

The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg Study Guide

**The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg by
Rodman Philbrick**

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Plot Summary

The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg by bestselling novelist Rodman Philbrick is the story of a young boy who runs away to find his brother, a young boy who has been sold into the army during the Civil War. In this novel, Homer has many adventures as he follows his brother to the Battle of Gettysburg. Homer meets a Quaker who is smuggling slaves out of the country, a preacher who is easily tricked by a con woman and her accomplice, and a medicine show owner who turns out to be a spy for the Confederates. In the end, Homer saves his brother from sure death only to place himself in mortal danger. The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg is a funny novel that presents true history to readers in a way that is both eye-opening, touching, and provides for a good laugh.

Homer P. Figg and his brother, Harold, live with their uncle. Their uncle is a cruel man who makes the children live in the barn. One day Homer takes a crust of bread from the slop meant for the pigs, causing the uncle to become angry. Harold defends his brother by pushing the uncle into the dirt. A short time later, a group of men come and force Harold to take an oath that forces him to fight in the Union Army during the Civil War. Later, Homer overhears the men talking about how the oath was not legal.

Homer runs away with the intention of telling his brother he does not have to fight in the army. However, on the first night Homer runs into a couple of men who have taken a black man captive and plan to sell him and the slaves he has been leading to safety in Canada back into slavery. However, they need Homer's help finding the slaves. Homer is sent to the home of Mr. Brewster to find out where he is hiding the slaves. However, Mr. Brewster has figured out what is happening and tells Homer he knows. Then Mr. Brewster shows Homer where the slaves are and trusts him to decide what to do.

Homer lies to the criminals and leads them to Mr. Brewster's mines, where they are ambushed by the conductor who is supposed to lead the slaves to freedom. The slaves are saved. Mr. Brewster offers to adopt Homer, but Homer insists on continuing his search for his brother. Mr. Brewster sends a new preacher with Homer named Mr. Willow, who has been entrusted with enough money to buy back Harold should it be necessary.

Before they even board the ship, Mr. Willow is spotted by a couple of con people. The woman seduces Mr. Willow and convinces him to give her the money Mr. Brewster has handed over for Harold. When Homer protests, he is knocked out and placed in a pig crate. This is where Homer is found some time later by Professor Fleabottom, the owner of a medicine show.

Professor Fleabottom takes Homer into his show and makes him the pig boy. After the first show, however, Homer learns that Professor Fleabottom is selling whiskey to the army soldiers. Professor Fleabottom explains that these men are about to die and they deserve to have a few moments of relaxation first.



While running from some angry army officers, the medicine show runs into a man with a hot air balloon. As they enjoy breakfast with this strange man, a group of military officers come up on them and accuse Professor Fleabottom of spying for the Confederates. As they attempt to arrest everyone, Homer gets away in the hot air balloon.

Homer crash lands in Confederate territory when the balloon gets a tear in it. As he waits in a barn stall, Homer learns that the Battle of Gettysburg is just beginning. When a call to arms takes away the soldiers guarding him, Homer steals a horse and rides to the Union side of the battle. There Homer begins searching for his brother. Homer runs into Mr. Willow, who has joined the army to make amends for allowing himself to be swindled.

Homer finds Harold only to learn he has been arrested for cowardice. Harold's regiment is called to arms and Colonel Chamberland frees the prisoners so that they might fight as well. Harold fights bravely as Homer brings the soldiers ammunition. When they run out of ammunition, the men fix bayonets and charge the enemy. Homer tries to stop Harold when he takes over the regimental flag. To stop him, Homer shoots Harold in the leg. When Harold falls, Homer takes up the flag.

After the battle, Harold is released from the army and he and Homer live on their own for several years until Mr. Brewster finds them. Harold recovers from his injury only to get an infection that causes him to lose his leg. Despite this, the two boys live happily with Mr. Brewster.



Chapters 1-4

Chapters 1-4 Summary

This novel is set during the Civil War, beginning just months before the Battle of Gettysburg. The Confederates were winning most of the battles in the beginning of the war and they would have been able to declare victory within days of winning at Gettysburg. Therefore, the Battle of Gettysburg is considered the turning point of the Civil War as it would prove to be in the life of the hero of this novel, Homer P. Figg.

Chapter 1. Homer and his brother Harold have been living with their uncle since their mother's death eight years ago. The boys dislike their uncle because he is unkind to them and forces them to live in the barn. One day, the uncle catches Homer eating a piece of bread from the slop meant for the pigs. The uncle moves to hit Homer, but Harold grabs him first. The uncle ends up in the hog pen, face down. The boys run to the barn and hide, but their uncle leaves the farm without a word.

