

Introduction

During the years I have been teaching *Johnny Tremain*, the final meeting of the “Boston Observers”—Esther Forbes’s name for the inner circle of the Sons of Liberty—has always intrigued me. While I had implemented a rather lengthy set of questions about the events of the book, put together a variety of essay questions and the usual culminating test, and even used the Walt Disney movie as a “reward,” I had never pursued a study of these Patriots. This series of lessons centers on primary sources about nine members of the Long Room Club, the actual group on which Forbes’ Boston Observers is based. Some of these men are famous and exceedingly well documented, such as John and Samuel Adams, Paul Revere, and John Hancock. Others are moderately well known, or at least have left enough writing and/or activity behind for us to learn quite a bit about them, such as Dr. Benjamin Church, Dr. Joseph Warren, Josiah Quincy, and the Rev. Dr. Samuel Cooper. Still others were too old and too private to be noted for more than their contribution during this time, such as William Cooper.

Classes will first read *Johnny Tremain* as usual. A map of Boston in the 1770s, labeled with streets and locations where the story actually takes place should be provided to students, so they can get a sense of where things are in relation to each other and other pertinent data.¹ Along with the map, a worksheet will be provided to help the students better visualize where things are. Following a particular template found below, we shall look at each of the main characters, as well as most of the minor ones, and see what they do, what motivates them, and how they change, or not, as the story unfolds. Fictional characters, such as the Laphams and the Lytes, are important, because they show us how actual people lived thought, acted, and reacted during that time. Johnny Tremain, who is not an actual person, but is nonetheless the main character of the story, represents the story of many Bostonians of his day. We’ll explore the ways in which Johnny does this.

Because the Boston Tea Party is such a large part of the events portrayed in *Johnny Tremain*, I have provided primary source material from various newspapers and other sources in late 1773. This is followed by a section containing information on nine members of the Long Room Club, including a few introductory paragraphs and excerpts from several primary sources. Students will combine into groups to explore the various members of the Long Room Club, and to compare these men as they understand them with Forbes’ depictions in *Johnny Tremain*. They will then prepare oral reports as well as a written consensus about the person(s) assigned. Some students may also prepare maps of Boston based on the material provided. More ambitious students may make a presentation on the Long Room Club’s members’ contributions to the Battles of Lexington and Concord, based on *Johnny Tremain* and other sources.

¹ Appropriate maps may be found in: Emerson D. Fite and Archibald Freeman, eds., *A Book of Old Maps Delineating American History from the Earliest Days down to the Close of the Revolutionary War*, (New York: Dover Publications, 1969), and John Harris, *America Rebels*, (Boston: Globe Newspaper Company, 1976). See also the 1775 Boston maps from the Norman B. Leventhal Map Center at the Boston Public Library, which may be downloaded from <http://maps.bpl.org/>.

Classes might also hold a mock meeting of the Long Room Club, with all members present, and every member making at least a small contribution that fits what each student has discovered about “her/his” character. There is assuredly room for lots of creative writing – letters, poems, and stories about these interesting, active people and the lives they led.

While there is certainly quite a bit of source material here, there is just as certainly room for more. The teacher who uses this material, of course, may well choose to use only some of the selections. The variables of class composition, size, interest, and ability (and time) will certainly affect the choices each teacher makes. I have not attempted to prepare precise, daily lesson plans simply because of the variables already mentioned. Much more important than all of these possibilities is the interest that could be stimulated in the minds of our students. Perhaps another Esther Forbes will come out of this, stimulated and intrigued by what she or he has discovered. All the work we do would be worthwhile if the coming generation would continue the search for what really happened in that room over Edes and Gill’s print shop so long ago.

Finding Your Way Around Johnny Tremain's Boston

Directions: Use the maps of Boston you have been given, and trace a map of the city of Boston as it was in the 1770's. Be sure to include a scale of yards, including the length of half a mile, so you can see how close everything is.

Use a key to label the following places:

Boston Neck	Boston Common	Griffin's Wharf	Long Wharf
Orange Street	Liberty Tree	Gray's Ropewalk	Hancock Wharf
Newbury Street	Sam Adams's House	Milk Street	Clarke Warehouse
Faneuil Hall	Province House	Old State House	Old South Meeting House
King Street	Tremont Street	Hanover Street	Green Dragon Tavern
Middle Street	Mill Pond	Beacon Hill	Edes & Gill's Office

More Directions: Prepare answers for these questions. Use separate paper, and answer them in "final copy condition."

