

# Johnny Tremain



*Based on the book by Esther Forbes  
Adapted by John Olive*

## Synopsis

Recommended for  
everyone age 9  
and older

Esther Forbes' classic novel is set amid the beginnings of the American Revolution. Johnny, a boastful and ambitious orphan, serves as an apprentice to the silversmith Mr. Lapham. Johnny is extremely talented, which makes him a valued member of the Lapham household. When a terrible accident covers his hand in molten silver, his future as a silversmith is over and his position with the Laphams is gone. Johnny is forced to look for other means of support and another place in the world.

Rab, a clever and kind young printer's assistant, takes Johnny under his wing, and helps him discover what it means to be a friend. But Johnny is still searching for more—for family and a place to belong. Unsuccessful in his search and at his wit's end, Johnny hopes to prove his kinship to the rich Lyte family. However, instead of welcoming him into their home, Merchant Lyte accuses Johnny of stealing and has him thrown in jail.

Freed with the help of Rab and the Sons of Liberty, a radical group of men opposed to British rule, Johnny is welcomed into the ranks of those struggling for freedom. Johnny's initiation comes as the Sons plan and execute the Boston Tea Party. With Rab and his fellow Revolutionaries, Johnny learns about the sacrifices and dangers involved in fighting for the right that "[one] might stand up."

## Resource List

### FOR CHILDREN

#### ***The American Revolution***

Bonnie L. Lukes

#### ***Black Heroes of the American Revolution***

Burke Davis

#### ***The Boston Tea Party***

Steven Kroll

#### ***Heroines of the American Revolution: America's Founding Mothers***

Diane Silcox-Jarrett

### SPOTLIGHT

#### ***War Comes to Willy Freeman***

James Lincoln Collier

After her father is murdered, 13-year-old Willy embarks on a journey to find her kidnapped mother. She discovers the difficulties, dangers, and rewards of being a free black female during the Revolutionary War.

### FOR PARENTS & EDUCATORS

#### ***Angel in the Whirlwind: The Triumph of the American Revolution***

Benson Bobrick

#### ***Last Refuge of Scoundrels: A Revolutionary Novel***

Paul Lussier

### SPOTLIGHT

#### ***The Revolutionary War***

Louise Minks

Where did the Battle of Bunker Hill really take place? What is a "lobsterback?" Discover the answers to these questions and others in this fascinating account of the Revolutionary War. Minks describes the origins of the conflict, the events that took place in the days before the "shot heard 'round the world" was fired, and other major battles and key figures in the war.

### WEBSITES

#### **[www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/revolution/](http://www.historyplace.com/unitedstates/revolution/)**

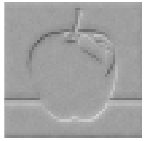
A comprehensive timeline that spans beyond the War itself.

#### **[www.si.umich.edu/spies/](http://www.si.umich.edu/spies/)**

Spy letters from the American Revolution.

#### **[www.paulreverehouse.org](http://www.paulreverehouse.org)**

The official site of the Paul Revere Museum, with information about his life and times.



# *A few notes on* writing plays

By John Olive

Here's the cool thing about writing plays: it's even better than acting because you get to play ALL the roles. If you could watch me at my desk when I'm working on a play, you'd see that I'm acting almost as much as writing. I say the lines out loud, trying out different versions of a line. I gesture wildly. I laugh at the funny stuff, get moved by the moving stuff. I'm acting. It's fun (it ain't for nothing they're called "plays", with that word's evocation of playing, of playgrounds, of innocence and joy). Like many playwrights (Shakespeare, Moliere, Pinter, Steve Martin) I started out as an actor and, although I haven't stepped out on a stage in a long time, I put my experience as an actor to use every time I sit down at my desk.

One of things people ask me about my work is: where do you get your ideas? It's a fair question. The short answer is: I make them up. Another short answer is: I don't know. Another, slightly longer answer is: well, I sit at my desk and write and when I write, ideas come to me.

I'll try a longer answer. I've been doing this work for a long time, going to a lot of plays, writing plays, etc., and I've developed an instinct—this is hard to define—for what will make a good play story. So when I run across an idea, when reading a book, or seeing a play or movie, or just thinking, something clicks in my head and I say to myself, "That's interesting. Hm." It's just an instinctive sense that lurking somewhere in this situation, in this character, is a story that can be developed as a play.