Chapter 2. The uncle returns with a group of men, including the local judge and a soldier. The men force Harold to take the oath to join the army even though he is only seventeen. When Homer tries to interfere, the soldier says he will shoot Harold for going against the oath.

Chapter 3. Homer is put into the cellar, where he listens to his uncle get drunk with one of his friends. Homer overhears his uncle admit to selling Harold into the army to take the place of a rich man's son. Homer also hears his uncle say that the oath is not legal because it was not done properly, the draft has not gone into effect yet, and Harold is not of age. Homer decides he must go find his brother and tell him the truth.

Chapter 4. Homer digs his way out of the root cellar and escapes the farm with his mother's horse, Bob.

Chapters 1-4 Analysis

These first few chapters introduce the main characters and the conflict that will move the plot along. Homer and Harold are brothers who were orphaned and left in the care of their only relative, an uncle who is cruel and does not want the boys around. This uncle is so cruel that he forces the boys to live in a barn and feeds them so little that Homer takes food from the slop meant for the pigs. This leads to a confrontation between the uncle and Harold. It is a difficult situation, one that was common in the time period of the Civil War. Many children were orphaned due to the hardships of living in this time period and many children depended on one another for survival. It is clear in these chapters that Homer and Harold have grown to depend on one another, especially Homer on Harold because Harold is much older.



The uncle sells Harold into the army using a law that was new at the time. This law allowed rich men to pay poor families so that their sons would go into the army in place of the rich man's son. The uncle uses this new rule to sell Harold into the army for a local rich man who does not want his son going into the army. Harold is under age and the new law has not gone into effect yet, but Harold does not know this. When Homer learns the truth, he decides to save Harold, suggesting not only a brave young character, but one who might be a little too naive to survive in this harsh world.



Chapters 5-9

Chapters 5-9 Summary

Chapter 5. Homer walks the horse for a while before he climbs on and continues through the night. Before Homer has gone far, he hears voices in the darkness.

Chapter 6. Two men, Stink and Smelt, come across Homer and force him off the horse. The men think Homer is a spy at first, come to get information for the judge back in Pine Swamp. Homer tells them he is looking for his brother, but embellishes the facts with a few lies. This gives Smelt an idea.

Chapter 7. Smelt shows Homer their prisoner, a black man who claims to be a free man from Rhode Island. The men plan to kill the prisoner, Samuel Reed, until Homer convinces them they would get more money if they sold him into slavery. Smelt then walks Homer through the woods and shows him a big house. Smelt tells Homer that runaway slaves are hidden somewhere in the house or in the mines belonging to the man who owns the house. Homer is to pretend to be an orphan searching for his brother and get information on where the runaway slaves are hidden.

Chapter 8. Homer passes out from lack of food. Homer wakes to find himself under the care of a kind housekeeper. Homer tells another of his embellished stories as the housekeeper, Mrs. Bean, makes him a large meal.

Chapter 9. Mr. Brewster, the owner of the house, comes into the kitchen and is introduced to Homer. Mr. Brewster is a Quaker and speaks plain speech. Mr. Brewster takes Homer to see the mines, explaining about the tourmaline they take from the mines to make costume jewelry. As they stand on the edge of the mine, Mr. Brewster tells Homer he knows he is in league with Stink and Smelt.

Chapters 5-9 Analysis

Homer is a brave young man, setting out to save his older brother when he is only twelve. However, Homer seems to have misjudged the world he is living in. Homer thinks he can just find his brother and go home. The truth is that Homer lives in a time that is very dangerous, especially to a boy on his own. Homer quickly runs into a couple of criminals who are on the trail of a group of runaway slaves trying to escape to Canada. A touch of true history comes into the novel at this point as the author explains the fugitive slave law that will allow Stink and Smelt to sell any slaves they should find back into slavery even though they will not be returning them to their original owners or even able to prove they were slaves in the first place and not free men like Samuel Reed claims to be.

Homer finds himself in the home of Mr. Brewster, where he has been told to find out where the slaves are hiding. Homer finds himself caught in a strange position. Homer

has found the type of home life he has always wanted, but he must betray Mr. Brewster in order to escape the danger of the criminals. When Mr. Brewster announces that he knows what Homer is doing, it complicates things, and the reader wonders what will happen next.



Chapters 10-14

Chapters 10-14 Summary

Chapter 10. Homer tries to explain his association with Stink and Smelt, but Mr. Brewster does not seem to care about explanations. Instead, Mr. Brewster explains the underground railroad and the role Samuel Reed plays in it.