1. About how far is it from Faneuil Hall to Old South Meeting House?
2. How far is it from Edes & Gill's print shop to Griffin's Wharf?
3. Find out where Christ Church (Old North Church) is located. Then find out the location of Paul Revere's house. How close are they to each other?
4. Some British soldiers marched from Hanover Street to the Cambridge Ferry on April 18, 1775. About how far did they walk?
5. How far did John Hancock have to travel when he went from his house to his wharf?
6. Invent your own question about Boston, using your maps. Explain why you chose this question to answer. (Be sure to answer your question.)

Methods of Characterization in *Johnny Tremain*

Writers use several different ways to develop characters, depending on what sort of work they are writing. As you know, every story has a **protagonist** - the main character of the story. Johnny Tremain is obviously the main character of the novel by that name. Every story has at least one **antagonist**, a character who draws out the protagonist by challenging him, yet not always in a bad way. Rab is in many ways the antagonist for Johnny Tremain, although others are much harsher to Johnny.

How do you come to understand a character in a story? Look for these things:

1. What the character says about himself.
2. What the character does.
3. What the character says about others.
4. What the character's motives appear to be.
5. What others say about the character.
6. What the character thinks about others.
7. What the character thinks about himself.
8. What others say about the character.
9. How the character changes when in the presence of others.
10. How others change in the presence of the character.

There is no "sacredness" to this order, nor do all of them always apply. If the story is told in first person (I, me, my), it may not be obvious what others think of the protagonist. If the narration is omniscient third person (he, she, they, and the narrator knows "everything"), then you can learn lots about a character.

Johnny Tremain has many characters. As you know, Johnny, the Laphams, the Lytes, and Rab and his family are fictional, although they could have existed, because there were people very much like them living in Boston in the 1770's.

Assignments:

Choose three fictional characters in *Johnny Tremain*.. Complete a Character Analysis Sheet for each.

Do the same for the Boston Observers as they appear in the novel. Josiah Quincy, Sam Adams, Paul Revere, and Dr. Warren are the easiest. If you are brave, try Dr. Church and Rev. Samuel Cooper. Complete a Character Analysis Sheet for at least three of these men.

When we finish the book and learn about the actual members of the Long Room Club, we'll compare our findings to see how closely Esther Forbes came to portraying the members as they "really" were.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS SHEET

Name _____ Date _____

Character/ Person _____

What does the character say about her/himself?

What does the character do?

What does the character say about others?

What are the character's motives?

What do others say about the character?

What does the character think about others?

What do others think about the character?

What does the character think about her/himself?

How does the character change in the presence of others?

How do others change in the character's presence?

Write a paragraph in which you assess this character. Is this a person you would be willing to trust? How much would you enjoy being with this person? What are the character's best qualities? What are this character's greatest weaknesses?

The Long Room Club and the Boston Observers

Esther Forbes, in her novel *Johnny Tremain*, places Samuel Adams in charge of the Boston Observers, who in turn plan and direct the operations of the Sons of Liberty. She based the Boston Observers on the Long Room Club, although this group of men was one of several who jointly directed the Sons of Liberty. Some men, such as Paul Revere, Dr. Joseph Warren, and Samuel Adams, were members of several groups. Because these groups did not keep records or provide membership lists, it is hard to know exactly what role each member played. These men were, after all, trying to overthrow the government, and if caught, could be executed under the laws of Britain as traitors.

The Boston Observers are found in two parts of *Johnny Tremain*. We are introduced to them in chapter 6, “Salt-Water Tea,” and they meet a second time in Chapter 8, “A World to Come.” Their meeting place is the upstairs room of the print shop for the *Boston Observer*, just as the Long Room Club met in the upstairs room of the print shop for the *Boston Gazette*. In both cases, the meetings were secret. Members were not expected to attend every meeting, due to health and travel concerns. Also in both groups, some of the members like each other, and some do not. Because they were secret organizations, both groups are afraid there might be a spy in the group – and both are correct.

Who were the members of members of the Boston Observers? Forbes tells us there were twenty-two members, but she does not name very many. They include Paul Revere, Samuel Adams, Dr. Joseph Warren, Rev. Samuel Cooper, William Cooper, Josiah Quincy, John Hancock, Dr. Benjamin Church, John Adams, James Otis, and William Molineaux. Forbes does not include John Adams in her “scholarly” list, even though he probably attended from time to time, but the other “official” list by David Fischer does list John Adams.² Most of the other members were not well known in Boston at that time. Some were very young, but would rise to important positions later.

Below you will find information about nine of the members of the Long Room Club. A brief biographical review will be first, followed by at least three primary sources — something the person actually wrote himself or something someone else wrote about him, or a letter written to him. Ideally, the materials chosen will be about them during 1772-1775, the time described in *Johnny Tremain*.

² David Hackett Fischer, *Paul Revere's Ride*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).