An Historical Novel, Based On The American Revolution

A Google Certified Teacher Literature Project
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Chapter Questions

Novel:  My Brother Sam is Dead
Authors: James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier

This is a novel about a family living in Connecticut during the time of the American Revolution. They must face the consequences of the war when it reaches their community. The story is told through the eyes of the younger son, Tim Meeker.

This LitTrip can be used as a complete lesson to teach the novel. It follows the story and characters, chapter by chapter. Click on the links to open windows that contain discussion questions, written by Carol LaRow's 7th grade students, which can be used in class to arrive at the meaning and theme of the novel. All questions are discussion questions, not recall. Students use the questions in “all class” discussions about the novel. Each link contains chapter summaries and additional WEB resources, which help students understand the time period of the American Revolution.

Don't miss the links at the bottom of the kmz which contain additional resources, links to the Library of Congress and primary source documents, webquests and online games for learning about the revolution and Colonial times. There are also suggested activities and projects for students to use as culminating activities.

Chapter 1:

Summary: April 1775, Sam Meeker returns to his parents' tavern in Redding Ridge and announces that he has joined the Patriots in the fight against the British. He wants to take his father's Brown Bess. Sam and Father get into an argument.

Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think Sam has a different opinion about the revolution than his father does?
2. What was the significance of what happened between the Minutemen and the Lobsterbacks at Lexington and Concord?
3. Why does the author spend so much of the chapter showing the reader what Tim thinks about Sam's clothes, manner of speaking, and accomplishments?

Additional Internet Resources:

- What Made the Colonists So Angry at the British?
- 1775 -1776 Conflict and Revolution in the Colonies
- The American Revolution - Causes, Battles, & People
- Online Game: The Road to Revolution

Carol LaRow, Teacher
Chapter 2:

Summary: Tim goes to Tom Warrup's hut, where Sam is hiding. Tim tells Sam how upset Father was about arguing with Sam. Betsy Read is there and is part of the discussion. Sam says, "There's going to be war. Which side are you going to be on?" Tim can't answer the question.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the difference between a Tory and a Patriot?
2. Why does Tim begin to cry as he and Sam argue about the "Brown Bess"?
3. In this chapter, what side do you think Tim is on, the British or the Patriots?
4. Why do you think Tim couldn't answer the question about being a Tory or a Patriot?
5. Why does Sam want Tim to listen for information at the tavern?

Additional Internet Resources:

- What was life like in Connecticut during Colonial times?
- Occupations and Customs of the Colonists
- Daily Life in the Colonies
- Food in the American Colonies

Chapter 3:

Summary: The fighting of the war hasn't come to the town of Redding yet. In this chapter, Tim tells the reader how the war has affected his family. Sam is gone, and Tim wonders when he will see him again. In November, Betsy lets Tim know that Sam is back.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Tim's father have to keep the Tory newspaper, The Rivington Gazette, hidden?
2. How did the war affect the people in Redding, CT, in the summer of 1775?
3. Why do you think the authors devoted half a page to describing nature on page 45?
4. What were the major differences between Sam and Tim?
5. Why do you think the authors had Tim narrate the story instead of a different character?

Additional Internet Resources:

- The Politics and Economics of the Colonies
- 1775 -1776 Conflict and Revolution in the Colonies
- The American Revolution, Month by Month
- Online Game: The Road to Revolution
Chapter 4:

Summary: Rebel soldiers go to the Meeker Tavern and demand that Father give them his rifle. Father tells them that his son has taken the rifle and is part of their army. The soldiers do not believe him and begin to hit him. Tim rushes to where Sam is hiding, with the intent of getting the "Brown Bess" back in time to save Father.

Discussion Questions

1. Who are the Continentals, and why do they come to Redding?
2. Why were the Rebel soldiers threatening Mr. Meeker?
3. Why can't Sam go to the tavern to defend his father when he is attacked by the Rebel soldiers?
4. Would Tim have shot Sam if Sam hadn't overpowered him when Tim tried to get the Brown Bess back?
5. What do Tim and Mr. Meeker feel when Sam turns around and waves from the stone fence?