Chapter 11. Mr. Brewster takes Homer to the basement of his house and shows him where a large group of slaves wait to go to Canada. Homer can see the people are frightened. Homer asks Mr. Brewster what he should do with Smelt, but Mr. Brewster tells him the decision is his. Homer suggests they get guns to defend the slaves, but Mr. Brewster tells him as a Quaker he cannot touch a gun.

Chapter 12. Homer goes to meet Smelt and tells him that the slaves are hidden in the mine under a door in the dirt. Smelt and Stink march Homer to the mine to show them. Smelt promises to kill Homer if there is no door. Just as Smelt and Stink are about to see the truth, Samuel Reed comes out of nowhere and beats them with an iron bar.

Chapter 13. Samuel Reed, who regrets the need for violence, decides they must move the slaves out that night, despite his personal exhaustion. As the slaves move off to find freedom in Canada, Homer tries to escape too, but Mrs. Bean will not let him.

Chapter 14. Mr. Brewster invites Homer to stay with him and Mrs. Bean. Homer considers it, but he is worried about Harold. When Mr. Brewster realizes that Homer plans to continue his journey, he arranges for a young preacher to accompany him. Not only this, but Mr. Brewster gives this preacher money to buy back Harold if necessary.

Chapters 10-14 Analysis

Mr. Brewster tells Homer what Smelt and Stink want to know and then tells Homer it is up to him what he does with that information. Homer does not know what to do, but he knows he cannot do nothing. This again shows Homer's character. Homer is basically a good person despite his penchant for lying.

Homer lies again, this time to the bad guys, and places his own life in danger. Instead, Homer is saved by the same man whose life he saved earlier in the novel. Now Homer is free of the bad guys and can do what he likes. Despite the opportunity to remain in the lap of luxury with the Brewsters, Homer insists he must find his brother. This again shows the depth of the relationship between these two and Homer's basic good character. It also leads Homer directly into a new adventure.



Chapters 15-19

Chapters 15-19 Summary

Chapter 15. Mr. Brewster gives instructions to Mr. Willow, the young preacher he has asked to accompany Homer in his search for Harold. Homer has never been on a train or steamship, but neither has Mr. Willow. Mr. Willow proves to be something of a wimp when it comes to new things.

Chapter 16. When they arrive in Portland, Maine, they get lost on the way to the harbor. Mr. Willow finally allows Homer to direct him and they find the ship they have tickets to board. They meet a young woman and her brother on the dock.

Chapter 17. Homer immediately recognizes this couple as being con artists, but Mr. Willow is taken in by the woman's beauty. Against Homer's advice, Mr. Willow tells them about his and Homer's mission and the money he carries. Homer manages to get Mr. Willow on the ship and away from Miss Nibbly and her brother, but Mr. Willow is love sick and eager to see her again. During the night, Homer is tricked into leaving his and Mr. Willow's cabin. When he returns, it is to learn that Mr. Willow and Miss Nibbly are engaged.

Chapter 18. Homer tries to talk Mr. Willow out of the engagement, or at least to give him the money meant for his brother, but Mr. Willow will hear none of it. When Homer threatens to tell the captain of the ship about Miss Nibbly and her brother, he is hit on the head and knocked unconscious.

Chapter 19. Homer wakes in a pig crate on the dock. Mr. Willow and the Nibblys are gone. A group of people on the dock mistake Homer for a boy raised as a pig. A man comes along and demands Homer be released from the pig crate. This man, Professor Fenton J. Fleabottom, takes Homer away from the dock and offers him a job with his traveling medicine show.

Chapters 15-19 Analysis

Homer has quite an adventure with Mr. Willow. The reader thought Homer might be naive at the beginning of the novel, but his naivety is nothing near as bad as Mr. Willow's. Mr. Willow has never been outside of the small Maine town where he was born and raised. This makes Mr. Willow vulnerable not only to becoming scared on a train and getting lost in a big city, but also to the wiles of a beautiful woman. Homer can see the scam Miss Nibbly and her brother are pulling on Mr. Willow because he understands something of the darker side of human nature thanks to his uncle and Stink and Smelt, but Mr. Willow will not listen to a child.

Homer has found and lost the best opportunity he has for rescuing his brother in Mr. Willow. Now Homer is a pig boy traveling with a medicine show. The reader wonders if Homer will ever really find his brother.



