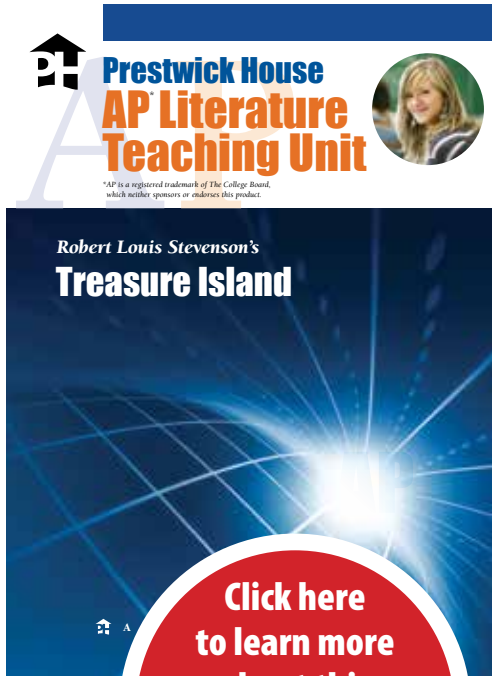




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Teaching Unit

Treasure Island

by Robert Louis Stevenson

written by Kay Hampson



Prestwick House

Item No. 309186

Treasure Island

Objectives

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

1. describe the main elements of a Hero Quest and apply them to the narrator's experiences in *Treasure Island*.
2. describe the main elements of a coming of age story or *Bildungsroman* and apply them to the plot and character development of *Treasure Island*.
3. recognize *Treasure Island* as a representative of nineteenth-century thought and literature.
4. recognize *Treasure Island* as an early example of children's or "young adult" fiction.
5. analyze the impact of the first person narrator on the novel's plot and the reader's reactions to plot and characters.
6. analysis key characters in terms of their type (flat, round, static, dynamic) and role (protagonist, antagonist, foil, etc.).
7. analyze historical references and their role in creating verisimilitude and establishing the historical setting of the novel.
8. offer a close reading of *Treasure Island* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.
9. respond to multiple choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
10. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.

Introductory Lecture

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh, Scotland on November 13, 1850. He died of an apparent cerebral hemorrhage at the age of 44 on December 3, 1894 on the South Pacific Samoan island of *Upolu*. During his brief career, he wrote over 100 short stories, poems, essays, travelogues, and novels. A literary celebrity in his own age, he is most famous today for his novels that combine elements of adventure and horror with deep and insightful examinations of human nature and moral ambiguity—especially *Treasure Island* (1883), *Kidnapped* (1886), and *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). While his popularity dropped considerably during the early-twentieth-century post-Modern movement, today he ranks among the twenty-six most translated authors in the world.

Stevenson was a sickly child from birth, suffering from a chest ailment that is now generally believed to have been tuberculosis. Many of his travels were, at least in part, motivated by a desire to find a climate better suited to his constitution and illness.

These travels, however, provide the settings, characters, and thought-provoking characters in late-nineteenth-century literature.

ABOUT THE NOVEL

While not Stevenson's first published work or the one to receive the best critical reception, *Treasure Island* was the novel that thrust Stevenson to literary fame. Between 1881 - 82, it was serialized as *Treasure Island; or, the mutiny of the Hispaniola* in a children's magazine called *Young Folks*. For the serialization, Stevenson used the *nom de plume* Captain George North. It appeared in book form, under Stevenson's real name, on May 23, 1883.

While today the novel is often dismissed as a children's book—and it is indeed to a large extent a coming-of-age story—the novel also explores a number of themes popular among Victorian adults as well: the ambiguous and inexplicable combination of good and evil in all humans, world exploration and British Imperialism, the relative wildness of the “New World” compared to “civilized” Britain, pirates, and treasure.

While a modern reader might be tempted to criticize Stevenson's portrayal of pirates as clichéd, it is actually Stevenson's portrayal of the eye-patched, wooden-legged buccaneer with a parrot on his shoulder that created these clichés. *Treasure Island* also establishes the convention of the treasure buried on a tropical island, indicated by a mysterious map on which “X marks the spot.”

Treasure Island

Part I – The Old Buccaneer

Chapters I – III

1. What does Stevenson's choice of narrator determine for the novel that is about to follow?

2. What outcomes are revealed by Jim's writing this account and deciding not to disclose the exact location of the island? Do these early revelations increase or decrease the reader's suspense?

3. Why does Stevenson begin the novel by having Jim explain that Squire and doctor asked Jim to write about Treasure Island? What is implied by their asking Jim instead of writing the narrative themselves?

4. Why does Stevenson have Jim begin his account with the old sailor's arrival at the Admiral Benbow?

5. For what duty does the old sailor hire Jim? What does Stevenson achieve in this detail?

Chapters X – XII

1. What suspicion does the fact that Mr. Arrow proves incompetent and untrustworthy verify for the reader?

2. How does Long John Silver's parrot strengthen the reader's suspicions about Long John's being the one-legged sailor Billy Bones feared would find him at the Admiral Benbow?

3. Why is the narrator, Jim Hawkins, so apparently taken with Long John Silver? What literary convention does Jim's appraisal of the one-legged sailor illustrate?

4. How does Stevenson once again use chance or luck to advance the plot in the direction he desires?

5. How surprised are you by the information revealed in Chapter XI? Why?

6. What bothers Long John Silver and the other pirates the most about the fact that the “black spot” was delivered on a page cut from the Bible? Does this anxiety reveal an element of faith or superstition? What evidence can you provide to support your conclusion?

7. How is Silver’s initial response to the “black spot” ironic?

8. Why does Stevenson choose the book of Revelation to be the source of the page from which Long John Silver’s Black Spot was torn? What is the significance of the specific quotation Jim reads?

9. What does Jim reveal in his last sentence of Chapter XXIX: “He himself slept peacefully and snored aloud, yet my heart was sore for him, wicked as he was, to think on the dark perils that environed and the shameful gibbet that awaited him.”?

10. How does Jim’s Chapter XXX conversation with Dr. Livesey reveal the final stage of Jim’s growth into a hero?