Additional Internet Resources:

- Timeline of the Revolutionary War
- Causes of the Revolution
- Historical Documents
- Who Were the Minutemen?

Chapter 5:

Summary: By January of 1776, the war is starting to have its effects on the Meekers. Food is in short supply; soldiers are searching their home for weapons; soldiers on both sides are stealing cattle. Sam is still gone, and the Meekers hear more stories about the war. In April of 1776, Mr. Heron wants Tim to deliver a letter for him, but Father refuses.

Discussion Questions

1. For Tim, what is the worst part of the war?
2. Why is the errand for Mr. Heron so important?
3. At this point in the book, how are the people of Redding affected by the war? What were the major differences between the way the people in Redding viewed the war and the way the people in Lexington and Concord viewed it?
4. In this chapter, how does Tim feel about his older brother Sam. Does Tim support what Sam is doing?
5. At this point in the story, what side do you think Tim would choose - Patriot or Tory?
6. Why doesn't Father want Tim to deliver the message for Mr. Heron? Is there anything Father knows that Tim doesn't?

Additional Internet Resources:

- Battles of the Revolution - Commanders, Number Killed, Wounded and Captured
- Prelude to the Revolution 1763-1775
- Supply Problems Plagued the Continental Army
- Broadside Posted- Asking for Supplies for the Continental Army
- General Parsons and Mr. Heron, the Spy
Chapter 6:

Summary: Tim decides he will deliver the letter for Mr. Heron. He lies to his father, telling Father he's going fishing and sets out for Fairfield, CT. with the sealed letter. He runs into Betsy Read. After an argument, Betsy takes the letter from Tim.

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Mr. Heron allow Tim to deliver the message when Mr. Meeker told him directly that Tim was not allowed to do so?
2. Why does Tim decide to deliver the message for Mr. Heron even though he knows his father has said he couldn't?
3. Why doesn't it make sense that Mr. Heron would know where Sam and the other American officers are?
4. Why does Tim talk about lying to his father and the fact that it's a sin? (page 76) Why do you think the authors refer to the lying as being a sin rather than just say it's wrong to lie?
5. Is Mr. Heron a Loyalist?

Additional Internet Resources:
Important People During the American Revolution, With Pictures
How Might a Handwritten Letter Be Sealed During Colonial Times?

Chapter 7:

Summary: It's nearing the fall of 1776. Goods are getting more scarce, but the war still has not come to Redding. It's time for Father to take his annual 40 mile trip to Verplancks Point, NY, to sell his cattle and hogs and get supplies for the tavern. Sam usually goes with Father, but this year, he must take Tim. The trip takes three days each way. Tim and Father are stopped in Ridgebury by six Cowboys who want to steal their cattle. Loyalist horsemen arrive and scare the Cowboys away.

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't Mr. Heron ask Tim about the letter after the incident?
2. Why was Father arguing with the Cowboys if he knew he could get hurt?
3. Was Tim afraid to go to Verplancks Point with his father?
4. When Mother said she was going to write back to Sam, she told Father her decision was final. Why did Father stop arguing with Mother at this point in the story?
5. Do you think that Sam will come back, and if so, when?
6. Why does Father get angry at the way Sam is living his life?
7. Why does Father think it's different for Sam to leave at age 16 or 17 when Father left his own home when he was 16 himself?
8. If you were in Tim's position, which side would you want to win the war?
9. Why doesn't the mother have a bigger part in the story? Why is she always in the background?
Chapter 8:

Summary: Tim and Father reach the home of their relatives in North Salem. They stay the night. When asked which side he would be on in the war, Tim is still unsure. They leave the next morning and continue to Verplancks, where they sell their cattle. Tim sees a large town and the Hudson River for the first time. On the return trip, it starts to snow, and Father must decide which route to take.