So I start to sort of poke at the idea. I make notes. The physical act of writing (and this is true whether you're at a computer keyboard or using a leaky fountain pen) sparks things in your brain. The idea develops. Characters grow. Other characters come forward. "Hey, we wanna be in this play, too." You get to know the characters and once you know them, they start to talk. They tell you who they want to become, or try to become, and once you know that, a plot develops. Pretty soon,



you wake one morning and discover that you've written a play.

Here's the last thing I want to say about writing plays. Every play is about the same thing: people trying to make their lives better. I defy you to name a play that isn't about that. People come to the theater because they want to learn how to live better. And that's what you, the playwright, have got to give them. An expanded sense of how to live. To do this you have to explore the world, make discoveries, and communicate them to your audience.

So. How do you do this, how do you explore the world for your audience?

You can travel (expensive and time-consuming). You can live, fall in love, build relationships, get to know people. You can have interesting experiences. You can think about the world, get ideas, write them down, and develop them. These are all worthwhile.

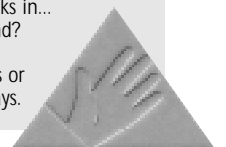
And you can read. Reading is hugely important. I read voraciously and I think all serious writers do. I get most of my ideas from reading. I don't mean that I steal from other writers, no. But reading fires my imagination like nothing else. I couldn't write plays, I don't even think I could live, if I didn't read.

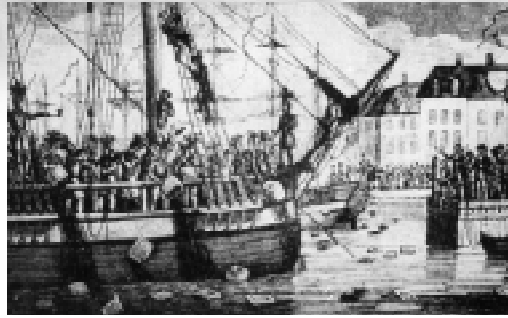
So try it. Write a play. I wouldn't want this to get around, but it's not all that hard.

## Activity

- Invite your students to try to write a short play. You can give them all a scenario from which to start, like: a student sits in an empty classroom. The door opens and the teacher walks in... What does the teacher say? How does the student respond?

You can have the playwrights read their plays to the class or cast each play and have students act out each other's plays.

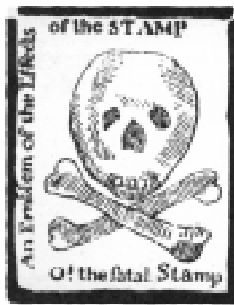




# WHY DID THE COLONISTS REVOLT?

The American Revolution began in 1775 and lasted nine years. Both the British and the **colonists** had reasons for wanting to control America. Changes in politics, the economy, and social beliefs were the basis for the colonists' rebellion.

Politically, many colonists felt that Great Britain used them for military gain. **The French and Indian War** of 1754-1763 was an example of the abuse that colonists wanted to end. The British began drafting colonists, taking possession of supplies and equipment from local farmers and tradesmen, and forcing locals to house British troops. Having to give up their homes, goods, and lives for a war many did not support was an insult to the Americans who were used to running their own lives.



Many publications showed their disgust for the Stamp Act by using fake "stamps" such as this one.

Economic hardships also took their toll on Britain's relationship with her American colonies. After the French and Indian War ended, Great Britain, in an effort to both stress their leadership over the colonists and to gain money for itself, imposed many harsh taxes

that took money out of the colonies. For example, the *Stamp Act* of 1765 required a tax on every printed document: newspapers, deeds, wills, pamphlets, and licenses. This affected all social classes equally. This was one of the first measures taken by the British that had a negative effect on the wealth of the upper classes as well as the lower. This had a leveling effect on a population that was fairly divided along class boundaries. Now every rank of person had something against which he/she could fight.

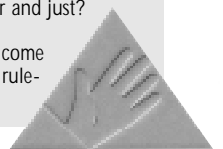
The *Townsend Act* was seen as another barrier to colonial freedom. Under this Act the Americans were required to **quarter** British troops in the colonies without receiving any payment in return. Also, the colonists had to pay **duties** on goods from Britain such as tea, lead, paper, or paint, as though they were **imported** from a foreign country.

As time went on, the social distance some colonists felt from their mother country mirrored the physical distance between America and England. Some Americans believed that they should be allowed "natural rights" such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of property. They felt that they lived like an independent nation and should therefore be allowed those same freedoms—freedom from British rule.

