

Treasure Island

by Robert Louis Stevenson

story summary

Billy and the Old Sea-chest

Jim Hawkins' parents' ran the Admiral Benbow Inn in western England. One winter day, an old sea captain with a scarred face called Billy Bones arrived at the inn. He had an old sea-chest with him, which he guarded very carefully. Billy gave Jim some money to look out for a one-legged sailor. However, Billy did not pay his rent properly. In the evenings, Billy would drink rum and sing. During the day, he would go down to the rocks and nervously look out at the sea.

After many weeks, a mysterious evil looking seaman called Black Dog appeared and started fighting with Billy after an argument. The man chased him out of the inn with his cutlass. This caused Billy to suffer a stroke and collapse. Another visitor, a blind beggar named Pew, came while Billy was bedridden and pressed a piece of paper onto his palm. This paper was 'the black spot' which pirates make by partially burning a piece of paper. It is a kind of curse that pirates put on someone, particularly if they want to get rid of a leader. After Pew left, Billy suffered another stroke and dropped dead. His last words were that pirates would be coming there soon, and that he had been a part of a pirate crew. The pirates had ordered Billy's death and wanted to steal his sea-chest. Jim soon forgot about Billy because he had other things to think about. His father was very ill. Later that night Jim's father died.

Jim and his mother searched through Billy's old sea-chest and found a logbook and map inside. Suddenly they heard steps outside. It was the pirates! Jim and his mother quickly ran out of the inn, taking with them the documents from Billy's sea-chest.

The pirates entered the inn and raided it, desperately looking for the documents. The pirates were angry that they could not find what they wanted in the sea-chest and rushed outside to look for Jim and his mother. However, the pirates were chased by the police. Most of the pirates escaped but Blind Pew died.

Jim then realized that the documents he had snatched from the sea chest must be valuable, so he took one of the documents he had found to some local acquaintances, Dr. Livesey and Squire Trelawney.

Jim sets out for Treasure Island

Jim went to Doctor Livesey's house and told him and Squire Trelawney about everything that had happened. He showed them the papers the pirates had been searching for and they agreed that they had found a treasure map to Captain Flint's booty.

The doctor and the squire made plans to travel to the island where the treasure was buried. Jim would be their cabin boy.

The squire went to Bristol and bought a ship called The Hispaniola and hired a captain. The ship's cook would be an old one-legged sailor called Long John Silver who had helped the squire pick the rest of the crew. Jim and the doctor soon joined them. An apprentice would help Jim's mother with the inn while he was away. Jim did wonder if Long John Silver was the sailor Billy had been worried about, but soon forgot about it.

On the day of their departure, Captain Smollett told the doctor and the squire that he was unhappy that he had not chosen his crew himself and that everyone knew they were sailing for treasure. The squire admitted that it had been unwise to let everyone know, and promised that he would hide the treasure map.

The ship made steady progress when it set sail, even in heavy seas, and the captain could not find anything wrong with the crew. Long John Silver had a parrot called Captain Flint and behaved well, but there was treachery going on.

Long John Silver's Treacherous Plot

One evening, as they neared their destination, Jim was looking for food and climbed into a barrel. While hiding there, he heard Long John Silver boast about his piracy with Captain Flint and talk about his plan to kill the doctor and the squire after finding the treasure. Jim was very afraid he would be caught but just then someone shouted that land had been seen.

Jim secretly warned Captain Smollett, the squire and the doctor about Long John Silver's plan. They decided to pretend they knew nothing because they were outnumbered by Long John Silver's men.

Now at the island, the Captain gave everyone the day off. Long John Silver took a group of sailors ashore while leaving six men to watch over those who were not part of their plan. Jim secretly followed Silver, and heard him telling the men that he would kill any crew member who refused to join the mutiny. Jim was terrified and ran away. He soon met a wild-looking man dressed in rags called Ben Gunn.

Ben Gunn said he had been part of Captain Flint's crew when the treasure was buried some years ago. He had returned with another crew three years later to look for it. However Ben could not find the treasure. His shipmates were angry with him so left him there on the island, marooned. He had lived on the island alone, ever since.

Captain Smollett, the doctor and the squire went exploring on the island. They found a stockade, built by previous pirates - a sturdy cabin surrounded by a high fence. They decided to use the stockade to defend themselves against the pirates. They needed weapons however, which were back on the ship. The squire's gamekeeper, Redruth, kept the pirates at gunpoint while they gathered their supplies and weapons and went ashore with them. On their final trip back to the stockade, they were attacked by more pirates. The pirates lost but Redruth died of injury soon after.

The pirates then started an attack from the ship's cannons, but the stockade was far away from the ship so they could not hit it. Jim and Ben Gunn heard the cannon-fire. Jim told him about the pirates and asked him to help him find his friends. Ben said that he used to know Long John Silver and would help Jim and his friends if they promised him a safe passage home. Then he disappeared into the bushes.