Chapters 20-25

Chapters 20-25 Summary

Chapter 20. Homer tells Fleabottom about his search for his brother. Fleabottom promises to help if Homer will join his medicine show. Fleabottom then gives his tattooed girl some money to get Homer a bath.

Chapter 21. Homer tries to talk Minerva out of making him take a bath, but is unsuccessful. Back at the dock, Fleabottom is in a hurry to leave, acting as though he is running from something.

Chapter 22. Homer goes to New Jersey with Fleabottom and his show. Homer thinks he can see his brother on the dock at Jersey City.

Chapter 23. Homer rushes toward the soldier he believes is Harold. However, the boy turns out to be someone else. The boy promises to keep an eye out for Harold. Later that night, the medicine show sets up near an Army encampment.

Chapter 24. Homer watches most of the medicine show from his tent. At the end, Homer is brought out with three pigs and pretends as though he was raised by pigs. After the show, Fleabottom sells his elixir to the soldiers, claiming it will heal all that ails. However, the elixir proves to be plain whiskey.

Chapter 25. Homer asks Fleabottom about the whiskey and is told the soldiers deserve some fun before they go into battle. For several weeks, Homer travels with Fleabottom's medicine show. Fleabottom stops as many soldiers as he can and asks about Harold. Some of the soldiers accuse Fleabottom of spying for the south. Then one night Homer sees Fleabottom give a rider on horseback some sort of package in the middle of the night.

Chapters 20-25 Analysis

Homer teams up with a medicine show and learns some new hard truths. Fleabottom tells Homer of the hardships the soldiers are bound to face, including death. Fleabottom thinks that giving these young men liquor is giving them a few, last moments of happiness before they go off to war.

Fleabottom seems like a caring, understanding man who is not completely in support of the war. As these chapters go on, the reader learns that Fleabottom is trying hard to learn where Harold might be, but he also seems interested in the movements of the troops throughout the country. This is questioned by some soldiers, but no one seems to question Fleabottom's loyalty when he uses Harold as an excuse. However, Homer learns it is just an excuse when he sees Fleabottom giving intelligence to a rider in the middle of the night.



Chapters 26-30

Chapters 26-30 Summary

Chapter 26. One afternoon, Homer and the medicine show come across a group of wagons carrying the dead. One of the wagons has a broken wheel, so Fleabottom stops to help. They learn that the commanding general of the Union troops has resigned and been replaced with another. Fleabottom suggests to Homer that this could bring a swift end to the war.

Chapter 27. Outside of Lancaster, Pennsylvania, the medicine show runs into a hot air balloon flown by a young man who was part of an experiment using hot air balloons to track troop movements. Over breakfast, the young man with the balloon laments the failure of the program.

Chapter 28. A group of military officers surrounds the medicine show members and calls out for Fleabottom to surrender. They claim that Fleabottom is really Reginald Robertson Crockett, a known spy from the Confederacy. They want to arrest Fleabottom for spying, along with everyone else in the show. Just as they attempt to grab Homer, he manages to climb into the hot air balloon's basket and escape.

Chapter 29. Homer sails for hours in the hot air balloon until it gets a tear in the silk and begins to go down.

Chapter 30. Homer lands right in the middle of the Confederate Calvary. Homer is placed in a barn stall along with another Union prisoner, journalist Jonathon Griswold. Homer tells his story to Griswold, adding enough embellishment to make it seem fantastic. Then the wounded start coming in.

Chapters 26-30 Analysis

Homer might not have known it, but Fleabottom was sneaking information to the Confederates. This comes back to haunt them when the military catches up to them and tries to arrest them all. Once again, fortune has fallen on Homer. A man with a hot air balloon has joined the group just a short time before the military catches up with them. Homer uses the balloon to escape, but finds himself crash landing in the middle of the Confederate Calvary.

A short time before Fleabottom meets his fate in the military, he learns that Mead has replaced the commanding general of the Union Army. A reader who knows history will realize that this event took place shortly before the Battle of Gettysburg. In fact, Homer has landed just outside of Gettysburg, Pennsylvania the day the fighting is to begin.



Chapters 31-36

Chapters 31-36 Summary

Chapter 31. There were many wounded from the first fights at Gettysburg. Homer saw many things he should not have seen. Then word came that the Confederates were on the verge of winning and they needed every man they had. All the able soldiers left, leaving Homer and Griswold unguarded. Homer takes a small pony and leaves.

Chapter 32. Homer rides over the battlefield, barely aware of the fighting going on around him. Homer is rescued by a soldier who takes him to the back of the Union lines. Homer asks about the Maine regiments and is sent to a group further back, but these men have never heard of Harold.

