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Literature Teaching Unit

Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



My Brother Sam is Dead

by James Lincoln Collier &
Christopher Collier

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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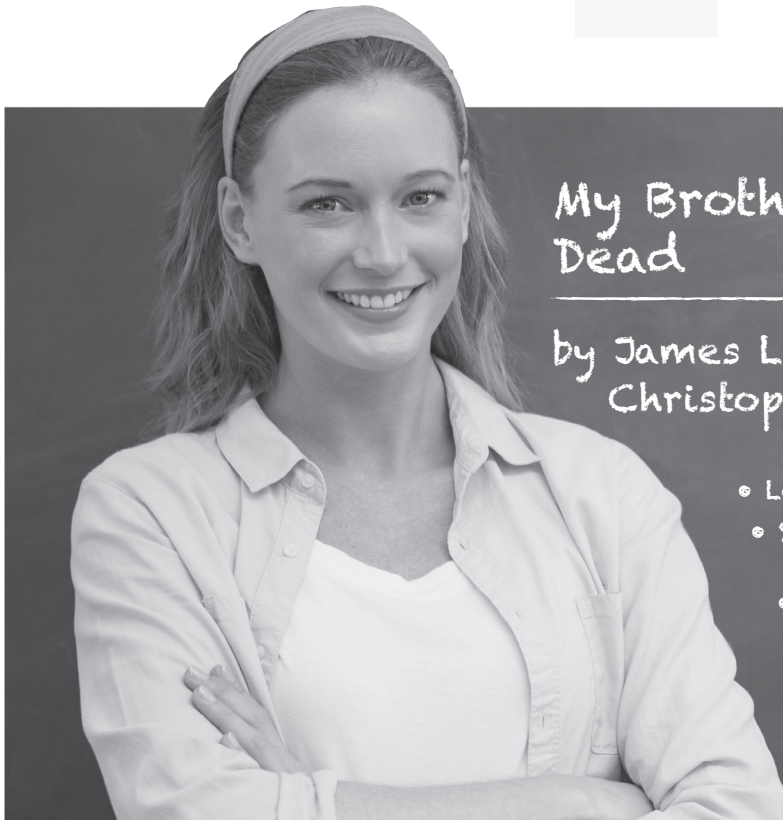
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My Brother Sam Is Dead

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. infer meanings about characters and events when these are not explicitly stated.
2. define vocabulary words from the text, including vocabulary words relating to the American Revolution and life during this era.
3. point out instances of foreshadowing.
4. relate details about the life of a colonial soldier during the American Revolution.
5. discuss why Life Meeker's death is ironic.
6. point out instances of the following uses of language: simile, cliché.
7. provide details to support the idea that some citizens felt divided loyalties during the Revolutionary War.
8. cite incidents from the story to illustrate the theme that war has a harmful impact on soldiers, civilians, and communities.
9. relate incidents from the story to support the theme that war is unjust.
10. cite incidents from the story to demonstrate the extent to which the novel satisfies the following criteria for historical fiction:
 - The action takes place at least one or two generations before the writing of the novel.
 - An attempt is made by the authors to accurately describe the customs and lifestyle of the time period.
 - The central character in the novel may be subjected to divided loyalties within a larger historical conflict the reader is familiar with.
 - The authors infer from historical records how the people of the time thought and may include characters in the story that are historical figures, as well as fictional characters.
11. discuss this story as a coming-of-age novel for Tim, and relate incidents from the story illustrating his path to adulthood.
12. identify significant historical figures and events from the American Revolution.

