach it. Tim is excited because he remembers that Sam is with Benedict Arnold's men, and this means he might be coming to Redding.

Captain Betts comes running into the tavern. The British have released most of the men they captured, but they kept three as prisoners. One of the prisoners is Jerry Sanford, and no one can understand why the British would take a young boy. Captain Betts is horrified to learn that the British killed Dan Starr and the other men, and he orders Tim to go ring the church bells to round up the trainband. Tim wants to stay out of war, but he moves to obey. His mother stops him, furious that Captain Betts wants to drag the last man in her family into the war. Captain Betts is angry and tells her to be more patriotic, but she threatens him with a poker. He leaves. Once they are alone, Mother and Timothy pray. She cannot understand why God has let such horror and evil into their lives.

After a brief silence, the sound of more soldiers approaching can be heard. Tim looks out the window and sees that the men are Continentals, much to the relief of the injured man. General Wooster and his aides gather in the tavern and eat the dinner that Mother has made. They are startled to learn that the British have already passed through, and Tim tells them about the men killed at the Starr's house. General Arnold arrives, and the men eat and discuss the war. They mention Mr. Heron in a friendly way, which confuses Tim since Mr. Heron is a Tory. As they talk, Tim says he needs to check the livestock and slips across the road to the church where many of the soldiers are staying, to see if Sam is there.

The soldiers are distrustful at first, but eventually Tim and Sam have an emotional reunion. Sam tells Tim that he was hesitant to see his family because he was afraid they hated them. He has heard about Father. He tells Tim that he tried to help, that he even spoke to General Benedict about his situation, but there was nothing he could do. Tim tells Sam that things have been very hard on him and Mother, and with Father gone they are struggling with the work to keep the tavern going. Tim insists that the Rebels have no reason to keep Father, but Sam says that since the cattle were going to the British, Father was selling to the enemy. Sam tells Tim that he tried to help Father, but he could not even find out where he was. Tim continues to insist that Sam should do something to help Father, which annoys Sam.



Tim goes into the house and tells Mother that the cow is hurt and that she should go to the barn to check it. She goes outside, and the three of them have a happy reunion. They talk about how Sam has gotten older and how Tim is so much more grown up. Mother tells Sam that Tim has had to grow up, and it has been difficult. Sam needs to come home, she says, arguing that the Rebels need to return her son since they took her husband. For the first time, she admits that Father might be dead. Sam is impatient with their arguments and does not think he can come home. Even though his enlistment is up in two months, he plans on re-enlisting, because he made a pact with some of the other soldiers to stay and fight until the end. He says he has a duty to stay and fight, but Mother tells him his family should come first. His country comes first, Sam tells her, and those soldiers are dying for her.

Mother tells Sam that she does not want anyone's death, but she sees that he is stubborn and cannot be persuaded. They talk a bit about the tavern, and Sam gives them a message for Betsy Read. When Sam sneaks back to the church, Tim is sad. Not only is his brother gone again, with a good chance that he will never return, but he has left Tim with a feeling of disappointment. This is the first time they have argued when Tim knew that Sam was wrong. He no longer looks up to Sam the same way, since now it feels like they are equals.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Mother has become a fierce and protective woman. She does not want to let the war into their lives because it has taken so much from her, and she is disgusted by the violence of the war. When she feels the only son she has left is being drawn into the fray, she is willing to resort to violence herself to keep him out of it. Mother's morality and belief in God and the church have been apparent since the first chapter, but in this chapter she seems strained in this belief. She wonders how God could let so many bad things happen.

Tim clearly realizes for the first time that his brother can be wrong. Not only is he putting his quest for glory and his promises to his friends above his family, but he believes he is completely right to do so and is annoyed with his family for bothering him. Tim is still glad to see Sam and is proud to show what an adult he has become. It still seems unfair to him that Sam does not have to carry these burdens. Tim has always looked up to Sam as a roll model and wanted to be like Sam, but now he knows that he cannot always be proud of his brother. When Tim recognizes that they are now equals, he puts away that last part of his childhood, the idea that his older brother will look out for him and protect him.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

In June of 1777, Mother and Tim receive news that Father is dead. For some mysterious reason he was sent to a British, not Rebel, prison ship, where he died of cholera and was buried on Long Island Sound. The news comes from one of the men who was taken away by the British, who was with Father when he died. Father told this man to tell his family that he loves them and that he forgives Sam, who is a good but headstrong boy. Soon afterwards, Betsy tells them that Jerry Sanford also died on a prison ship, and his body was sunk in the Sound. Even Betsy is discouraged by the war. The actions of the British seem beastly. She says that the war has gone on too long, and Sam should have come home.

A year passes, and Tim grows more frustrated. At fourteen, he should be thinking about his future. He could be going to school at Yale or learning a trade, but instead he must continue working to keep the tavern going. He figures that once the war is over, Sam should come home and help with the tavern for a few years, so that Tim will have a chance to make a life for himself. The situation at home gets worse and worse. Prices rise, and there is less food to go around. More people use credit at the tavern. They cannot go to Verplancks Point this year, but Mother and Tim have managed to get eight thin cows to sell. Hunger is a problem everywhere, and Tim and Mother desperately need the money from the cows to feed themselves. Tim tries to find a commissary where he can sell the cows. He does not care which side he sells to, but the British have more money. Selling to them would be risky, and traveling with the cows would be dangerous, especially since Tim cannot find out for certain where to go.

On December 3, 1778, Sam returns to Redding. Mother and Tim are glad to see him, and as they feed him, he tells them that the soldiers will be camping in Redding for the winter. Mother is worried about him because he is thin, and Sam warns them that everybody is hungry. He tells them to slaughter the cattle and hide the meat. The soldiers will steal the cattle for themselves if they do not. Sam tells them that he will see them when he can, but he warns them that it will be risky if he has to sneak away, since General Putnam is very strict.

Mother is worried about Sam, but having the soldiers in town means the tavern is very busy. The business is not very profitable, since the soldiers pay with commissary notes. They do not have much to sell, but they can get a good price for liquor. Tim spends a lot of time trying to buy rum and cider to sell to the soldiers. Sam stops by the tavern every week or so, usually on a mission to buy something for the camp or to run an errand for an officer. Since he is familiar with the area, he is seen as useful. Sam continually tells Tim and Mother to butcher the cows, but Tim does not want to since they need the money to buy rum. Even though there is an order not to steal cattle, and General Putnam will hang any man who does so, some of the neighbors have had their cows butchered.