Discussion Questions

1. Tim tells his cousin that he'd probably fight for the British. What would Tim do if he ran into Sam in battle, and they were on opposite sides?
2. If Tim is so concerned about the way, why doesn't he at least try and talk to his father about it?
3. What do you think Father would say if Tim told him he was a Patriot?
4. What side do "you" think Tim is on? Do you think Tim is changing his mind at all?
5. If you were in Tim's position, would you be a Loyalist or a Rebel?
6. Do you think Mr. Meeker feels differently about Tim than he does about Sam?
7. Why didn't Father buy a new rifle when he sold the cattle and the hogs? Sam had his only rifle. Why didn't Father replace it, especially when he knew the Cowboys could ambush them?

Additional Internet Resources:

A History of Verplancks Point
The Battle of Stony Point, Near Verplancks Point (Colonial Fortifications Against the British)

Chapter 9:

Summary: Tim and Father stay at the Platt's and leave the next morning. They are having a difficult time moving the oxen in the deep snow. Father rides ahead to check the road. When Father doesn't return, Tim realizes something is wrong. He comes upon tracks in the snow. Father has been ambushed and is missing. Tim must continue on his own, deciding what he will do if he meets up with the Cowboys.

Discussion Questions

1. What makes Tim start worrying about Father's safety? Does he immediately know something is wrong?
2. Tim sees the ambush site in the snow and instantly knows the Cowboys have attacked Father. What does the reader notice about the way Tim is thinking as he senses there may be trouble with Father?
3. Tim has to decide what to do when he realizes that Father is in trouble. He considers what Sam would do (track Father down and rescue him) and what Father would do (get the oxen and goods back home). Why do you think Tim decided to choose the second solution rather than the first?
4. Tell about a time when you had to make a very difficult choice in your own life. What did you have to consider to make your decision. Was it the right choice?
5. Tim starts to think about what he will tell the Cowboys if they come upon him and the wagon. How are Tim's actions changing in this chapter?
6. Tim runs into the Cowboys. He asks them, "Are you the escort?" He then says, "Am I ever glad to see you . . . I thought there'd be more of you, though." What is the author trying to show us about Tim?
7. Does the reader begin to feel any differently about Tim in this chapter?
Chapter 10:

Summary: Tim and Mother have to run the tavern by themselves. Sam and Father are still away. In April of 1777, the British march into Redding and camp out in the training grounds. They storm Captain Betts' house and take prisoners, including Jerry Sanford. A Rebel messenger rides into town and is shot. Tim goes for Dr. Hobart and sees the British burn Captain Starr's house, killing everyone inside. The chapter ends with Tim saying, "I didn't feel much like being a Tory any more."

Discussion Questions

1. Why does Mother go on believing Father is alive?
2. How does the absence of Father change the lives of Mother and Tim? How does Tim feel about Father being absent? How does he feel about Sam not coming home after Father is taken?
3. What did Mother mean when she said of Sam, "He should be tired of playing soldier boy by now. I should think that glory would have worn off"?
4. What did Tim mean when he said, "Of course, I still hadn't figured out what he was fighting for. It seemed to me that we'd been free all along. What had the English ever done against me"?
5. What does Tim mean when he says, "There were a lot of changes in our lives, but the biggest was the one that was happening inside myself. Ever since I had got the wagon home by myself, I hadn't felt like a boy any more"?
6. As Tim speaks to an Irish soldier he says, "We're mostly Tories here. Suddenly, I realized I was. Father's capture had done that." What does Tim mean by this?
7. At the end of the chapter, Tim says, "I turned and ran down the road toward Dr. Hobart's. I didn't feel much like being a Tory any more."
8. Why does Tim feel this way?
9. What made him change his mind from earlier in the chapter when he stated he was a Tory?
10. Why do you think the author shows Tim on both sides of the war within the same chapter?

Additional Internet Resources:

Voices From the American Revolution
Loyalists During the American Revolution
Patriot vs. Loyalist

The Story of Tories in American History
The Loyalists of Redding; The Militia; The Brown Bess
Chapter 11:

**Summary:** Captain Benedict Arnold comes to Redding with his army in order to drive the British out. Sam is part of Captain Arnold's troop. Tim goes to find Sam in order to tell him about Father and persuade him to come home. Sam refuses to leave the army.

