

My Brother Sam is Dead



By

James and Christopher Collier

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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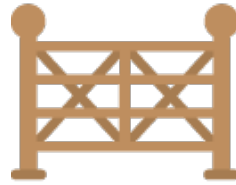


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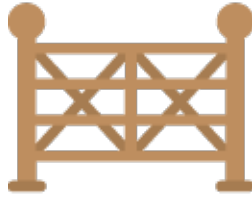
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About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. The ten chapters of the novel study focus on one or two chapters of *My Brother Sam is Dead*. The unit is comprised of the following different activities:

1. Before You Read
2. Vocabulary Building
3. Comprehension Questions
4. Language and Extension Activities

A portfolio cover (page 7) as well as a Checklist (page 6) are included so that students may keep track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to:

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases... including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story, **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include, The American War of Independence; the conflict between the love of one's country and the love of mankind; the illusion of glory; the impact of war on individuals and families; dealing with adversity; coming of age; courage, sacrifice and endurance.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms/homophones
3. Identifying/creating *alliteration*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify *personification*.
7. Identify *anagrams*
8. Listing compound words
9. Identifying parts of speech
10. Identify/create *similes*
11. Identification of root words

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Complete Five W's Chart
4. Identify *cliffhangers*
5. Identify the climax of the novel.
6. Complete a Story Pyramid

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Identify the protagonist/antagonist
3. Relating personal experiences
4. Compare characters

Creative and Critical Thinking

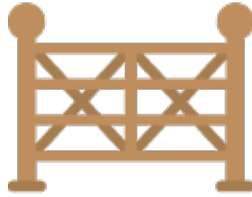
1. Research
2. Write a newspaper story
3. Participate in a talk show
4. Conduct an interview
5. Create a poem
6. Write about personal feelings
7. Write a book review
8. Complete a KWS Chart

Art Activities

1. A Storyboard
2. Create a collage
3. Design a cover for the novel
4. Create a comic strip

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Synopsis

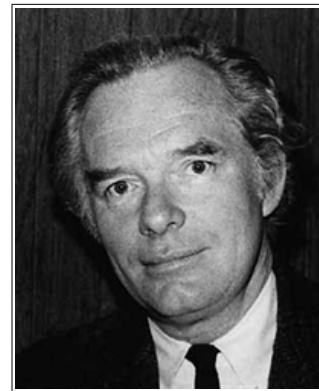
The classic story of one family torn apart by the Revolutionary War. All his life, Tim Meeker has looked up to his brother. Sam is smart and brave, and is now a part of the American Revolution. Not everyone in town wants to be a part of the rebellion. Most are supporters of the British, including Tim and Sam's father. With the war soon raging, Tim knows he will have to make a choice between the Revolutionaries and the Redcoats, and between his brother and his father.

[Courtesy of the Publisher]

Author Biography

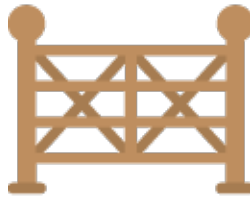
James and Christopher Collier

At first glance these two brothers, who have created the highly successful and moving historical novels ***My Brother Sam is Dead*** (1974) and ***The Bloody Country*** (1976), are as unlike as any two people could be. Christopher, or Kit as he prefers, is the younger of the two and epitomizes the New England college professor he is. He is slightly built, of serious demeanor, and appears as a man who has likely spent the better part of his life indoors, probably in the dusky archives of a college library. He dresses conservatively, speaks crisply and seriously, who has made the study of American history, his life's work. Jim, on the other hand, is taller, heavier, and has a ruddy complexion that suggests a more active life. He speaks easily and with a broad humor (often directed fondly at his younger brother). With the exception of a stint in the army, his career has been as a New York City- based writer—a writer of magazine articles and books for both young people and adults. [Adapted from JSTOR]



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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

[illegible]

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Name: _____

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Chapter 1



Before you read the chapters:

The **protagonist** in most novels features the main character or “good guy”. The main character of *My Brother Sam is Dead* is 14-year-old Tim Meeker, who lives during the troubled times of the American Revolutionary War. Think back on other main characters from books you have read or movies you have seen. Who would you choose as the most memorable protagonist? What made this character so unforgettable?



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

garrison	virtue	prevail	constitutes	agitators
sloth	lasciviousness	subversion	vile	bayonet

1. In my house I will decide what _____ disloyalty.
2. The meaning of _____ is *an habitual disinclination to exertion*.
3. Mr. Beach shook his head. “Surely common sense will _____,” he said.
4. The soldier fixed his _____ to the end of his rifle.
5. If there is _____ among the ranks, the soldiers will be court-martialled.
6. Sam was staying at the _____ in Boston.
7. These _____ can always manage to stir up the passions of a people.
8. My brother has a _____ mouth and a worse temper.
9. I think that you will find that loyalty is a _____ among most people.
10. I have a new song about girls, but it’s too _____ for your ears.