One night Sam comes to the tavern and talks to Tim about the troubles at the camp. Several men were shot because they wanted to go to Hartford to get their pay. The war is dragging on, and people are suffering. Even Sam is beginning to think it cannot last much longer. Suddenly, they hear a noise outside. They run out and find four of the cows loose and four of the cows missing. Sam runs off to find the stolen cattle, while Tim rounds up the loose cows and puts them back in the barn. Once the cattle are secure, Tim goes to find Sam. He sees two soldiers dragging a beaten and bloody Sam up the hill. Sam tells Tim to find General Parsons quickly, since the men are taking him in as a cattle thief.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Father always said, "In war the dead pay the debts for the living." Father and Jerry are not part of the war, so the fact that they pay with their lives seems cruel and unfair to Tim and the women. Tim finds himself angry at Sam, even though he knows that Sam did not kill Father. Although Father and Mother have forgiven Sam, Tim sees him as part of the war that is causing the destruction of his family and hurting his town. Tim realizes that he cannot be on either side of the war, since both sides have done harm. Even though Sam and the other soldiers might be cold and hungry in some distant winter camp, the people in Redding are suffering as well and seem to deserve it less.

When Tim sees Sam at last, he can see that Sam has suffered as well, and the war has changed him. When they discuss the cattle, Sam says that it is easy to decide that the cattle belong to your enemy when you are starving and that he has slaughtered cattle himself. The men have seen horrible things in the war, and it has changed them. They do not seem to care about anyone but their friends. The brutality of the war has made the men into animals, who look out only for themselves. The soldiers are aware of the constant danger they are in, and it affects every aspect of their lives. Life in the camps is hard, and drinking is an escape for the men. The expression "A short life, but a merry one" is often heard at the tavern and reflects the attitude that many of the men have taken.

Tim is unable to feel easy about taking from others. Although Sam asks him where the Rebels can find the supplies they need, Tim does not want to tell him, since it would not be good for the farmers who have those supplies. They cannot choose if they want to sell them, and they get paid in commissary notes, which will not help them. In spite of all the changes in his life, Tim is still unable to lie to his brother, the person he once trusted most in the world. Although he might have lied to his parents in the past, Tim never had to lie to Sam before and cannot learn how now.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Tim tries to see General Parsons, but the soldier at the door does not believe him when he says that Sam is innocent. The soldier sends Tim away without listening to him. Tim has no choice but to go home. He finds the other three cows wandering in a field and the fourth dead. He struggles to get the cows back to the barn in the snow, and then he goes in the house to tell Mother. Tim thinks that since it is a misunderstanding, it should be easy to straighten things out, but Mother is worried. They stop to pray before they go back out to the field to butcher the frozen cow.

The next morning, Tim goes to see General Parsons. After a long wait, he finally talks to the general, who is surprised to learn that Sam was taken in as a cattle thief. He says that since Sam is at the encampment, there is nothing he can really do. General Putnam will decide what to do, and he can be a harsh man. Tim is disappointed. It seems that no one cares whether or not Sam is guilty, and it will not be easy to free Sam. Mother goes to the encampment to talk to General Putnam, while Tim stays behind to mind the tavern. After she leaves, a frightened Betsy arrives and is astonished to learn that Sam has been arrested for stealing his own family's cattle. She will try to get her father to help Sam. Tim tells her that he is worried about his mother, since she seems to be worn down by these events. Even when his father died, she was strong, but now the hunger and Sam's arrest are breaking her.

Tim tries to keep his mind off Sam and stays busy at the tavern. Aside from the customers and his normal chores, he also has to plan to butcher the cattle. The afternoon passes and night falls, and finally Mother returns. Tim is busy making stew and serving customers, and he cannot speak to her for awhile. Finally, she tells him that she was allowed to see General Putnam briefly, and he did not really care about her story. Sam was not supposed to be at their house. He was supposed to be with General Parsons at the Betts. Even though General Parsons let him come over, it looks as though he deserted his post, and the other two men are lying about what happened.

Tim and Mother are not allowed to see Sam, but a few days later Colonel Read visits them and tells them that things are not going well for Sam. As he and Mother drink rum, he tells them that the other two men are ready to tell lies to save themselves, and the fact that Sam comes from a Tory family does not look good either. Tim protests that none of them are Tories, but Colonel Read says it does not matter. Sam's trial will be in three weeks, on February 6th. Tim tries to visit him in prison, but the soldiers will not let him in.

The day of the trial, Colonel Read comes to the tavern to tell them the news. Tim knows it is bad, and Mother tells the colonel that she knew Sam would be executed when they decided to send him to trial. Tim is numb, but he decides to make plans. First, he visits General Parsons, but the general tells him that there is nothing he can do. Tim is upset,



and a bit rude to the general, since they both know Sam is innocent. Finally, the general agrees to give him a note so that he can see General Putnam. General Putnam is the only one who can change the verdict, but Parsons warns him that Putnam wants to keep the troops in line, and who he executes is not as important to him as winning the war.

A soldier takes Tim to see General Putnam. He waits outside for hours, and he finally gets to see the general for a brief moment. The general does not listen to Tim's story, but dismisses him almost immediately, telling him that he'll consider it. He does allow Tim to see Sam at the stockade. Sam does not seem to be in bad shape, but he tells Tim that the other two men had a story ready and that his argument did not look good, especially since he was supposed to be at the Betts. Sam tells Tim to pray and to say hello to Betsy and Mother for him. He smiles at Tim and tells him he is the best brother he has. Then the soldier tells Tim that his time is up and he has to leave.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Tim is worried about his mother, since she seems to be worn down by these events. Even when his father died, she was strong, but now the hunger and Sam's arrest are breaking her. After the trial, he notices that she is drinking more rum than normal and seems distracted most of the time. Although she still manages to do the work of the tavern, Tim can see that the war is very trying on the last family member he has left.

One irony of the trial is that Sam's best hope to avoid execution is that others will be punished enough that he will be saved. Although he will have a trial, the jury of officers will react to the desires of General Putnam. If Putnam wants to make an example of Sam, then they will probably hang him. Innocence and guilt do not seem to factor in to Sam's arrest or his trial. The war has consumed all reason, and the war is the driving force behind his sentencing. Putnam wants to keep the men in line, because he needs the men to win the war. The life of one man does not seem important in comparison. The war has hardened the men, and the death of a man, or the tears of his family, mean little to them.