**Discussion Questions**

1. Sam has a conversation with his mother about which duty is more important - family or country. Which do you think is more important? What would you do if you were Sam?
2. Why do you think the authors wait until this chapter to show how aggressive Mother can be?
3. Why won't Mother let Tim ring the bell to call the soldiers?
4. How does the mother's personality change as the war goes on?
5. At this point in the story, do you think Tim would be a soldier if he could?
6. Tim says, "I didn't feel like his little brother so much any more. I felt more like his equal." What does Tim mean by this?
7. Why does Tim feel this way?
8. What made him change his mind from earlier in the chapter when he stated he was a Tory?
9. Why do you think the author shows Tim on both sides of the war within the same chapter?

**Additional Internet Resources:**

- Captain Benedict Arnold, The Traitor Who Saved America
- Benedict Arnold, A Revolutionary War General

Chapter 12:

**Summary:** In June of 1777, Tim and Mother find out that Father is dead. Tim is 14 years old now; things are getting worse for the people of Redding Ridge. In December of 1778, Sam's troop returns to Redding. Sam visits the tavern when he can. During one visit, Tim and Sam discover four cows have been stolen from the barn. They rush out to stop the thieves, and Sam is mistakenly arrested for stealing his own cattle.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What do you think Tim's feelings are about the war now?
2. What side do you think Tim would be on if he had to choose?
3. In what ways has Tim changed?
4. Why do you think the authors have decided to tell the story through Tim's eyes? Why not tell the story through Sam's eyes?
5. Why do you think the authors chose the title, *My Brother Sam is Dead* rather than a different title? Does the title give away too much of the story to the reader?
6. Why does Tim blame Sam for Father's death?
7. Father was on the prison ship when he forgave Sam. Why did Father forgive Sam so late in the story?
8. What do you think Father meant when he said, "Now, I go to enjoy the freedom war has brought me"? (page 165)
9. If you were in Sam's position, would you change to the British side after you found out that Father had died?
10. Why do you think the British kept Jerry Sanford?
11. At this point in the book, how do you think Sam feels about being a soldier?

Additional Internet Resources:

The Second Connecticut Regiment
Regimental History of the Second Connecticut Regiment, Includes Winter Encampment at Redding, CT

Chapter 13:

Summary: Tim and Mother try to talk Colonel Parsons and General Putnam, to explain what has happened, in order to free Sam. Tim is told that General Putnam wants to deal severely with cattle theives, making them an example for the other men. Sam isn't optimistic about his fate. Mother becomes very depressed and withdrawn.

Discussion Questions

1. Why didn't Tim try harder to get to see Colonel Parsons?
2. Why didn't Mother show more emotion when she found out that Sam was going to die?
3. Why did Sam seem to be resigned to the fact that he would die? Why doesn't he have more fight in him?
4. Why doesn't Betsy Read try and see Sam?
5. If you were Tim and had to see General Putnam, what would you tell the general about the situation to convince him to release Sam?
6. When Tim was visiting Sam, why didn't Sam ask about his Mother or how things were going at the tavern without Father?
7. Why does Mother act so calm when she hears that Sam is going to be executed?

Additional Internet Resources:

Wikipedia Article on General Putnam
Troop Discontent
Putnam Memorial State Park, Redding CT - Site of the 1778-1779 Encampment of General Putnam's Troops
Map of Putnam Memorial Park
Chapter 14:

Summary: Tim has been unsuccessful negotiating for Sam's release. Tim tries a desperate plan to free his brother. Mother has refused to go to the execution. Tim watches in horror as Sam is shot.

Discussion Questions

Mother decided not to go to church. She said, "I'm not going. They can murder whom they like, church whom they like, but I'm not going. For me, the war is over." What does Mother mean by this?
1. Why didn't Tim try to get anyone to help him rescue Sam?
2. Did you notice any "foreshadowing" about the deaths of Father and Sam in the story?
3. What do you think is going through Tim's mind as he watches Sam being executed?
4. How did you feel as you read about Sam's execution? What was going through your mind?
5. Why didn't Mother go to the execution?
6. Why didn't Mother try and stop Tim from trying to break Sam out of prison?