Jim found his way to the stockade. His friends were happy to see him safe and amazed to hear about Ben Gunn.

The next morning, Long John Silver came near the stockade holding a flag, offering peace in exchange for the treasure map, but Captain Smollett refused to trust him. He went away angrily and then the pirates attacked the stockade. A fight took place and some pirates were killed, but some of the loyal men died too.

At the shore, Jim found a little boat Ben had told him about and made his way back to the ship with it. He cut its mooring ropes and set it adrift. But the tide was very strong and Jim was swept away with it too.

The next morning, Jim awoke to find himself near the island's north coast along with the ship. He hurried aboard and steered it to safety. He was attacked by a pirate called Hands, who remained on the ship, but Jim managed to kill him.

Jim returned to the stockade but finds it occupied by the pirates. Silver took Jim hostage, telling the boy that the captain had given the pirates the treasure map, provisions, and the use of the stockade in exchange for their lives. Jim realized, however, that Silver was having trouble managing his men, who accused him of treachery. Silver proposed to Jim that they help each other survive by pretending Jim is a hostage. However, the men presented Silver with a black spot and informed him that he is no longer their commander. The black spot however had no effect because it had accidentally been placed on the pages of a Bible.

In a desperate attempt to gain control of his crew, Silver showed them the treasure map to appease them. Silver led Jim and the men to the treasure site, but they were shocked to find it had been already excavated and the treasure had been removed. The men were angry. At that moment Dr. Livesey, Ben Gunn, and the others fired at the pirate band. The pirates ran off, scattered throughout the island. Jim and Silver fled, and were guided by the others to Ben's cave, where Ben had hidden the treasure, which he had discovered months before.

After spending three days carrying the loot to the ship, the men prepared to set sail for home. Despite the pirates' submissive pleas, they were left marooned on the island. Silver was allowed to join the voyage, but he snuck off the ship one night with a portion of the treasure and was never heard from again. The voyage home came to a close. Eventually, Captain Smollett retired from the sea, and Ben became a lodge-keeper. Jim was put off treasure-hunting forever and suffered from nightmares about the sea and gold coins for the rest of his life!

Conclusion

Treasure Island is an exciting story full of adventure and danger. The ending shows us how loyal and good people get the prize they deserve while treacherous people are punished. Thus, it teaches us to value loyalty and despise treachery.

Study guide

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Scotland in 1850. After *Treasure Island* was first published in 1883 the book became very popular and made the author famous all over the world.

Five years after *Treasure Island* was published, Robert Louis Stevenson sailed to the South Pacific with his family and settled in Sāmoa. He had a house built on the slopes of Mt. Vaea. The house was called Vailima. He died there in 1894.

More about the author

Other works by Robert Louis Stevenson are: *Kidnapped* (1886), *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), and *The Master of Ballantrae* (1889).

Early years

Born in Edinburgh, Stevenson began writing as a teenager. Despite frail health due to tuberculosis, Stevenson travelled abroad often, and many of his books were produced during those journeys.

Stevenson split his time between Switzerland and Scotland - on medical advice for his ongoing problems with tuberculosis - and during this time began work on his famous novel, *Treasure Island*, as well as many other published works.

In 1888 Stevenson chartered a yacht for a holiday on the seas from which he would never return.

Arrival in Samoa

He and his wife reached Samoa in 1889 for a six-week stay. He then sailed to Sydney, where he stayed for a short time, then he returned to Samoa and set up life in the Vailima house, Samoa, in what is today the Robert Louis Stevenson Museum.

Stevenson became a popular and well-respected member of the Samoan community and continued to write, the climate suiting his health, until his death at age 44 - not from tuberculosis, but a cerebral hemorrhage (brain tumour). He was buried on top of Mount Vaea, overlooking the sea.

For you to do

Read the summarized story, 'Treasure Island' in small booklet form, the A4 sheet story summary, and the play.

Make the small booklet, providing illustrations on each page. At the end of the booklet there are a few ideas for drawings, but feel free to use your imagination to illustrate the story.

After reading and completing your booklet, do the following exercises:

Vocabulary

Find the meanings of the following words that are very important to the story:

cabin-boy, inn, mast, mutiny, mutineer, pirate, rum, squire, stockade

Then use each word in a sentence which is connected to the story of *Treasure Island*:

e.g. Because Jim Hawkins was the cabin-boy on the *Hispaniola* he got to know all the members of the ship's crew and they trusted him.

Plot

The Plot is what happens in the story.

Major Conflict

Jim, Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, Captain Smollett, and his crew search for a treasure that Captain Flint, an old pirate, has left buried after his death. They are challenged by Flint's former crewmembers, who have tricked Trelawney into hiring them to help sail to Treasure Island.