When Tim sees Sam at the stockade, Sam remarks that he lost at the trial because he did not score enough telling points. This remark shows clearly how much life has changed for the Meekers. Once scoring telling points in a debate meant winning a prize and having a story to boast about. Now, what once might have been a small disappointment means death for Sam Meeker. Sam still shows his strong spirit by joking about his former triumphs, but Tim can see that he knows their old life is gone. This exchange also shows the strong bond that will always exist between the two brothers, even though so much has changed.



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

The family waits to hear what General Putnam will decide. Tim and Betsy consider several escape plans, but there is nothing they can do. A week later, they learn that General Putnam has refused clemency, and Sam will be executed on Tuesday. Tim is angry and sad at the unfairness of the situation. Sam has fought hard for the Rebels for three years, and now he will be executed, even though he is innocent.

There is a mandatory church service on Sunday, but Mother refuses to go. Tim becomes so upset during the service that he walks out. They close the tavern that night, but they have no customers anyway. Mother has stopped drinking, and she says that she would like to close the tavern forever. She says she will never serve another Continental soldier again. Tim wants to do something, but Mother says there is nothing they can do. Tim takes his father's bayonet and sharpens it. As he leaves to rescue his brother, Mother tells him he is going to get himself killed and that she is finished with the war.

Tim stays off the road and sneaks over to the encampment. The moonlight is bright, and he can see the stockade and the snoozing guard. His only hope is to kill the guard and open the gate to let the prisoners out. If the guard sees him, he will throw the bayonet over the wall and hope that the prisoners can free themselves. He silently slips down the hill, but he cannot see anyone in the stockade. He approaches the guard, but suddenly the guard awakens and shouts at him to halt. Tim shouts Sam's name and throws the bayonet over the wall. He turns and runs back up the hill, with the guard and other soldiers shooting at him. He feels a tug on his shoulder and hears several muskets go off, but he makes it up the ridge and is safe. Tim looks down at the stockade before he runs home and realizes that there is no movement inside. The prisoners must have been moved elsewhere. When Tim arrives home, Mother is asleep, and he realizes that his wound is superficial. No one will be able to prove he was there.

Mother does not go to Sam's execution, but Tim knows that Sam would want somebody there. As Sam is led past him, Tim shouts his name, and Sam gives him a small, white-faced grin. They hang Edward Jones, the butcher, first, and then they bring out Sam. They stand Sam in front of the gallows with a sack over his head. Mr. Bartlett, the Presbyterian minister, prays, and then three soldiers line up with their musket muzzles nearly touching Sam. Tim screams, "Don't shoot him, don't shoot him," but Sam falls backwards anyway. He thrashes around with his clothes on fire, and then another soldier shoots him. He is dead.



Chapter 14 Analysis

When Mother realizes that Tim is going to try to rescue Sam, she sounds very bitter. The war has taken her husband and her oldest son, and now she may lose the only person she has left. This conflict between Tim and his mother shows how trying the war has been for her. She once fought to keep Tim from simply ringing the church bells, but now she does nothing as he risks his life to try to save Sam.

Tim's unsuccessful rescue attempt demonstrates how useless the sacrifices caused by the war really are. Tim is willing to risk his life for his brother, and he nearly dies. He looks down and realizes that the stockade is empty, and he might have been killed for nothing. He sees then how futile his efforts have been. Tim knows that there are things worth dying for, something that Sam has argued from the beginning. The fact that Tim risks his life for something he believes in, and that Sam dies for a crime he did not commit, shows how much the brothers have learned but how little these gestures can mean. The lives of the dead mean a lot to the living who mourn them, and Tim sees them paying with their lives with nothing in return.

The violence and pain of Sam's death is clearly depicted by the authors. They describe his thrashing and the fire on his clothes to truly demonstrate what the cost of a war is. Tim's turbulent emotions are felt, and the reader must hope with him when he shouts, "Don't shoot him." An innocent man, loved by his family, dies for nothing. The chapter abruptly stops with the death of Sam Meeker, showing how suddenly a life may end.



Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

Tim writes this story in 1826, fifty years after the start of the war and forty-seven years after the death of his brother. Although Tim has had a happy life, he believes it is nearly over. When the war finally ends, three years after Sam's death, Tim and Mother leave Redding. Immediately after Sam's death, Tim is not able to do much. Eventually he begins to plan for the future. He studies calculating and surveying with Mr. Heron, and then he and Mother sell the tavern and move to Pennsylvania. They open a new tavern, and Tim buys and sells land. Eventually, he buys a mill, marries and has children, then grandchildren. He is pleased that he can now enjoy his children and grandchildren in peace. His mother has always remained sad over Sam's death, but even in her old age she is able to tell stories about him to her grandchildren. Although Tim has led a good life, and he is proud of the great nation he sees emerging, he still wonders if there might have been another way, besides war, to get there.

Epilogue Analysis

Tim reveals that he is proud of his nation, and he has been able to lead a peaceful, happy life. At the same time, the cost of the war is always with him and with his family. Even years later, when he has built his success on the country created by the war, he still knows that the cost was high, and he wishes that there had been another way. The reader is able to see that in spite of the terrible events of the war, and the pain that it causes, Tim is able to move on with his life and achieve his goals.



"How much of this book is true?"

"How much of this book is true?" Summary

The authors try to stick to history as much as possible in writing this story. The setting and many of the characters and events are true. There really was a Meeker family in Redding, although theirs is not the story in this book. The encampment in Redding; the actions of General Putnam, Colonel Read and Tom Warrups; and the mysterious behavior of William Heron were all real events. The lives and deaths of many of the characters, including Jerry Sanford and Ned, were written here as they were recorded.

The Meeker family and other characters are fictitious, but the authors try to make them as real as possible. They use modern language to make the story easier to read and because it is difficult to know exactly how people talked in those days. Although the actions of the main characters are fictional, many of the events in the story are true. There was a fight at Dan Starr's house, and the butcher, Edward Jones, was executed alongside a 17-year-old soldier named John Smith. There was no Sam Meeker, but his execution is based on this real-life event.

"How much of this book is true?" Analysis

Although much of the story is fictional, the authors have used historic events to try to realistically portray what life was like for some of the citizens who struggled through the war. The many sides of the war, the sacrifices and suffering, and the struggles that the characters go through are based on the experiences of real people. When the readers look back on the war, and weighs whether or not they feel it was worth it, or if they should agree with Sam or with Father, they have real situations to base these feelings on.



