

The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg



By

Rodman Philbrick

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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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. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on three chapters of **The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P. Figg** and is comprised of four different sections:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may 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 Civil War; life in North America during the 1860's; slavery; early transportation; traveling caravans/ circuses; courage, loyalty; chance and coincidence and family relationships.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms & antonyms
3. Identifying/creating *personification*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Identify exaggeration
7. Identifying/creating similes
8. Use of singular / plural nouns
9. Identify sarcasm
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identifying / creating *alliteration*
14. Identifying anagrams.

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a 5 W's Chart
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify *cliffhanger*
4. Identify *foreshadowing*
5. Write a synopsis
6. Predict an outcome
7. Complete a Sequence Chart

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare two characters
3. Understand concepts such as *meeting a challenge*
4. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper article
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Complete an Observation Chart
5. Conduct an interview
6. Write a description of personal feelings
7. Write a Book Review
8. Write a journal entry

Art Activities

1. Design a cover for the novel
3. Create a Storyboard.

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Synopsis

In this award-winning page-turner, twelve-year-old orphan Homer runs away from Pine Swamp, Maine, to find his older brother who has been sold into the Union army. With laugh-aloud humor, Homer outwits and outruns a colorful assortment of Civil War-era thieves, scallywags, and spies as he makes his way south, following clues that finally lead him to Gettysburg. Even through a hail of gunfire, Homer never loses heart - but will he find his brother? Or will he be too late? (The Publisher)

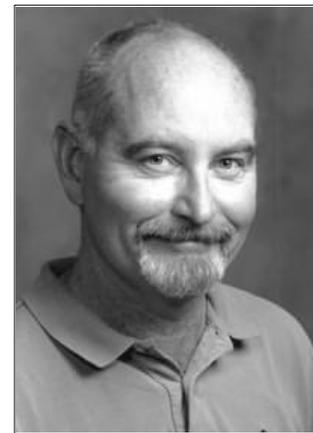
Author Biography

Rodman Philbrick

Rodman Philbrick grew up on the coast of New Hampshire and has been writing novels since the age of sixteen. For a number of years he published mystery and suspense novels for adults. Two of his detective novels were nominated for the Shamus Award. *Brothers & Sinners* finally won the Shamus outright in 1993.

In that same year his debut young adult novel *Freak the Mighty* won numerous awards and was eventually made into the feature film *The Mighty*, starring Sharon Stone and James Gandolfini. *Freak The Mighty* has become a standard reading selection in thousands of classrooms worldwide, and now has nearly three million copies in print.

Philbrick's young adult novel *The Young Man And The Sea* draws upon his youthful experiences as a boat builder, and his vivid memories of growing up in a small town on the coast of New England. In 2010 his novel *The Mostly True Adventures of Homer P.Figg*, set at the time of the Civil War, won a Newbery Honor. His novel, *Zane and The Hurricane, A story of Katrina* was published in March 2014.



Courtesy of the following website: <http://www.rodmanphilbrick.com/info.html>

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By Rodman Philbrick

Name: _____

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Chapter 1 - 3



Before you read the chapters:

Every good novel needs an interesting **antagonist** ("bad guy"). In these first three chapters we meet a character that you will probably dislike. What specific characteristics do you think make for an effective antagonist? Try to come up with at least three characteristics.



Vocabulary:

Match each word with its definition.

1.	scalawag		a.	a deadly epidemic or disease
2.	perish		b.	much of something
3.	pestilence		c.	to beat with one's fists
4.	aggrieve		d.	wonderful or marvelous
5.	pummel		e.	the care, feeding, stabling, etc., of horses for pay
6.	deliberate		f.	scamp; rascal
7.	prodigious		g.	compulsory enrollment of persons for military service
8.	complicated		h.	to injure by injustice
9.	livery		i.	suitcase
10.	conscription		j.	on purpose
11.	abundance		k.	to die or be destroyed
12.	valise		l.	difficult to understand

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the first three chapter. Remember a setting encompasses both the place and time period.

2. Think of four appropriate words to describe the personality of Squinton Leach.

b. How might some regard Squinton Leach's name as being appropriate for his character?

3. Find an example in the list of "Things Uncle Hates" which prove to be quite illogical.

4. Why did it surprise the boys when their uncle left for town on Bob the horse?

5. What kind of a man was J.T. Marston? Be sure to offer proof for your answer.

6. Describe the purpose of the **Enrolment Act**.

7. Why did Homer believe that his brother would not survive the war? How might this actually be a legitimate concern?

b. What did Homer intend to do about this?

Language Activities



A. The Simile.

Rodman Philbrick is an author who seems to enjoy using literary devices. One example that we see on more than one occasion in this chapter is the **simile** (a comparison between two things using the words *like* or *as*). Here is such an instance: "eyes as black as buttons"

a) What two things are being compared in this simile?

--	--

Create your own similes from the following suggestions:

b) the cackle of a witch

--

c) the heat of a wood stove

--

d) Bonus: Invent your own simile

B. Harriett Beecher Stowe

The first few chapters of this novel takes place in the state of Maine during the dark days of the American Civil War (1861-1865). A writer who made her home in Maine for several years during this era was Harriett Beecher Stowe, who is famous for writing the classic novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. This renowned work brought to light the life of the African-American slaves during the 1800's - with all its heartache and cruelty. The popularity of the novel turned out to be one of the reasons why the people of the northern states (which outlawed slavery) wished to abolish this horrific practice. The issue of slavery was one of the main reasons why the United States was plunged into years of terrible conflict in which there were more than one-half million casualties.



Using resources in your school library or the Internet, do a further investigation of this influential writer. Research three interesting facts about the Harriett Beecher Stowe - her personal life, writing accomplishments, awards, family, personal beliefs etc. You may wish to conclude your research with a personal statement with regard to your own personal feelings about her accomplishments.

C. Place the following words from these chapters in alphabetical order.

perished	1.
Pierce	2.
paper	3.
paddock	4.
porch	5.
pipe	6.
pistol	7.
place	8.
profit	9.
pal	10

D. The Quatrain Poem.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The novel takes place during one of the most momentous events in American history – the Civil War. A key issue which caused this conflict was slavery. The following quatrain is the first four lines from a poem called ***A Slave's Dream***, written by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. (You might want to check out the whole poem online.)

*Beside the ungathered rice he lay,
His sickle in his hand;
His breast was bare, his matted hair
Was buried in the sand.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A – B – C – B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBA, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first three chapters of our novel.

The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: _____

Extension Activities



A Comic Strip

This activity is especially for students with an artistic flair or who love comic books! It can be done for any event up to this point in the story. The first step is to decide on the length of your comic strip (6 to 9 frames is suggested); next consider what events you will include. You may wish to highlight a brief incident, or include the highlights of the novel to this point. A quick sketch of the comic strip can first be accomplished in a **storyboard format** before a final copy is attempted. The strip should include a title and dialogue. It should be neat and imaginative.