## Activity

- Role-play being a pro-British colonist. Can you come up with 5 reasons why the Stamp and Townsend Acts are fair and just?

Choose a rule from your own life that you don't like and come up with 5 reasons why that rule is fair and just, from the rule-maker's point of view.



## DEFINITIONS

**Colonist**—inhabitant of a colony; here the British colonies in America  
**The French and Indian War**—a conflict between France and Great Britain fought on American soil. The French united themselves with most of the Native American tribes, and the British depended on their colonists to do much of their fighting  
**Quarter**—to provide food and shelter  
**Duties**—taxes on imported goods  
**Imported**—goods or services brought in from another country



EALRS

COMMUNICATION—listen and observe, communicate clearly and effectively, analyze and evaluate  
 SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and observe, investigate, understand impact of ideas  
 CIVICS—understand core values of democracy, international relationships, and responsibilities of citizenship



# To Be a Child in 1775

*“Fixed gown for Prude, mended Mother’s riding hood, spun short thread, fixed two gowns for Neighbor Welsh, spun linen, worked on cheese basket, separated flax stems with Hannah (51 pounds each), pleated and ironed, read sermon, milked cows, spun line (50 knots), made broom from wheat straw, spun thread to bleach, made a red dye, carded 2 pounds of wool, spun harness twine, scoured pewter until my face was feverish...”*

—A 1775 journal entry lists the chores a young girl accomplished in one day.

The next time your Mom asks you to sweep the floor, think what it would be like to have to make your own broom. Or instead of quickly grabbing some fast food, what would it be like to have to chop wood, pick vegetables, and start a fire before you can begin cooking dinner. Parking at the mall might be tough, but would you rather shear a sheep, card, spin, dye, weave, and sew its wool into a drab garment—the single piece of clothing you will wear for a year? There is no doubt about it, when you compare your life to that of a teenager in Colonial America, you are living a life of luxury.

If you were living in Boston in 1775, you would probably work every day but Sunday, which is the day set aside to pray. Monday through Saturday, you work from 6am to 9am, at which time you are finally given breakfast. Then, it’s back to work until 3pm, when everyone stops for lunch, eating out of the same big pot of food. Soon the family is back at work

until the sun goes down, and all of you head straight to bed. There’s much work to do in a day and each family is responsible for itself. Because of this, you may be one of ten children; some families you know have 30 children. You are dressed as an adult and treated like one starting at age six, so play is generally not encouraged, especially for boys. Any recreation you may have is found during the course of the workday, so while you wait for the candles to harden, you make a cornhusk doll. Coming in from the field where you harvest vegetables, you play hopscotch or cat’s cradle. Toys are invented from discarded things that have no other uses (corn cobs, rags or string).

School is a luxury and most kids are simply taught at home. You learn to read and write by using the Bible. You figure out how to count and do sums in the family accounts book, where all of the goods created, sold, and purchased are written down. Girls are raised to run their homes. Boys are **apprenticed** to a tradesman, starting their life’s work at age seven. By the time you turn 16, you are married and starting your own family. Your entire childhood has been spent in training for this demanding life.

## Activity

- Pair up with another classmate. Each of you must take a skill that you possess—sewing, throwing a baseball, playing an instrument—and teach it to the other.

What does it feel like to help someone learn something that comes easily to you? As a mentor, did you draw on some of the techniques that your teachers used to instruct you? As an apprentice, did you find that the skill was easy or difficult to master? Did you like learning one-on-one this way?

- Make a journal entry as though you are a child living in 1775. The next day write an entry from the current year. What are some of the things you “did” in 1775 that you still do today? What are some things that you did today that you wouldn’t have had to do in 1775?

## DEFINITIONS

**Card:** to smooth out wool fibers so that they can be spun into thread on a spinning wheel, using a brush with rows of wire teeth

**Apprenticed:** to be trained for a long period of time until you have gained enough skill to become a professional in whatever job you studied, such as blacksmithing or silversmithing



## EALRs

READING-analyze  
SOCIAL STUDIES-analyze and synthesize  
COMMUNICATION-communicate clearly  
WRITING-writing for a purpose  
ARTS-communicate, connect

## TIMELINE OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

American history is full of terminology, some of which is no longer used today and some that is still a vital part of our government. Invite your students to look up the words that are underlined to learn more about the actions and institutions that shaped our country.

1763

England and France sign a treaty ending the French and Indian War.

1765

Parliament passes the Stamp Act as a means to pay for British troops on the American frontier. Colonists violently protest the measure.