Characters

Timothy Meeker

The novel follows Timothy Meeker as he grows from a young boy to an adult faced with the brutal realities of war. In the beginning, Tim has a fairly easy life. He respects his parents and follows their moral teachings, and he loves and admires his older brother Sam. As soon as the war enters their lives, and Sam leaves to join the Rebels, Tim must begin the journey to adulthood. The conflict between his father and brother leaves Tim questioning his own sense of loyalty and confused about the morality of the war. While he admires his brother's courage and conviction, he knows that his father is wise and wants what is best for the family. Through Tim's eyes, the reader sees the changes that war brings to the community. As the situation changes over the course of the war, Tim must learn how to cope with the challenges he faces. When his father disappears, when there is not enough food to eat and when he must make decisions about the family business, Tim is forced to be a grown up and think about his family and their needs more than himself. While Tim is uncertain about things as a child, as a grown-up he knows what he must do, and he takes his responsibilities seriously. At the same time, his ideas about the war and morality become more uncertain. Tim stands between the two sides, and his growth ultimately shows that there can be no true winners in a war, since everyone pays a price.

Sam Meeker

Sam Meeker is the bold and clever older son in the Meeker family. Before the war, his brother looks up to him as a daring person, skilled at debate and filled with exciting stories. Sam is stubborn and sometimes brash. He does not think before he speaks, and he is sometimes disrespectful to his parents. When he runs off to join the Rebel army, he takes the family's gun with him, regardless of their needs or his brother's pleading. Sam strongly believes in the principles behind the war, and he is very loyal to the Rebel cause. Although his father tells him differently, Sam believes that there are causes worth dying for, and he leaves his family to fight the war. As the war progresses, Sam stays much the same. The glory of war and the principles behind it are the most important things to him. Even when his family begs him to come home, he still chooses to fight, determined to see things through to the end. He is still slightly disobedient, sneaking away from his duties as a soldier to see his friends and family. Ultimately, Sam does not die for freedom, but because others were willing to lie to save themselves.

Father (Life Meeker)

Father is a man guided by religious morality. He believes that loyalty to the king is part of obedience to God and that the price of war is too high for the principles behind it. Like his son Sam, he does not like being told what to do, and he can be stubborn when



others argue with him. Unlike Sam, Father is an adult, who takes his responsibilities to his family seriously and tries his best to protect them from harm. He is against the war, and he tries to stay out of it. He ends up being drawn into the war anyway. When Father and Tim are attacked by cow-boys, Father tries to reason with them, telling them that he is not part of the war and that he does not have an opinion about where the cattle go. Unfortunately, Father is lost to the war and ends up on a British prison ship, even though he was loyal to the king. His last words of love for his family and forgiveness for his rebellious son illustrate the loyalties and principles he lived by.

Mother (Susannah Meeker)

Susannah Meeker is a strong, moral woman at the beginning of the novel, but gradually she is worn down by the cost of war. She maintains a relationship with Sam, in spite of her husband's protest, and she continues to work in the tavern during difficult times. Over the course of the war, the hardships change her. At first she is hopeful for the survival of her husband, but gradually she becomes bitter about the war and what it costs her. Although she seems to be a gentle woman, she is willing to resort to violence to protect Tim. Later, when Sam is tried and executed, she seems to give up hope that her family will survive. After the war, she reverts to her strong self, but she never forgets what the war has cost her.

Betsy Read

Betsy is Sam's sweetheart, and she is equally passionate about the war. She is one of the main forces driving Tim's uncertainty about the war, badgering him with questions and forcing him to choose sides. She is the one who asks him if he wants his brother killed when he wants to take the Brown Bess back to Father. Betsy is protective of Sam, and she fights with Tim to get a letter when she feels Sam is in danger. Gradually, even Betsy begins to realize that Sam is not entirely right. When Mr. Meeker and Jerry Sanford die, she says that the war should end soon and that Sam should come home to be with his family. In spite of these later statements, her loyalty to Sam and willingness to fight on his behalf are constant.

General Putnam

General Putnam is the commander of Sam's encampment in Redding. He is known for being heroic, honorable and tough. He is determined to win the war, but he knows that he must keep the people on his side in order to do so. The harsh winter and rough conditions at camp have made his men rebellious, and he is willing to lose a few lives to set an example the men will live by. This attitude results in the death of Sam Meeker. Even though Sam is innocent, showing the other soldiers that stealing cattle will not be tolerated is more important to the general. Because he wants to set an example for the people, General Putnam refuses to change Sam's sentence, and his harsh rules cause Sam's execution.



The cow-boys

The cow-boys are a group of men who steal cattle from farmers and travelers in the name of the Continental army. Although they say that they are working to prevent the cattle from going to the British, in reality they are simply cattle thieves, willing to resort to violence to get their way. These cow-boys attack Tim and Father twice. The first time, on the way to Verplancks Point, they are driven off by a group of local men. The second time, on the return trip, they ambush Father and take him away. When they see Tim, they are willing to harm him too in order to take his wagon, but he tricks them into believing there is an escort coming. They finally leave him alone.

Jerry Sanford

Jerry is Tim's childhood friend and neighbor. The British capture him, simply for being in Captain Betts' house, and they take him away, even though he is only ten years old. Jerry later dies of illness on a prison ship, and the Redding community regards his death as a brutal mistake.

Mr. Heron

Mr. Heron is a rich neighbor of the Meekers. He is a local surveyor, and he serves on the Assembly before the war. During the war, Tim and others notice that although he is known as a Tory, both the British and the Rebels seem to regard him as a friend. His mysterious behavior demonstrates how the war can set neighbors against each other, since it appears that he is the one who sends the British to Captain Betts' house. After the war, he kindly gives Tim free lessons on calculating and surveying, which allows Tim to set out on a new life in Pennsylvania.

General Parsons

General Parsons is the other general who comes to Redding during the winter of 1778. Although he seems to be fond of Sam and allows him to leave his post and visit his family, he is unwilling to be involved with Sam's trial. He refuses to intervene in Sam's case, saying that General Putnam is in charge of the encampment and must do as he believes.

Mr. Beach

Mr. Beach is the Anglican minister in Redding. He tries to keep things calm between Father and Sam when they argue. In the early days of the war, he preaches about loyalty to the king and obedience to one's parents. Later, when things are more heated, he continues to pray for the king and Parliament, even after such prayers have been banned by the Rebels.



Captain Betts

Captain Betts is a neighbor of the Meekers and a member of the Rebel trainband. The British briefly capture him, and he and Mother argue over the war when he wants Tim to help raise the Rebels.