Chapter 33. Homer is awoken the following morning by Private Willow. Willow tells Homer he joined the military after realizing the mistake he made with Miss Nibbly. Willow apologizes to Homer and tells him that his brother might be with Chamberlain's men, a regiment due to arrive in a few hours. Homer is waiting on the road when Colonel Chamberlain's men arrive, only to discover his brother is a prisoner, charged with mutiny.

Chapter 34. Harold tells Homer that he was happy in the Army at first, until his sergeant kept telling him what to do. One day Harold got mad and hit his sergeant. Harold then tells Homer that he wants to stay with the Army and that he likes not having to care for Homer all the time. Harold then tells Homer to go home, but before he can, Chamberlain comes and tells the prisoners that he will free them if they will fight to protect a small hill from the Confederates. The prisoners agree. Homer refuses to leave his brother.

Chapter 35. Homer is told to stay back out of the way, but instead, he begins bringing ammunition to the soldiers. Soon they run out of ammunition and Homer hopes the fighting will stop. Instead, Chamberlain orders his men to fix bayonets. The soldiers rush down the hill and fight the Confederates hand to hand. When the soldier carrying the flag dies in front of Harold, he picks up the flag. Convinced Harold will die, Homer grabs a gun the sergeant has dropped and shoots Harold in the leg. Homer then picks up the flag and carries it down the hill. A Confederate soldier nearly kills Homer, but Chamberlain comes to his rescue.

Chapter 36. Homer stays with Harold in the hospital, where he tells Chamberlain the truth about his age. Chamberlain arranges for Harold to be released from the army. Harold and Homer wander around for a time, finally making their way back to Mr. Brewster in Maine. Harold loses his leg from an infection. However, Harold has no hard feelings against Homer.

Chapters 31-36 Analysis

Homer is at the Battle of Gettysburg. A reader who knows history will know this was a bloody, three day battle in which many men died, both Union and Confederate. Homer somehow manages to get across the battlefield without a scratch and find his brother, only to learn that Harold was happy being away from his cruel uncle and the responsibility of his little brother. Not only this, but Harold has been arrested for mutiny right before the most pivotal battle of the Civil War.

Harold is a member of the 20th Maine led by Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain. This leader is infamous for his stand at Gettysburg in which he used bayonets to keep the Confederates from taking Little Round Top during the battle. Again, the author has used his comical characters to tell a true story of history. Chamberlain was a real person and most of his actions as portrayed in these chapters of the novel are true.

In the end, Homer shoots his beloved brother in the leg and causes him to lose his leg. However, the two boys end up living with Mr. Brewster in a lifestyle that is much kinder and better than the one they had before. For these two boys, they have found a happily ever after.



Characters

Homer P. Figg

Homer P. Figg is a twelve-year-old boy living with his uncle when the novel begins. Homer's mother died several years ago and Homer has been living in his uncle's barn, working for little more than table scraps. One day, when Homer takes food from the slop meant for the pigs, the uncle becomes enraged and gets into a confrontation with Harold. This leads to the uncle selling Harold into the army.

Homer is a precocious young man who is incredibly brave. Homer runs away from his uncle's place and goes after Harold, unafraid of the things that await him out in the world. Despite running into terrible criminals, losing all his money, and being mistaken for a pig, Homer continues to search for his brother until he finds him. Not only this, but when Homer finds his brother, he helps him fight one of the most notorious battles in the Civil War.

Harold Figg

Harold Figg is the seventeen-year-old brother of Homer. Harold is sold into the army and forced to take the oath. Harold should be upset about this, especially since the whole thing is illegal, but Harold finds he likes being away from his uncle and his little brother. However, Harold dislikes the sergeant, who is constantly telling him what to do. One day Harold strikes his sergeant and is quickly arrested for mutiny. This appears to be a show of cowardice, but Harold shows his strength and courage when he fights alongside Colonel Chamberlain on Little Round Top at Gettysburg.

Stink and Smelt

Stink and Smelt are a pair of criminals who are in the middle of a scheme to find escaped slaves and sell them back into slavery. These criminals come across Homer on his first night away from his uncle's house and force him to help in their scheme. In the end, however, these men are not able to conceal their intentions from the man hiding the slaves and are found out. The men are beaten by the man they threatened to kill and sell into slavery despite his birthright of freedom.