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the story at the beginning of Chapter One.

2. How would you describe the personality of Tim's father?

3. What seemed to be the attitude of the local men in the tavern when Sam brought them news of the fighting?

4. What argument did Sam make for starting a rebellion against the British?

5. What do you think is meant by, "Sam was a triumphant sort of person".

6. What was your initial impression of Sam from these two chapters?

7. Why did Tim think that Sam owed it to his father to be nicer to him? What did Sam do in particular that really set his father off?

8. What information did Sam tell Tim about which he swore him to secrecy?

9. Describe what caused Tim's father to weep at the end of the chapter?

Language Activities



A. Foreshadowing

Chapter 1 contains an example of an important literary device called **foreshadowing**. Foreshadowing is defined as *a warning or indication of a future event*. We find Tim's father weeping and Tim states, *I knew there were bad times coming*. What events do you think this realization foreshadows?



Prediction:

B. Benedict Arnold

Sam mentions a number of historical figures in this chapter. One of them is Captain Benedict Arnold, the Captain of the Governor's Second Foot Guard. Captain Arnold would eventually become one of the most reviled people in American history. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research three important and interesting facts about Benedict Arnold and his particular place in American history..



C. A **simile** is a comparison using the words “like” or “as”. An example of this literary device is found in the chapter’s first sentence: ... *the rain whipped against the windows of our tavern, making a sound like muffled drums.*



What is being compared in this example?

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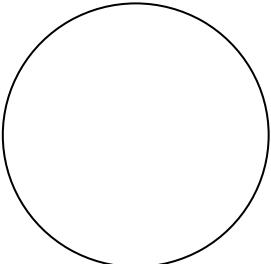
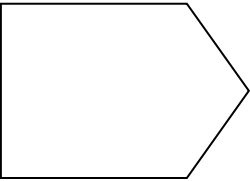
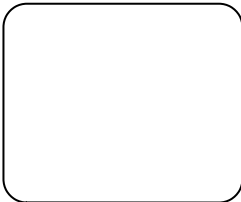

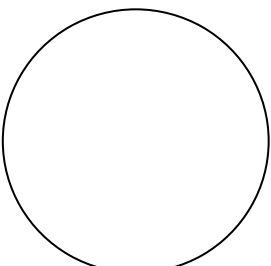
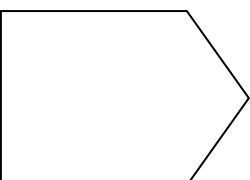

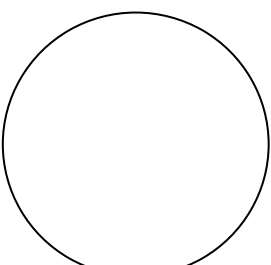
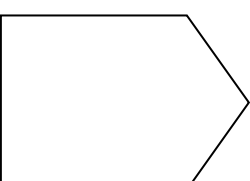

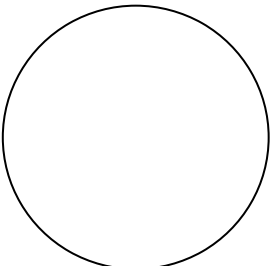
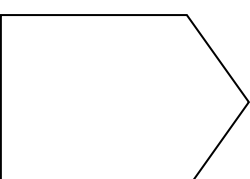
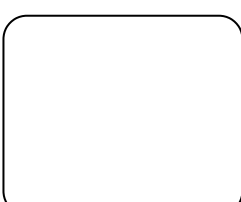
Invent your own **similes** comparing the following items with something from your own imagination:

a) the roll of thunder

b) a discontented cow

D. Perspectives.

Choose an event from this chapter that involved at least three characters (i.e., the heated discussion in the tavern involving Sam, his dad and the local men.) Now consider the same incident from different perspectives and compare them using the chart below.

VIEW POINTS	THOUGHTS/ FEELINGS	IMPACT	REFLECTIONS
			
			
			
			

E. The Diamante Poem.

There are many forms of poetry available to the aspiring poet other than the rhyming poem. One of the forms of poetry that is the most fun to tackle is the **Diamante** poem.



The Diamante Poem

The diamante poem has a distinct form and a distinct shape. Directions for creating one is as follows:

Line 1 - Noun or subject – one word.

Line 2 – Two adjectives that describe Line 1.