Tom Warrups

Tom is an Indian who lives in a hut behind the Reads' house. He is a friend of Sam's, yet his actions during the war are mysterious. Even though he lives on land belonging to Patriots, he delivers messages for Mr. Heron, a Tory.

Ned

Ned is a black man who belongs to the Starrs. He is killed by the British during the fight at Dan Starr's house.



Objects/Places

Redding Ridge

Redding is the home of the Meeker family and the town where they have their tavern. The area is mostly loyal to the king, but there is a division between the two areas of Redding Ridge and Redding Center. Most of the events in the novel take place in Redding, which is located in a part of Connecticut that both armies pass through several times.

The Meeker Tavern

The tavern serves food and lodges travelers. It also has a small store, and people in the town gather there to socialize as well as buy supplies. The Meekers live in the tavern, and they keep their livestock in a barn out back.

Sam's uniform

Sam arrives at the Meeker tavern proudly wearing the scarlet uniform of the Rebel army.

The Brown Bess

Father's large gun, which Sam steals when he runs off to the war.

The Two Churches

Redding Center has a Presbyterian church, while Redding Ridge has an Anglican church. The Anglican congregation is mainly loyalists and Tories.

Tom Warrups' Hut

When Sam and Father argue, Sam runs away to Tom Warrups' hut, behind the Reads' house. Tom is an Indian, and the hut is built in the traditional manner.

The Letter

Tim is supposed to carry a letter to Fairfield for Mr. Heron, but Betsy takes it away from him.



Fishing Hooks and Line

When Tim leaves to deliver Mr. Heron's letter, he lies to Father and says he is going fishing. He takes fishing hooks and line with him to make it look realistic.

The Cattle

The Meekers buy cattle and sell them in Verplancks Point to pay for the supplies they need at the tavern. Getting cattle and being able to sell them is crucial to their business, but it is on one of these journeys that Father is captured. Later, Sam is arrested and executed for supposedly stealing the cattle.

Ridgebury

A hostile Rebel-held area that Tim and Father must travel through to get to and from Verplancks Point.

New Haven

The town where Tim's cousins, the Platts, live and where Sam attends school at Yale.

Verplancks Point

A busy harbor town on the Hudson River, where Father sells cattle and buys supplies.

The Wagon

After Father is captured, Tim must make sure that the wagon gets home to the tavern, so that he and Mother will have enough supplies to keep the tavern going.

The Hemlocks

A grove of hemlock trees lines the road through Ridgebury, where Father was attacked. Tim sees signs of the struggle in the snow and realizes that the cow-boys hid in the trees and ambushed Father.

Dan Starr's House

Tim witnesses a fight between the British soldiers and several Rebels in Dan Starr's house, and he witnesses the violent deaths of several of his neighbors.



Rum and Cider

As food and money become scarcer, rum and cider become very important to the tavern. The soldiers like to drink, and Tim can easily find and buy these products.

The Encampment

General Putnam's soldiers camp just north of Colonel Read's house during the hard winter of 1778.

The Stockade

The stockade is a prison at the encampment, where Sam is kept prisoner after his arrest.

The Bayonet

Tim takes his father's bayonet and goes to the stockade to try to free his brother. The guard wakes up, and Tim throws the bayonet over the wall of the stockade.

The Gallows

The part of the encampment where Edward Jones and Sam Meeker are executed is the gallows.

Setting

My Brother Sam Is Dead opens in April 1775 with the first battle of the American Revolution, the Minutemen's defeat of the British in Lexington, Massachusetts. The story ends a year and a half later, when Sam is executed by his British captors. The reader learns in the last chapter that Tim is telling the story in 1826, when he is sixty-four years old, to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Declaration of Independence. Most of the novel's action occurs in Redding Ridge, a once peaceful Tory town in southwestern Connecticut. The town becomes embroiled in bitter turmoil, and the war's effects on the Meeker family make for a gripping story. Christopher Collier has lived in southern Connecticut almost all his life, and his knowledge of the region's history adds depth to the characters, setting, and events of the story.

Social Sensitivity

Although most contemporary young adults are aware of the horror and suffering that attend warfare, they are, nonetheless, frequently exposed to books and films that glorify past conflicts. Writers often depict the American Revolution as a clearcut moral struggle that witnessed the triumph of freedomloving patriots over their oppressors. *My Brother Sam Is Dead* refuses to simplify the issues surrounding either the American Revolution or war in general.

Mr. Meeker's Loyalist beliefs stem from his desire to maintain his business and protect his family; Sam's patriotism encourages him to place the rebel cause over family duties; and Tim remains at home, facing the unresolved conflict of divided personal loyalties. The story raises issues of family loyalty and teenagers' rights to defy parental judgment; to his father, Sam is defiant, not patriotic.

Some parents may object to the fact that the book describes violent death, although the accounts of violence are not sensationalized. Readers will note that the Colliers do not develop the book's female characters as thoroughly as they do its male characters; Sam's girlfriend Betsy Read is particularly shallow, her ideas and actions shaped by those of her boyfriend. The character Tom Warrups, however, is less stereotypical than Native Americans portrayed in many other books. Although Tom lives in a traditional tepee with a blanket flap entrance, he has become part of the white man's society, dressing as the other farmers in Redding dress and speaking English.

Literary Qualities

The Colliers' collaborative work highlights the individual strengths of each brother. James's narrative structure and dialogue combine with Christopher's historical research to create a feeling for the era and its people. James Collier does an excellent job of expanding a selected historical event into an exciting story. His characters speak in a modern dialect, a feature that makes it easier for readers to understand the book. The descriptions of everyday life in Redding Ridge are well drawn and balance the sometimes dramatic and graphic depictions of death during wartime.

The plot, with its focus on divided loyalties, compels the reader to think seriously about issues of public and private duties during wartime. The Colliers refrain from providing easy answers, assuming that young readers can think for themselves about political controversy. Though the book's ending does not provide a satisfying conclusion, the authors' addition of an epilogue and a "How much of this book is true?"

section helps to bring the book to an acceptable resolution.



Themes

Honor versus Glory

Part of the reason Tim admires his brother is because Sam is a glamorous person. He always has triumphs to report when he comes home from school, and even when he goes to war, Tim knows his brother is brave and daring. At some points during the war, Tim also craves the glory that his brother has. He wants to do something daring and brave so that his brother will be proud of him. This is the reason he agrees to deliver the message for Mr. Heron, even though it means disobeying his father and lying. Tim even remarks that glory seems more important than honor at that time.