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Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Write a brief paragraph describing Tim's everyday life, using at least five of the following vocabulary words: swill, teat, ciphering, holystoning, rushing, shad, johnnycake, seining, sturgeon, heifer.
2. Divide the class into two groups for a mock debate. Using incidents from the story to support their positions, have the two groups debate the following questions:
 - Could the Colonists have achieved relief from unjust British rule without fighting the Revolutionary War?
 - Should Father have supported Sam's decision to join the army?
 - What is Mr. Heron's role in the story? Is he a Tory or a Patriot? Consider the ways he helps the Meeker family and also his involvement in Jerry Sanford's arrest.
3. Using context clues from the text and any supplemental research you may have done, briefly identify each of the following figures from history:
John Adams, John Hancock, Benedict Arnold, King George III, General Putnam.
4. Discuss the conflict Tim feels about each of the following. For what reasons is Tim's loyalty divided between each?
Tim and Sam
Tim and his neighbors
Tim and his father
5. Cite four incidents from the story illustrating the following theme: Man must strive to avoid war because of the harmful impact of war on soldiers, civilians, and the community.
6. Assume Tim is granted permission to make a plea for Sam's life at his court martial. Write a few paragraphs detailing the arguments Tim might use to try and save his brother.
7. One of the themes of this story is that war is unjust. Besides Sam's execution, find and discuss two incidents in this story supporting this theme.

My Brother Sam Is Dead

Chapter I

VOCABULARY

agitators – persons who try to stir up others to support a cause
constitutes –designated as
garrison – a fortified place
gaudy – bright and showy, but lacking good taste
hundredweight –100 pounds
lascivious – lustful or lewd
Loyalist – a Colonist who was loyal to the British government
Parliament – the national legislative body of Great Britain
pence – the plural of penny
sloth – laziness
store – a place for the storage of supplies
subversion – overthrowing or destroying
swill – garbage, table scraps
teat – the nipple used for milking a cow
Tory – a person who supported continued allegiance to Great Britain
treason – betrayal of one’s country
triumphant – victorious
vile – evil or wicked

1. Through contextual clues, the reader is able to infer or deduce the definitions of many terms from the time period as well as the identity of some real-life historical characters. Based on the following excerpt from this chapter what can you infer about Lobsterbacks, Minutemen, Mr. Adams, and Mr. Hancock?

“Who has beaten the British?” Father said.

Sam shut the door. “We have,” he said, with his back to us as he slipped the latch in place. “The Minutemen. The damn Lobsterbacks marched out of Boston yesterday. They were looking for Mr. Adams and Mr. Hancock and they marched up to Lexington. Some of the Massachusetts Minutemen tried to stop them there in the square, but there were too many British, and they got through and went on up to Concord looking for ammunitions stores. But the Patriots got the stores hidden mostly and they didn’t find much. And then when they turned around and went back, the Minutemen hid in the fields along the roads and massacred them all the way back to Boston.”

Chapter II

VOCABULARY

Anglican – of England or its people or culture
cordial – warm and friendly
papist – a Roman Catholic
scornful – filled with or showing scorn or contempt
trainband – a volunteer body trained as a militia

1. Tim is confused about the debates his neighbors have concerning whether or not the Colonists should rebel against the King of England or if the Colonists should obey the King.

“What kept confusing me about it was that the argument didn’t have two sides the way an argument should, but about six sides.”

Briefly discuss the six different arguments Tim is referring to in the above quotation.

2. For what reasons is Life against fighting the British?

3. Why does Tim believe that God is capable of punishing Sam by “getting him bayoneted by a Lobsterback?”

4. Who is Betsy Read? How does she feel about Sam’s decision to fight in the War?

8. Why is Tim disappointed when he and his father cross the border into New York?

Chapter VIII

VOCABULARY

- johnnycake** – thin, flat, cornbread
- retaliate** – to get revenge
- sedition** – resistance or rebellion against the government
- seining** – fishing with a large net
- sturgeon** – a large fish

1. One of the themes of this story is the harmful effects of war not only on the soldiers fighting the war but also on ordinary men, women, and children living in the colonies at the time. Find a passage in this chapter illustrating this theme.

2. For what reason might Tim have a problem fighting in the War as a Loyalist?

3. Find an example of a cliché in this chapter.