Line 3 – Three *'ing* words that describe line 1 (i.e. *playing*).

Line 4 – Four nouns – the first two are connected with Line 1, the last two are connected with Line 7.

Line 5 – Three *'ing* words that describe Line 7.

Line 6 – Two adjectives that describe Line 7.

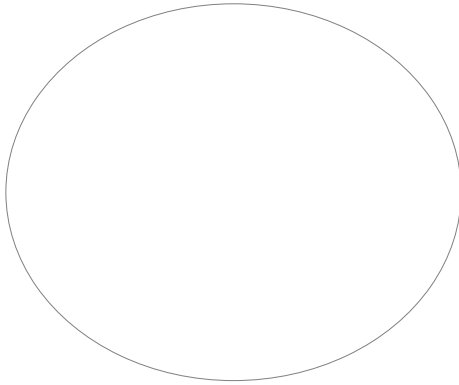
Line 7 – One noun synonym for the subject.

Following the above instructions, try your hand at writing a diamante poem using an idea, event or character from the first chapter as your inspiration.

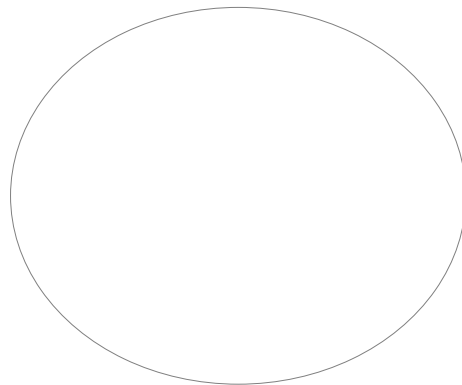
Title: _____

F. 5 Ws and an H.

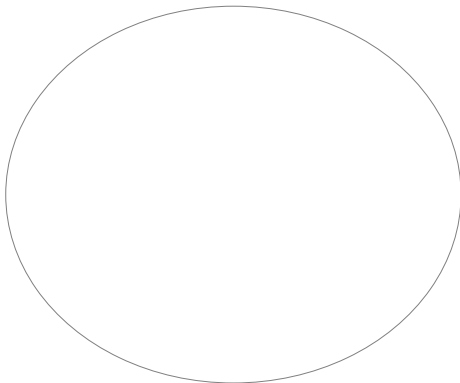
Choose an event from this section that you thought was really important and/or exciting. Using facts that you gleaned from reading about this event, fill in the balloons below, summarizing what you learned.



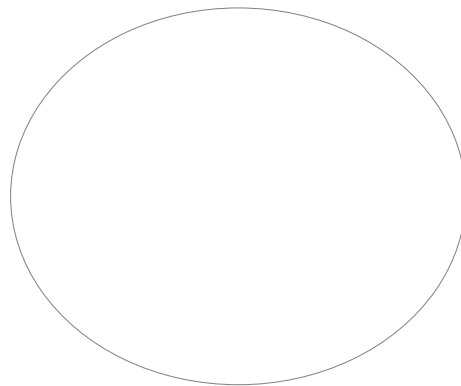
WHO?



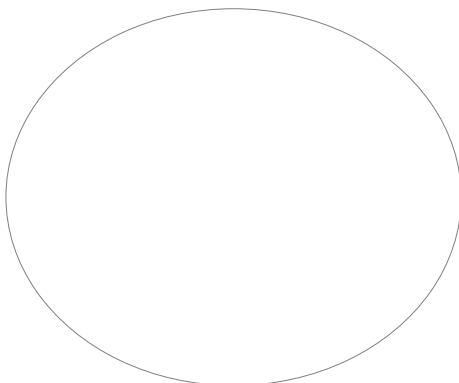
WHAT?



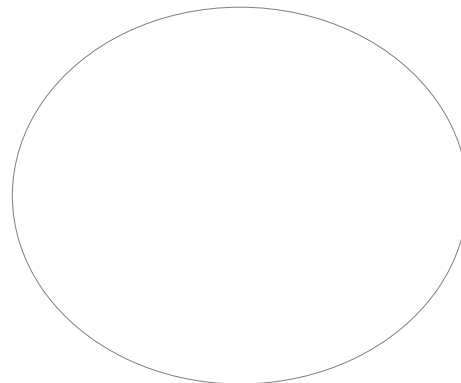
WHEN?



WHERE?



WHY?



HOW?

Extension Activity



Storyboard

A storyboard is a series of pictures that tell about an important event in a story. A story-board can tell the story of only one scene – or the entire novel. Complete the storyboard below illustrating the events described in this section our novel. You may wish to practice your drawings on a separate piece of paper.

1	2
3	4
5	6