Later, when Tim and Father travel to Verplancks Point, the journey represents an adventure to Tim. It is something exciting that he can report to Sam, something that will make him and his brother equals. When Father disappears, Tim is suddenly forced to make decisions on his own and be an adult. He realizes that being brave and being daring are not the same thing. There may not be glory in Tim's actions, but he is brave and intelligent.

Even when Tim realizes that he is an adult and that Sam will have to respect him, he still craves the glory that Sam has. It does not seem fair that Sam is off fighting the war, while Tim is at home stuck with all the work of running the tavern. When Tim comes faces to face with Sam, he realizes that Sam is only concerned with being a part of something big and the glory of fighting in the war. Tim realizes that honor and responsibility are the true signs of adulthood.

The Price of War

Throughout the novel, the families in Redding have to sacrifice because of the war, no matter which side they are on. One of the primary effects they feel is the lack of money and food, which causes them to suffer during the winters. This price of war wears on the people and can be seen particularly in Mother, who seems to give up as the war wears on. Yet, this is a temporary price to pay and has little lasting effect on the people.

The more lasting costs of war are the ones Father initially spoke of to Sam. Many lives are lost in the war. Tim witnesses the deaths of people fighting on both sides, and those deaths represent heartache to many families and hardships for many communities. These men know that there is a chance they might die when they join the war, and they decide that they are willing to pay this price for their principles. Yet the violent descriptions of death, such as the beheading of Ned, or the execution of Sam, show how horrific this price is and what the true consequences of this choice may be.

The true victims who pay the cost of the war are those not fighting on either side, but the people who become caught in the violence. Father refuses to choose a side, but he is captured by Rebels and dies on a British prison ship. Even though he does nothing



wrong, he pays the price for the war. Jerry Sanford is too young to be involved in the war, but he dies as well. His death seems to alert the community to the true cost of war. Even though the Meekers are Tories and Betsy is a Patriot, they both share in the despair and disgust over what happens to the little boy. They begin to believe that the war costs too much. The families of the dead must suffer, even if they are not involved. It is this loss that seems the most extreme and forces the reader to ponder if the outcome is worth the cost.

The Morality of War

At the beginning of the novel, religious morality is central to Tim's view of the world. He has been taught that honor and obedience are important and sloth, greed and pride are sins. His concerns over Sam and his father center on this idea of morality. He is worried that God will punish Sam for disobeying their father, and he uses these teachings as a guide for his own behavior. The community itself is governed by ideas about cordiality and morality. The neighbors on both sides are polite to each other, no matter which side they are on.

As the war begins to affect the community, the morality of the town seems to change. Neighbors report each other to the armies, and people steal cattle. Arguments grow more intense and public. Outside Redding, things seem even more extreme. Bands of cow-boys assault people and steal their cattle, and some people are beaten, and even murdered, for little or no reason. Instead of being guided by the religious morality apparent in the beginning of the book, people are being guided by the need to survive.

Mother is an exception to this. From the beginning to end of the novel, she uses religion as a guide for her actions. Even when things are at their worst, such as the night Sam is arrested, she and Tim take the time to pray. For Mother, prayer is the best way to ponder the horrible conditions they are suffering, and God will provide them with the answers.

The soldiers are at the other end of the scale. They have seen so much violence and suffered through hunger, pain and cold. Their morality has become blurred, and their actions are guided solely by their need to survive and their dependency on each other. Sam explains to Mother and Tim that it is easy to decide that a stranger is your enemy and take his cattle. The men, he says, are loyal only to each other. Even that trace of morality disappears when the soldiers are threatened. Sam is betrayed by his fellow soldiers, who lie about him to save themselves. This spectrum of changing morality is one theme that ties to many others, including the cost of war and the difference between honor and glory.



Themes/Characters

The Colliers' novel focuses on the conflict between ideological issues and personal relationships; forced to choose between political convictions and family loyalties, the Meekers are exposed to potential tragedy on both private and public fronts. *My Brother Sam Is Dead* portrays the Revolutionary War as a civil war that divides families and communities. The authors show that war unleashes forces that result in unpredictable outcomes, and claims as its victims both those who fall in battle and those whose lives are torn apart by the physical and emotional upheaval.

Sam Meeker, a sixteen-year-old student at Yale University, believes that the rebel cause is just. Like many Yale students, he wants to join the militia.

Yet Sam fails to live up to the nobility of his ideals; lazy and fond of drinking and cursing, Sam dishonors the family—at least in his brother's eyes—with his conduct. The boys' father, Life Meeker, owns a tavern and a general store. He proudly fought in the French and Indian War but does not wish to engage in rebellion against England. Argumentative and headstrong like Sam, he devoutly loves his family and England.

Fourteen-year-old Tim Meeker idolizes both his brother and his father. Tim narrates the story, and this perspective allows the reader to observe his initial innocence and his eventual perception of reality. Torn between his love for Sam and his loyalty to Life, Tim resists choosing sides. His desire to attend to the everyday concerns of his family, even during wartime, makes him highly believable. His character changes with time, especially as he recognizes that his youth does not make him inferior to his older brother. Tim quickly grows to maturity by taking charge of family responsibilities, unlike Sam, who abandons the family to fight for self-glorification.

Tim's mother, Susannah Meeker, is a proud English subject who tries to keep peace in the family. While her husband is alive, she is a strong, compassionate pioneer dedicated to his views, but after his death she becomes embittered against the war—especially when she realizes that Sam will re-enlist rather than return home to help the family.

Tom Warrups, a shabbily treated Native American, lives in fear of white civilization but is willing to take risks for his friend Sam. Sam's girlfriend—Betsy Read, daughter of the wealthy Colonel Read—has only vague ideas about the nature of war but nonetheless supports Sam's views, helping him to steal his father's gun and run away. Although Betsy's character is more stereotypical than the others, she, too, comes to understand that Sam re-enlists because he loves war more than he loves her or his family.

Style

Point of View

The story is told from the point of view of Timothy Meeker. At the start of the war, Tim is twelve years old. As readers experience the story through his eyes, they also learn about the cost of war. At first, Tim does not know or care much about the war, aside from the way it affects him personally. As the war becomes fiercer, Tim grows more aware of the different arguments that drive the war and the conflicts of truth and morality that go with it. As Tim grows up and becomes a man, the world around him changes as well. By witnessing events from Tim's perspective, the reader is able to grow with him.