Mr. Jedediah Brewster

Mr. Jedediah Brewster is a wealthy man who bought property in Maine with the intention of bottling spring water, but he found a vein of gemstones that he decided to mine and sell for costume jewelry. Mr. Brewster is a Quaker and believes that fighting in a war or to protect himself is wrong, but Mr. Brewster also believes that slavery is wrong. For this



reason, Mr. Brewster's home is a stop on the underground railroad that helped thousands of slaves escape to Canada before and during the Civil War.

Mr. Brewster takes Homer in when he appears on his property, despite knowing that Homer was sent there by Stink and Smelt. Mr. Brewster gives Homer the information Stink and Smelt are looking for and tells him to deal with it as he sees fit. When Homer makes the right choice, Mr. Brewster offers to adopt him. Instead, Mr. Brewster arranges for Mr. Willow to escort Homer in his search for his brother.

Mr. Webster B. Willow

Mr. Webster B. Willow is a newly ordained minister. Mr. Brewster has promised to help Mr. Willow find a congregation, and Mr. Willow believes that Mr. Brewster's request that Mr. Willow escort Homer to find his brother is a test. Mr. Willow wants to do well, but he is a naive young man who is unable to deal with the chaos of a big city. Not only this, but when a pretty woman targets Mr. Willow in a con to steal his money, Mr. Willow falls for it, despite Homer's protests. Mr. Willow ends up penniless and in the army in the hopes of righting his wrongs.

Miss Nibbly and Frank Nibbly

Miss Nibbly is a beautiful con artist who targets Mr. Willow on the dock before he and Homer board the steamship. Miss Nibbly learns why Mr. Willow is traveling with Homer and that Mr. Willow has a large amount of money to buy Harold back, if that should be necessary. Miss Nibbly learns about this money and she quickly convinces Mr. Willow to marry her and give the money to her brother, Frank Nibbly. Mr. Willow does, but later learns the Nibblys are not who they said they were.

Professor Fenton J. Fleabottom/Reginald Robertson Crockett

Professor Fenton J. Fleabottom is a medicine man who runs a traveling show. Fleabottom travels around the country, putting on something like a freak show and selling his elixir, a medicine that Homer soon learns is only whiskey. Fleabottom is only an alias, however, as Homer later learns. Fleabottom is really Reginald Robertson Crockett, a Confederate loyalist who moves around the North collecting information that he then sends to the Confederate military. Fleabottom is caught when his brother, the messenger, is caught by the Union military. However, Fleabottom escapes, only to be killed on the battlefield at Gettysburg.



Minerva

Minerva is a girl who works with Fleabottom's traveling medicine show. Minerva has multiple tattoos all over her body. Fleabottom tells show visitors that Minerva got the tattoos when she was kidnapped in the south seas, but this does not appear to be the truth. Minerva quickly befriends Homer and acts as something like a big sister to him during his time with the traveling medicine show.

Uncle Squinton Leach

Uncle Squinton Leach is the uncle who takes custody of Homer and Harold after their mother's death. Squinton was married to the sister of Homer's mother, but she was long dead before Homer's mother died. Uncle Squinton is a cruel man who kept the children just to force them to work. Uncle Squinton sold Harold into the army, the act that began the conflict that will propel the plot of this novel.

Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain

Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain is a real officer of the Union Army who fought at Gettysburg as the commander of the 20th Maine. Chamberlain and his men fought at the top of Little Round Top, charged with keeping the Confederate Army from taking the hill and thus giving them access to the Union's left flank. Chamberlain's men fought hard, but soon ran out of ammunition. Chamberlain ordered his men to fix bayonets and fight hand to hand combat. Chamberlain's men won the charge, forcing the remaining Confederates to surrender. In this novel, Homer and Harold fight alongside Chamberlain during this notorious battle.



Objects/Places

Money

Miss Nibbly and her brother, Frank, target Mr. Willow because of the money Mr. Brewster gave him to buy Harold Figg's release from the army.

Elixir

Professor Fleabottom sells an elixir to soldiers who come to see his medicine show. This elixir is nothing but whiskey.

Hot Air Balloon

The Union experimented with hot air balloons as a way of monitoring troop movements during the Civil War. Homer and the medicine show run into one of these airships when one crashes near them in Pennsylvania.

Wagons

Samuel Reed uses wagons to transport runaway slaves to Canada from Mr. Brewster's house.

Train

Mr. Willow nearly panics on his first train ride with Homer.

Steamship

Homer travels on his first steamship when Mr. Brewster arranges for him to travel south with Mr. Willow to find his brother.

Bob the Horse

When Homer runs away from his uncle's house, he takes with him Bob the horse. Bob once belonged to Homer's family, so he feels that taking him now is reclaiming what should have been his.