1768

British troops arrive in Boston to enforce customs laws.

1770

Four workers are shot by British troops stationed in Boston. American patriots label the killings “The Boston Massacre.”

1773

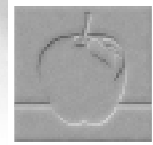
Massachusetts patriots dressed as Mohawk Indians protest the British Tea Act by dumping crates of tea into Boston Harbor.

1775

Shots are fired at Lexington and Concord. Colonial militia force British troops back to Boston. George Washington takes command of the Continental Army.

1776

Congress adopts Thomas Jefferson’s Declaration of Independence.



*“I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death!”*

—Patrick Henry, Sons of Liberty, 1775

# Sons of Liberty

## *Creating a new nation one rebellious act at a time*

In *Johnny Tremain*, fictional characters interact with real Revolution-era heroes. These men were leaders in a group of colonists fighting for independence from British rule called the Sons of Liberty.



*Often the British soldiers clashed with protesters who were members of the Sons of Liberty.*

When the Stamp Act was put into place in 1765 (see *Why Did the Colonists Revolt?* on page 7), representatives from the colonies seized the opportunity to ignite public opinion against British interference in American affairs. Merchants, businessmen, lawyers, journalists, and others formed secret organizations, calling themselves the “Sons of Liberty,” to protest the act. These patriots met in inconspicuous

places, such as taverns and by the “Liberty Tree,” a large elm tree in Boston, to discuss their plans.

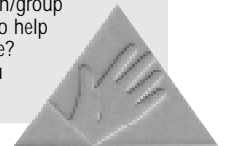
The leaders of the Sons of Liberty wanted to free the colonists from the constraints of British rule, make them aware of their own power, and arouse them to action. Toward these goals, they published articles in newspapers, made speeches at town meetings, and helped the colonists form committees to fight for their rights.

As Britain imposed rules and taxes, the Sons of Liberty led both violent and nonviolent resistance efforts to defy them. With British oppression fueling the fire, they persuaded others to join the movement, began collecting military supplies, trained townspeople as *minutemen* (a name given to those who could fight on a minute’s notice), and increased the public’s eagerness for rebellion.

If you look at the everyday lives of the people in *Johnny Tremain*—the origin of their frustrations, their motivations and actions—you can compare them to modern-day activists. Like the protests of African-Americans during the Civil Rights Movement or women suffragists, the Revolutionary activists united and fought for what they believed in, making more of a difference than even they could imagine. Their rebellious actions would eventually help to create a new nation.

## Activity/Discussion

- Ask your students to read current newspapers and/or news magazines and pick out an article with a modern-day activist or group of people fighting for a cause. Have the students cut out their articles and bring them to class. What cause is this person/group fighting for? What actions does this person/group take to help with the fight? Do you feel these actions will be effective? Why? Is there something you believe strongly in that you would fight for?



READING—analyze, evaluate

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze, synthesize, investigate

EALRs CIVICS—analyze, responsibility of citizenship

1778

France signs a treaty of alliance with the United States and the American Revolution becomes a world war.

1781

American and French forces trap Lord Cornwallis, the leader of the British forces, at Yorktown, Virginia. He surrenders his army.

1783

A peace treaty between Great Britain and the United States is signed.

1787

Delegates from all 13 of the states arrive in Philadelphia to rewrite the Articles of Confederation. The Constitutional Convention ends having passed a National Constitution that needs ratification from 3/4 of the states.

1788

The Constitution is accepted after Virginia and New York become states.

1791

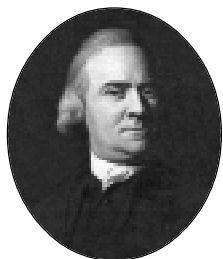
The first Congress of the United States passes a Bill of Rights.

Timeline from <http://www.studyweb.com/>



# Men of the Revolution

Learn about some of the men from *Johnny Tremain* who were real life figures in the American Revolution.



**Samuel Adams (1722–1803)**  
Born in Boston to a wealthy family, Sam Adams was one of 12 children. In 1736 he began to study at Harvard College. Adams was married twice and had two children by his first wife. He influenced events of his time through his skill as a writer, and in 1764 he wrote Boston's protest

against the Stamp Act. Adams ran the meeting that lead to the Boston Tea Party. He was a signer of the Declaration of Independence, and was later elected governor of Massachusetts in 1794. He died on October 2, 1803.