Using Tim as a narrator also allows the authors to demonstrate the personal cost of war. The reader is aware of what Tim wants and how he feels about his family and the war. The reader witnesses the internal conflict, fear and pain he experiences. In many ways, Tim allows the reader to enter the life of the typical young boy of this period and experience how the conflict within his family, his community and his nation affect him on many levels.

Since Tim has friends and family members on both sides of the conflict and since his family is harmed by the actions of the two armies, he is in a position to monitor the cost of war from a somewhat impartial position. At times, Tim and the reader may side with the British, or they may side with the Rebels. Sometimes Tim agrees with Sam, and other times he agrees with his father, but there is never a clear line between the sides. Using Tim as a narrator allows the authors to demonstrate that war affects everyone. The British, the Rebels and the people caught in the middle pay the price of war.

Setting

The novel takes place during the early years of the Revolutionary war, from 1776 to 1778. The Epilogue is told from the perspective of 1826, looking back. The birth of the United States was a turbulent time, and the settings that the authors use demonstrate this. The main action takes place in Redding, Connecticut. The people of the area are mostly Tories loyal to the king, but there are also Rebels in the area. The two churches in the town and the division of Redding Ridge and Redding Center further illustrate the divided nature of the town. Divisions are important throughout the novel, as each character is pulled to choose sides and divided against neighbors and family.

Using the tavern as a setting allows the narrator access to many events he would not have otherwise witnessed. Tim is not constrained by the constant work of farm life, and the varieties of travelers that pass through the tavern allow him to see people from both sides of the conflict. Although the town is mostly Tory and Father is against the war, the tavern must be a neutral place if the Meekers want to survive. Although many debates occur in the tavern and sometimes the Meekers fight with people over the war, they



must continue to serve both the British and the Rebels if they want to keep their business, and themselves, alive.

The journey to and from Verplancks Point takes the characters through additional settings. Visiting these other places represents a great adventure for Tim, and the sight of the Hudson River thrills him. Although this journey is an exciting time for Tim, the settings also reveal how different life is outside of Redding and how insecure the war has made the countryside. The eerie journey through the snow and the frightening attack by the cow-boys show how terrible and turbulent the war can be. It is in this setting that Tim's life drastically changes through the disappearance of his father. On that quiet stretch of road, Tim becomes an adult.

Language and Meaning

The novel uses modern language in both the descriptions and dialogue. Throughout the book, references to God and sin show how the morality of the people is ingrained in their lives and language and how this changes over the course of the war. The use of animal imagery, such as calling the soldiers "beasts" or talking about the slaughter of cattle reminds the reader of the inhuman aspects of war. The authors use language to talk about the morality of war and the cost of war in many different ways. The language used is closely tied to the perspective of the narrator, and most of the sentences and sentiments are tied to the boy who is telling the story.

As the story continues, the dialogue of the characters shifts to match the tension that surrounds their situation. In the beginning, sin and obedience to God are continuous themes in Tim's thoughts. Neighbors speak to each other politely, and being cordial is important to the community. Toward the end of the war, less courtesy is seen in the dialogue. On occasion, Tim swears or does not address an elder as "sir." This gradual shift is another way of portraying how life is becoming more violent and desperate because of the war.

Structure

The novel is divided into fourteen chapters, with an epilogue and short afterward on history. The story follows the events in chronological order, focusing primarily on the events directly affecting Tim Meeker. All the information is filtered through the narrator, so the focus is on his concerns. The pace of the story is very quick, but the authors do take time to examine the questions that preoccupy the narrator.

While some events unfold over several chapters, at other times several years pass in just a few pages. The longer passages involve those events that involve Sam, as the novel is centered on Sam's life and death. The events that change the lives of the characters the most are the ones that unfold over chapters. These events are also foreshadowed by earlier comments. An example of this is when Tim remarks that his father takes the Brown Bess with him to Verplancks Point for protection. The journey

that Tim and his father make without this protection, and Father's abduction, are detailed over several chapters.



Quotes

"I think common sense will prevail. Nobody wants a rebellion except fools and hotheads." Chapter 1, p. 6.

"It was one thing for Sam to say he was going to fight the British; they were a long way from here. But to take Father's gun was pretty bad; Father was right here and he seemed a lot more real to me than the British did." Chapter 1, p. 18.

"It's not the money, it's the principle."

"Principle, Sam? You may know principle, Sam, but I know war." Chapter 1, p. 21.

"Oh God, Sam, what did you have to fight for? Why didn't you stay in college?"

"I couldn't Tim. How could I not go when all my friends were going?"

"I understood that, but I wasn't going to give in. 'Your family ought to be more important than your friends.'" Chapter 4, p. 58

"I guess that being a soldier probably didn't have much glory to it, either, that it was mostly just a lot of hard work. But still, I envied Sam, and I wished I were old enough to do something glorious, too." Chapter 5, p. 64.

"Why should he have all the glory? Why shouldn't I have some, too? I wanted him to respect me and be proud of me and not think of me as just his little brother anymore. I couldn't score telling points in debates the way he did, but I could be just as brave as he was and do daring things, too." Chapter 5, p. 70.

"I was scared, that was the truth. It felt so lonely to be by myself with Father gone and maybe dead and nobody but myself to do - to do whatever has to be done." Chapter 9, p. 120.

"But that morning after that terrible trip home, right from the first moment we got finished saying grace, I began planning the things that I had to do - which things had to be done first and what was the best way to get them done. It was funny: it didn't even cross my mind to stall or try to get out of the work. I didn't wait for Mother to tell me what to do: I brought the subject up myself." Chapter 10, p. 133.

"Don't think that I was happy about leaving. I felt terrible. I remember running down that road in the rain being mad and cursing him for what he did. But all the while I was cursing I kept remembering things like out trips over to Verplancks Point, and him taking me down to New Haven to get admitted to Yale, and buying me new clothes there, and everything else, and finally I stopped cursing and I just felt terrible and wished we hadn't fought." Chapter 11, p. 157.



"For the first time in my life I know that Sam was wrong about something; I knew that I understood something better than he did.... Knowing that about Sam gave me a funny feeling. I didn't feel like his little brother so much anymore, I felt more like his equal."
Chapter 11, p. 163.

"Father said, 'In war the dead pay the debts of the living,' and they have paid us well. But somehow, even fifty years later, I keep thinking that there may have been another way, beside war, to achieve the same end." Epilogue, p. 211.

Adaptations

The Collier brothers have collaborated on two other books. In *The Bloody Country*, fifteen-year-old Ben Buck moves with his family from Connecticut to Pennsylvania in the mid-eighteenth century only to become involved in the property conflict between the two states.