Brewster Mines

Mr. Brewster owns some mines near his house where they dig tourmaline, a gemstone of that comes in many colors and is used in the manufacturing of costume jewelry.

Brewster's House

Homer finds luxury like he has never known in Mr. Brewster's large house. When Mr. Brewster asks Homer to stay, he wants to say yes, but cannot abandon his brother.

Pine Swamp, Maine

Pine Swamp, Maine is the small town where Homer and Harold live with their uncle at the beginning of the novel.

Jersey City, New Jersey

Jersey City, New Jersey is where Homer thinks he sees his brother on the docks. However, it turns out to be a young soldier who simply resembles Harold.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania is a small town where the most pivotal battle of the Civil War was fought between the Confederates and the Union.



Themes

Family

Harold is the only family Homer has. Although they live with an uncle, the uncle is cruel and is not really related to them. When Harold is sold into the army to take the place of a rich man's son, Homer decides he has to save him. Homer worries that Harold will be killed before Homer can find him. Finding Harold is all Homer can think about as he experiences one adventure after another throughout the novel.

When Homer finds his older brother, he discovers that not only does Harold like be away from the responsibility of caring for his baby brother, but that he has had difficulties with authority and been arrested for mutiny. Harold does not seem to be the brother Homer has always thought he was. Homer is not the person Harold thought he was either. Homer is not the baby Harold thinks he is. In fact, Homer proves that he can care for Harold just as well as Harold can care for Homer.

In the end, Homer and Harold discover that they need each other more than one needs to care for the other. Homer and Harold also find a new family, a family where they do not have to worry about where their next meal is coming from. Family finds a new definition for Homer and Harold as this novel reaches its conclusion, but the importance of family is never diminished. For this reason, family is a theme of the novel.

History

This novel takes place during the Civil War. This war changed many things about this country, including the way families feel about and deal with one another. The author of this book has taken a fictional character and a fictional situation and injected them with the truth of the Civil War.

As the novel moves through its story, the author discusses several aspects of history that impact the characters. One of these is the draft law that allowed Homer's uncle to sell his brother into the army. Another are the slave laws that would have made it possible for Stink and Smelt to sell Samuel Reed and the people he was trying to help into slavery.

The end of the novel takes place during one of the most notorious battles in American history. Gettysburg was a three day battle that turned the direction of the war. Had the Confederates won the battle, as they had believed they would, they would have been able to march on Washington, D.C. and declare victory. Since the Union won the Battle of Gettysburg, the war continued for several more years, but the Union had the advantage and would eventually win the war, keeping this country one united country rather than several divided countries. The author has chosen this notorious battle as the setting of his climax because the battle itself symbolizes the changes that have taken place between the Figg brothers and will continue to take place in their future.



Right and Wrong

Homer is a young man who likes to tell lies. Homer finds the truth boring; therefore, he often embellishes the truth with some lies. Homer knows that lying is wrong, but he believes that a few white lies cannot hurt anyone. As the novel progresses, Homer tells many lies. Most of these lies are so big that the listener knows they are lies. This causes some to wonder about Homer's character. However, as Mrs. Bean says, sometimes someone can be a liar and still be good.

The question of right and wrong also comes into the novel when the reader learns that Fleabottom is a Confederate spy. The reader must make the moral distinction in Fleabottom's case, deciding if his love for his home state is a good enough reason for him to steal information from the remaining states of his country to help his state win a civil war.

Style

Point of View

The point of view of this novel is first person. The novel is told as though Homer P. Figg is an older child, perhaps in his late teens, and has decided to tell the story of his adventures during the Civil War. There are times in which Homer refers to events that have not yet taken place and mentions what other characters have said to him since his adventures ended about those adventures.

The point of view of this novel is highly intimate, allowing the reader to get to know the main character well enough that they care what might happen to him at the end of the novel. However, there are times in which the reader must wonder if the narrator is unreliable. The reader must recall that Homer is a notorious liar; therefore, it stands to reason that some of his story might be untrue.

Setting

The novel is set in the 1860s, during the Civil War. The novel begins in a small Maine town and moves through other towns in Maine before moving into New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The novel ends at Gettysburg, the notorious days in July during which the Battle of Gettysburg took place between the Confederate states and the Union.

The setting of the novel is important because it is a time period and a war that directly affect the actions and motives of the characters. If Homer's brother, Harold, had not been sold into the army because of a draft law that allowed rich men to pay poor families to send their children to war instead of the rich man's, Homer never would have left his uncle's home. If there were no slaves, Homer never would have met Mr. Brewster. If there was no war, Homer would not have found his brother at the Battle of Gettysburg.