Rising Action

The discovery of the treasure map in the inn; the hiring of a treacherous crew for the expedition; the voyage to Treasure Island; the mutiny of Silver and his crew; Silver taking Jim as a hostage

Climax

The pirates' and Jim's discovery that the treasure has already been excavated from its burial ground

Falling Action

The return trip to England; Silver's escape with some of the treasure; Jim's nightmares about the sea and gold coins

Here are some important events from the plot of Treasure Island. They are not in the order in which they actually happen in the story. Rewrite the list, putting the events in the order in which they did happen.

- a. The Hispaniola arrives at Treasure Island.
- b. Long John Silver runs away with some of the treasure
- c. Jim shoots Hands.
- d. Jim meets Ben Gunn on the island.
- e. Several of the mutineers are killed.
- f. Jim's father dies.
- g. The Hispaniola sails back to England with the treasure.
- h. The treasure is found in Ben Gunn's cave.
- i. Captain Smollett and the others fight with the mutineers at the stockade.
- j. The Hispaniola sails from Bristol for Treasure Island.
- k. The sea captain, Billy Bones, comes to Jim's father's inn.
- l. Jim overhears the sailors plotting to mutiny.
- m. The mutineers put a black spot on to John Silver.

Check answers bottom of page 4.

Time Line of Events

Draw a line graph which has on it the most exciting events in the story.

i.e. When something very exciting happens, such as when Jim kills Israel Hands, the line on your graph should go up to a peak, when something less exciting happens, such as when they find the treasure has gone from where it was buried, the peak will not be as high.

Your line graph should go across the page, and should have about 10 'peaks' on it. Make sure you decide which is the most exciting event of all in the story. That will be the very highest peak on your graph.

Setting: Place

The Setting is the place or places where the story happens. Treasure Island is set in England and on Treasure Island itself, which is an island off the coast of 'Spanish America'.

Setting: Time

During the nineteenth century (the 1800s)

Research

Find a map of England in an atlas, and find the city of Bristol on the map. Bristol was a famous sea port in the eighteenth century. Now find the Caribbean, off the East coast of America.

- Draw a map, including England and America. Mark in an imaginary Treasure Island in the Caribbean. Draw a line from Bristol to Treasure Island showing the possible route that the sailing ship took.
- Draw your own map of Treasure Island, marking in all the places that are important to the story: e.g. The Stockade, Ben Gunn's cave, the place where the treasure was buried, the route from the harbour to where the treasure was buried.

Characters

The main characters in the novel are: Jim Hawkins,, Billy Bones, Blind Pew, Long John Silver, Squire Trelawney, Doctor Livesey, Captain Smollett, Hands, Ben Gunn.

For each of these characters: write their name, a sentence saying why they are important to the story, three adjectives to describe them, and whether you liked or disliked them, and why. The answer for Ben Gunn has been done for you. Set your answers out as shown on the following page.

Character	Why they were important	Adjectives to describe	Like or dislike
Ben Gunn	He had been left on the island so he knew where the treasure was.	Lonely, crazy, funny	I liked him because it was funny that the main thing he missed was cheese.
Jim Hawkins			
Billy Bones			
Blind Pew			
Long John Silver			
Squire Trelawney			
Doctor Livesey			
Captain Smollett			
Hands			

First Person Narrative

Imagine you are one of the characters in the novel, apart from Jim Hawkins:

e.g. Mrs. Hawkins, Long John Silver, Ben Gunn, Squire Trelawney.

Choose an important episode from the story, and describe the incident from your character's point of view, explaining why you felt and acted the way you did: e.g. If you are Mrs. Hawkins, describe how you felt when your husband became ill or when Jim left Bristol; or if you are Long John Silver, explain why you were angry about the Bible being cut and why you left the mutineers.

Write about a page, and use the first-person narrative 'I'.

Make sure you use strong verbs and interesting adjectives in your writing.

Themes

A Theme is an important idea which can be learned from the story.

Although Treasure Island is mainly an adventure story, it does have a theme, and that is greed — the strong desire to get more money than you need.

Think about what happens in the story, then write 3–4 sentences explaining why greed is the theme of Treasure Island. Begin your answer like this:

Greed is the theme of Treasure Island because nearly all the characters in the story want to get. . .

Another theme could be 'good overcomes evil'. What was the 'black spot' and why did it have no power when it was placed on the pages of the Bible?

Film Poster

Treasure Island has been made into a movie more than once. Imagine that there is to be a new film made of the story and you have been asked to design a poster which advertises the film. Design and draw a poster that includes the most important images from the story and that will attract people to the new film.

Answers to the story sequencing events p. 2:

k.1, g.2, j.3, l.4, a.5, d.6, i.7, e.8, c.9, m.10, h.11, g.12, b.13