Wanting to be a hero, fourteen-year-old Justin becomes involved in Shays Rebellion in *The Winter Hero*.

Several of James Collier's other books may be of interest to readers of *My Brother Sam Is Dead*. In *Battleground: The United States Army in World War II*, Collier describes the four years of war and outlines the strategy that led American forces to victory. In *The Teddy Bear Habit*, eleven-year-old George Stable yearns to be an entertainer and finds that his childhood teddy bear is his good luck charm. A New York record company attempts to turn George into a singing, guitar-playing teen-age idol in the book's sequel, *Rich and Famous: the Further Adventures of George Stable*. *It's Murder at St. Basket's* tells of Christopher Quincy, an American boy enrolled at an ancient London school by his father, a British enthusiast. Christopher uses his wits to solve a mystery with his English and Pakistani roommates.

Media for Education of Los Angeles has published a play script for *My Brother Sam Is Dead* entitled *Play Script: The Decision* (1976). The script is supplemented with suggestions for sets, props, casting, and costuming.



Topics for Discussion

1. Why does the gun, which the Meekers call Brown Bess, play a major part in the beginning of the story? Why is this symbol so important to both Sam and his father?
2. Is Tim loyal to his father, a Tory? Is he loyal to Sam, a rebel? Why is Tim torn in his decision? Does he ever choose sides? Which side do you think he chooses?
3. Does Tim have a good opportunity to serve as a double agent? Is he successful as a spy? Why or why not?
4. Which conflict is the more interesting to you: the one between Sam and Life, or the war between the countries?

Why?

5. What one event marks a change in Tim that makes him mature overnight?
6. Do you think the authors resorted to sensationalism in their descriptions of the gory scenes of war? Of Sam's execution? Explain your reaction to the conflict and its outcome.
7. What do you learn of Tim's character from his first-person account of the story? Does hearing the story from Tim's point of view make you care more about Tim and what happens to him?



Essay Topics

Discuss the relationship between Tim and Sam and how it changes over the course of the novel.

Religion and morality are constant themes in the novel. Discuss how Tim's thoughts on morality change over time. How does this effect his view of the war?

If you were Tim, would you be able to choose a side? What would you do differently?

Tim is forced to grow up quickly when his father disappears. Describe how the war has changed his role in the family and how this effects his relationship with his mother and brother.

Many of the victims described in the novel are not active participants in the war. How do the deaths of Jerry Sanford and Father differ from those of the soldiers? What do you think the authors are trying to say by including so many examples of bystanders paying the price of war?

There are two critical scenes involving the Meekers' guns. Discuss the differences between the scene when Tim points the Brown Betty at Sam and when Tim considers killing the guard with the bayonet.

Tim must make a difficult decision when his father disappears. Describe how he decides what to do and how this impacts the rest of the family.

There are many generals, captains and colonels in this book. Do they seem to have control over this war? Describe the different ways the officers interact with the citizens of Redding.

While Tim is at church with his parents, Sam has run away to Tom Warrups' shack. Discuss the differences between these two settings and what they may symbolize about the brothers.



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Do you feel that the characters in *My Brother Sam Is Dead* resemble real people, or are they stereotypes of the historical period? Give specific examples from the book to support your opinion.
2. Does this story have relevance today? Explain your answer.
3. What purpose did the authors have in writing the book? Did they succeed?
4. Prepare a debate supporting the Tory point of view and the Whig point of view.
5. Read either *The Bloody Country* or *The Winter Hero*, also by James and Christopher Collier, and compare its protagonist to Tim Meeker in *My Brother Sam Is Dead*.
6. Sam Meeker is, at age sixteen, a student at Yale University. How did eighteenth-century American colleges and universities differ from those of today? When were the first institutions of higher learning established in the colonies? What sorts of subjects did college students study?
7. Does the story ever become preachy about the issue of war? Read another book about the American Revolution, such as Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain*. Is the author's approach to war the same as the Colliers'? If not, how is it different?

Further Study

Collier, Christopher. "Criteria for Historical Fiction." *School Library Journal* (August 1982): 32-33. Collier discusses the novels he has co-authored with his brother.

"Johnny and Sam: Old and New Approaches to the American Revolution." *Horn Book* (April 1976): 132-138. Collier contrasts the approach in *My Brother Sam Is Dead* to Esther Forbes's approach in *Johnny Tremain*.

Commire, Anne, ed. *Something about the Author*. Vols. 8, 16. Detroit: Gale Research, 1976, 1979. Contain accounts of James and Christopher Collier's lives, and provide some analysis of their works.

Etheridge, James, ed. *Contemporary Authors*. Vols. 9-10. Detroit: Gale Research, 1964. Contains a biographical sketch of James Lincoln Collier and a bibliography of his works.

Glazer, Joan I., and Gurney Williams III.

Introduction to Children's Literature.

New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979. Discusses *My Brother Sam Is Dead* from a Tory focus.

Lukens, Rebecca J. *A Critical Handbook of Children's Literature*. Oxford, OH: Scott, Foresman, 1982. Provides insight into Tim's internal conflict as he struggles with his decision to be a Tory like his father or a rebel like his brother in *My Brother Sam Is Dead*.

Moir, Hughes. "Profile: James and Christopher Collier—More Than Just a Good Read." *Language Arts* (March 1978): 373-378. Moir gives insight into the authors' collaboration and their purpose for writing. Describes each author's concerns in depicting history accurately.



Copyright Information

Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Editor

Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Cover Design

Amanda Mott

Cover Art is "Pierrot," 1947, by William Baziotès Oil on Canvas, 42 1/8 x 36 Donated by the Alisa Mellon Bruce Fund, ©, 1996 Reproduced with Permission from the Board of Trustees, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction

Includes bibliographical references and index

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for the works of authors of popular fiction. Includes biography data, publishing history, and resources for the author of each analyzed work.

ISBN 0-933833-41-5 (Volumes 1-3, Biography Series)

ISBN 0-933833-42-3 (Volumes 1-8, Analyses Series)

ISBN 0-933833-38-5 (Entire set, 11 volumes)

1. Popular literature—Bio-bibliography. 2. Fiction—19th century—Bio-bibliography. 3. Fiction—20th century—Bio-bibliography. I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952-

Z6514.P7B43 1996[PN56.P55]809.3—dc20 96-20771 CIP

Copyright ©, 1996, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing Corp., P.O. Box 830, Osprey, FL 34229-0830

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1996