**John Hancock (1737–1793)**  
John Hancock was born in Massachusetts in 1737. He attended Harvard College and took over his uncle's trading company at the age of 27. Two years later he was elected to the Massachusetts legislature. He was also a part of a political party, the *Whigs*, which wanted British

troops out of Boston. John was the first man to sign the Declaration of Independence, and he was the first governor of Massachusetts. Hancock died in 1793.



**Paul Revere (1734–1818)**  
Revere was the third child in a large family. He learned the craft of gold and silversmithing from his father, and at the age of 19 he took over the family business. He married his first wife, Sarah, in 1757, and together they had eight children. Sarah died in 1773, after which he remarried

and had eight more children. Many remember Revere for his famous "Midnight Ride" of 1775. This ride took him from Boston to Lexington, where he warned John Hancock and Sam Adams that the British were coming. Paul Revere died in 1818.



**James Otis (1725–1783)**  
Otis was born in Massachusetts in 1725. He attended Harvard College. At the age of 23 he became a lawyer, and he worked for businessmen who were against British control. Otis led the radical opponents of British rule. He was elected to the Massachusetts legislature in

1761. After a physical attack in 1769, Otis suffered mental injuries and left public life. He died on May 23, 1783.



**Joseph Warren (1741–1775)**  
Born in Massachusetts in 1741, Warren went on to graduate from Harvard College at the age of 18. At 23 he married Elizabeth Horton, and later he practiced medicine in Boston. Warren joined the *Freemasons*, an international fraternal organization, which led to his joining an

extreme political group opposed to British rule. Although a high-ranking officer, he served as a volunteer at the Battle of Bunker Hill in 1775, where he was killed.

## Activity

Just as the men of the Revolution valued politics and freedom, often the things that are significant to us can tell a lot about who we are.

- Make a collage that displays the things that are important in your life. Once your collage is done, trade it with another student and write a biography of that student's life based on their collage.



EALRs

READING—analyze

WRITING—write for a purpose

ARTS—reason and problem solve, communicate, connect



# Women of the Revolution

During the American Revolution, women were a very important part of the struggle for independence. They stayed home to maintain the farms and businesses of their male relatives, spoke out for freedom, boycotted English tea and cloth, made warm clothing for soldiers, and volunteered at the camps. Women also spied and carried messages to soldiers, and even disguised themselves as men to participate in battle.

Mercy Otis Warren  
(1728–1814)

Mercy was a playwright, poet, and **pamphleteer**, letting her political opinions be known through her writing. Many influential men of the time, including Samuel Adams and John Hancock, sought her guidance on political issues. Her song “Massachusetts Song of Liberty” became the most popular in the colonies. In 1790, she dedicated a book of her plays to George Washington, and in 1805 published a three-volume book called *History of the Rise, Progress, and Termination of the American Revolution*.



Mercy Otis Warren

Deborah Sampson  
(Samson) (1760–1827)

At the age of 19 Deborah impersonated a man in order to join the Continental Army. She was soon recognized and dismissed from service. At 21, she signed a three-year enlistment under a different male name, but after 18 months of service her secret was discovered again. She was honorably discharged, and received special recognition for her heroism and a pension for her services. Deborah later gave lectures on her experiences in the military. In 1983, the governor of Massachusetts proclaimed her to be the “Official Heroine of the State of Massachusetts.”

Margaret Cochran Corbin (1751–1800)

Margaret accompanied her husband when he joined the **Continental Army**, where she cooked, washed clothes and nursed the wounded. After her husband was killed in an attack on Fort Mifflin, Margaret stepped in and continued to load and fire his cannon until she was badly wounded herself. In 1779, Congress granted her a **pension** as a disabled soldier. She was the first woman to receive such an allowance from the government. In 1926, her remains were moved to West Point, where a monument was built in her honor.

## Activity

- Who are some women today whom you consider heroes? What sort of challenges have they faced in their lives? Write a letter to a woman you consider inspirational and tell her how she has influenced you.

## DEFINITIONS

**Pamphleteer**—writer of political handouts

**Continental Army**—the official army of the colonies in their fight against Great Britain during the American Revolution, under the command of General George Washington

**Pension**—a regular payment made to people over a specific age, widows, or the disabled for services provided in business, the military, etc.



EALRs

READING—analyze

WRITING—write for a purpose

COMMUNICATION—communicate clearly

SOCIAL STUDIES—analyze and synthesize, investigate