Language and Meaning

The novel is written in simple English. However, the novel includes multiple words and phrases that date back to the Civil War. The author of the book explains most of these words in the text, helping the reader understand what he is talking about. For those who still do not understand, the author has also included an index with a list of these unfamiliar words at the end of the novel.

The language of the novel is simple because the intended audience is young readers and the main character of the novel is a twelve-year-old boy. The language supports these characters, helping to define them as well as keeping the language simple for readers. The language also contains words and phrases from the time period in which the novel takes place, adding authenticity to the setting.

Structure

The novel is divided into thirty-six chapters, each with a simple title that describes something that will take place or someone involved in the chapter. The chapters are very short, most of them only a few pages long. The novel is told in both dialogue and exposition, the author using detailed scenes to show his story rather than simply tell it.

The novel has one main plot, the story of Homer Figg, a young boy searching for his older brother. There are several subplots in the novel, including the story of Fleabottom, a spy for the Confederates pretending to be a traveling medicine man. Another subplot concerns the relationship between Homer and Mr. Brewster. All these plots come to a satisfying conclusion at the end of the novel.



Quotes

"My name is Homer P. Figg, and these are my true adventures."
Chap. 1, p. 7

"Most folks keep food in a root cellar. Not Squinton Leach."
Chap. 3, p. 19

"You probably already know this, but horses don't like to go places at night, any more than sensible folks do."
Chap. 5, p. 27

"That's when he comes in from the parlor, dressed all in black. God Himself."
Chap. 8, p. 49

"A deep river that cries like a baby."
Chap. 10, p. 60

"When I wake up we're in Portland, and that's where the trouble really starts."
Chap. 15, p. 88

"Professor Fleabottom's Miracle Elixir is just plain whiskey."
Chap. 24, p. 138

"Now I got two reasons not to sleep: Harold and whatever the professor is up to, sneaking around under the cover of darkness."
Chap. 25, p. 146

"That last thing I hear before the wind carries me away is Mr. Bobbins screaming for his Tilda."
Chap. 28, p. 165

"They come by the cartload. Moaning soldiers stacked in flatbed wagons or carts drawn by horse or by hand."
Chap. 31, p. 178

"I feel like tugging on sleeves and saying don't be in such a hurry, the bullets are faster than you."
Chap. 34, p. 202

"'Fix bayonets,' he roars."
Chap. 35, p. 209



Topics for Discussion

Who is Homer P. Figg? How did he come to live with an uncle? What happened to his parents? What causes Homer's uncle to get into a confrontation with his brother? Why does Homer feel to blame? What happens as a result of this confrontation? What does Homer decide to do about this situation? Why?

Who is Stink and Smelt? Why do they stop Homer from traveling? What do they have to do with what Homer is doing? Who is with Stink and Smelt? What does Homer do to help this man? For what reason? What does Homer come to understand Stink and Smelt want? Why does Homer agree to help them? Does he? Explain.

Who is Mr. Brewster? What religion does he practice? What is unusual about this religion? What is different about Mr. Brewster's language? Why does he speak this way? What is Mr. Brewster hiding in his house? Why does he show this to Homer? What does he expect Homer to do with this information? What does Homer do with this information? Why?

Why does Mr. Willow get engaged with Miss Nibbly? What does Mr. Willow expect from this relationship? What does Homer see about this relationship? Why does Homer not warn Mr. Willow away? What happens to the money Mr. Brewster gave Mr. Willow for Homer's attempts to get his brother back? What happens to Homer in all this?

Who is Fleabottom? Why does he come to Homer's rescue? Why does he offer Homer a place in his show? What does the reader later realize Fleabottom is using Homer to do? Why is Fleabottom not honest about his intentions? What does Homer see Fleabottom do one night in the middle of the night? What does this say about Fleabottom? Does this change Homer's opinion of Fleabottom?

Who is Colonel Chamberlain? What is he supposed to defend during the Battle of Gettysburg? How does he do this? What is unusual about the way in which Chamberlain fights that day? What parts of this section of the novel are true? What sections are fictional? How does the fictional impact the real history of this battle?

What does Homer learn about his brother when he finds him? Does this change Homer's opinions of his brother? How does this relationship change now that Homer and Harold are reunited? What remains the same? What does Homer's actions say about him? About his love for his brother? What does Harold's actions say about him? About his feelings for his brother?