Additional Internet Resources:

Executions on Gallows Hill, Redding, CT
A History of the Revolutionary War in Redding
Connecticut's Valley Forge

Epilogue:

Summary: Tim writes an epilogue 50 years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence. He is now 64 years old, living in Pennsylvania, and wishes to commemorate the life of his brother Sam. He married, had a family, and opened a tavern himself. The authors end the novel with Tim wondering if the war was worth all the suffering and loss of life it caused.

Discussion Questions

1. As you read this novel, what conclusions did you draw about how war affects people?
2. What conclusions did you draw about the American Revolutionary War?
3. What does Tim mean when he says at the end of the novel, "But somehow, even fifty years later, I kept thinking that there might have been another way besides war to achieve the same end." What does he mean here?
4. Would Tim's idea about there being another way besides war to achieve independence be different if his father and Sam hadn't been killed?
5. Why did Tim write this story so late in his life?
6. What do you think about the way the authors ended the book?
7. What was the mother's life like after the war ended and Sam and Father were dead?
8. Why do you think the authors talked about the rest of Tim's life in an epilogue, rather than in the main body of the story?
Additional Internet Resources:

- What Happened to the Signers of the Declaration of Independence?
- A List of Patriots
- Were Any of the Characters Real People?
- Brent Colley’s excellent site on Redding Connecticut and My Brother Sam is Dead

**Resources, Primary Sources, Activities, and Projects**

**Photos - American Revolution and Colonial America**

This is a collection of additional resources for the American Revolution and Colonial America. For example, you will find photos of Colonial times, British and American uniforms, typical houses, tools of the time, famous generals, battlefields, state parks commemorating the American Revolution, and other photos or drawings.

**Additional Internet Resources**

- Uniforms of the Continental Army
- Uniforms of the British Army
- Typical Colonial Home
- Signing of the Declaration of Independence July 4, 1776
- Declaration of Independence, The Continental Congress
- Google Search - Images of the American Revolution
- Map of the 13 Original Colonies
- British Soldiers Marching
- British Soldiers in Formation
- Putnam Memorial Park, Redding, CT - Pictures of a Recreated Cabin, Remains of Stone Fireplaces, and the Park Today
- Statue of Minuteman, Boston

**Additional Information and Research Links**

This is a collection of additional resources for the American Revolution and Colonial America. For example, you will find photos of Colonial times, British and American uniforms, typical houses, tools of the time, famous generals, battlefields, etc.

You will find several "primary source" documents to look at and use for your own research. The Library of Congress, for example, is an excellent source for many primary sources. It is the largest library in the world, and it traces "The American Experience," archiving pictures, original drafts, songs, drawings, speeches, etc. of events in American history. This is a rich resource for teachers and students.
Library of Congress Resources

1. Maps and Charts During the American Revolution
2. Boston Harbor with road to Concord
3. Staten Island, NY - Defense Redoubts
4. Signing of the Declaration of Independence
5. Lexington, MA - Line Where the Minutemen Stood
6. Declaration of Independence
7. Original Rough Draft of the Declaration of Independence
8. Jump Back in Time - Meet Amazing Americans
9. An American Time Capsule - Broadsides from American History

Additional Internet Resources

1. Battles of Lexington and Concord
2. Major Battles of the American Revolution
3. Timeline of Events for the American Revolution
4. Timeline of the American Revolutionary War
5. American Farmers Forming at Concord, MA in 1775
6. Biographies of the Revolutionaries
7. Books About the American Revolution
8. Chronicles of the Revolution - Public Broadcasting System
9. Stories from the American Revolution
10. Digital History - Using Digital Sources for Research and Learning
11. Redding, CT. Today
12. Maps of Redding, CT.
13. Historical Documents
14. Colonial Maps
15. Colonial Documents

Sources

