

Love to Read



# Treasure Island

1883

Robert Louis Stevenson

*A rollicking romp of an adventure story with tension aplenty. It is the quintessential action novel complete with pirates, treasure, murder and mayhem. Structurally sophisticated with demanding vocabulary, the novel explores ideas of morality.*



# CONTENTS

## Overview for teachers



Page

### Context ..... 3

- About the author
- What's the story about?
- Themes to look out for

### Literary techniques ..... 4–8

#### Characters

- Jim Hawkins
- Long John Silver
- Dr Livesey
- Squire Trelawney
- Captain Smollet

#### Setting

- The Admiral Benbow
- The Hispaniola
- The Island

#### Narrative techniques

#### Structure

#### Language

#### Special feature

- Pathetic fallacy

## Activities for children



### ► Before reading ..... 10–11

#### Ideas for getting started – Engaging with the world of the novel

- Pirates and sailors
- Sailing away
- What do you think?
- About the author

### ► During reading ..... 12–19

#### Stopping places – Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques

- 1 End of Chapter 1
- 2 End of Chapter 8
- 3 End of Chapter 11
- 4 End of Chapter 14
- 5 End of Chapter 17
- 6 End of Chapter 21
- 7 End of Chapter 27
- 8 The end of the novel

### ► After reading ..... 20–21

#### Create and imagine – Developing a personal response to the novel

- Off by heart
- Author's chair
- Message in a bottle
- Pirates and monsters

*Squire Grelawney, Dr Livesey, and the rest of these gentleman having asked me to write down the whole particulars about Treasure Island, from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is still treasure not yet lifted, I take up my pen in the year of grace 17-- , and go back to the time when my father kept the 'Admiral Benbow' inn , and the brown old seaman, with the sabre cut, first took up his lodging under our roof.*





# Overview for teachers





## Context

### *About the author*

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in Edinburgh in 1850. He came from a wealthy, well-respected family. As a child he was something of an outsider, mainly due to recurrent long bouts of illness which confined him to his bed, being read to by his nurse and privately tutored. He remained something of a non-conformer in his adult life. At the age of thirty he married a divorced American woman, ten years his senior. It was a match he had been advised against, but he was headstrong, self-willed and in love. They travelled together in search of a climate that might be kind to his fragile health, but he finally died when only forty-four.

Stevenson's work was celebrated during his life-time, but fell out of favour after the First World War. He has only recently become acknowledged in literary circles as a great writer once more.

### *What's the story about?*

The story largely is told from the point of view of our hero, Jim Hawkins, a young boy who lives with his parents at an inn – 'The Admiral Benbow'. Jim's destiny dramatically changes with the arrival of Billy Bones; a terrifying pirate. He employs Jim to be a lookout for other pirates who may arrive looking for him. And indeed they do, for Billy Bones has documents that they want! These truly horrific characters - Blind Pew, Black Dog and others - serve Billy Bones with the 'Black Spot', the mark of death. Death upon death does ensue: Jim's father, Billy Bones and Blind Pew.

After Billy Bones' death, Jim goes through Bones' chest. In the panic he snatches a bundle that contains a map for a 'Treasure Island' given to Bones by Captain Flint, another abominable but now dead pirate, who has buried his treasure there. Jim takes the map to Doctor Livesey and Squire Trelawney, two morally upright and respected characters. The Squire seizes the opportunity for adventure and fortune and fits out a ship, hires hands – including one Long John Silver – and sets off on a high seas and island adventure accompanied by the Doctor and Jim.

During the voyage, Jim, hidden in an apple barrel, overhears Long John Silver's mutinous conversation with another pirate and immediately informs the Squire and the Doctor. What ensues is a tense, exciting and bloody venture that takes place on board ship and on the island. At one point, Jim thoughtlessly disobeys the Doctor and decides to go it alone – all with the best intentions. On his 'boy's own adventure' he witnesses murder, kills a man himself - albeit by accident - and meets Ben Gunn, a sailor marooned by Flint, who has already found the treasure and moved it.

After much subterfuge and fighting, the heroes are victorious and sail away with the treasure, taking Long John Silver with them, whilst marooning the rest of the pirates. However, in one last twist in the tale, Long John Silver escapes, taking some of the treasure with him and, ominously, Jim appears to be haunted by the whole adventure.

### *Themes to look out for*

- Loyalty
- Betrayal
- Greed
- Adventure
- Death
- Morality
- Dreams



## Literary techniques

### *Presentation of character is achieved through*

- What the character says
- What the character does
- What other characters say about them
- How other characters react to them
- How they are described in the narrative



## Characters

### *Jim Hawkins*

Jim is a brave, humane and clever boy, with a mind of his own. Although he can be rebellious and thoughtless at times, it is always with the best of intentions. Jim as a narrator is used as a device to drive and unfurl the plot, and the reader is meant to side with him. He accidentally overhears conversations, creating dramatic irony and increasing the subterfuge. Witnessing events from a distance, he and the reader can only surmise what might be occurring - adding mystery, suspense and tension.

### *Long John Silver*

Alluded to several times by a variety of characters before the reader meets him, Silver is one of the most famous and complex villains in literature. Stevenson forces the reader to continually re-evaluate their opinion of Silver as he is charming yet murderous, incredibly intelligent but political and manipulative, seemingly willing to please and to bargain - but is he willing to keep his word? The most dangerous and feared character in the novel, he is fully in command of himself and every situation.



## *Doctor Livesey*

Depicted as a very honourable, sensible and trustworthy gentleman, Livesey has a strong sense of duty and is humanitarian, highly moral and brave, but not without cunning. He provides an alternative narrative view and is gently mocked by Stevenson in the process, revealing Livesey to be slightly boastful, proud and capable of exaggerating for effect.

## *Squire Trelawney*

Also gently mocked by Stevenson, the squire is a well-meaning, good man, but massively naive with the romantic idea of going to sea and of pirates. He is generous, but gung-ho. His language is smattered with hyperbole to highlight that he is a man of great extremes and excitability - a contrast to the more measured Livesey.

## *Captain Smollet*

Employed by Squire Trelawny to captain 'The Hispaniola', Smollet is morally excellent. He is not initially well-liked for although he possesses calm professionalism, he lacks warmth. However, as the novel progresses, dislike turns to admiration as Smollet shows himself to be Silver's equal and nemesis.



# Setting

## *The setting can*

- Be a backdrop to the action
- Reflect characters' experiences
- Symbolise ideas the author wishes to convey
- Have its own culture and values
- Cause conflict and distress



## *The Admiral Benbow*

A confined, parochial and unglamorous environment, the inn is used as a backdrop to emphasise how demonic and worldly the pirates are. It acts as a contrast to the later settings, enabling the reader to see what an adventure Jim embarks upon.

## *The Hispaniola*

Another confined setting, this time used to add tension since there is nowhere to escape to when things become dangerous. It is also used to show the author's admiration and romantic attachment to sea travel.

## *The Island*

A very powerful setting referred to at the beginning of each chapter from Part III onwards. Stevenson uses personification and metaphor to increase the idea of its power and formidability. The island is an unforgiving, dangerous place, full of disease, stagnation and 'poisonous brightness'. Unlike many 'boys' adventure' authors, he portrays the island in a very unromantic, realistic light - there are dangers!

# Narrative techniques

*Treasure Island* is written in the first person, predominantly from Jim Hawkins' point of view, with sections from Doctor Livesey, Squire Trelawney (a letter) and Captain Smollet (his log). This gives the sense that the story is being told from the 'inside', strengthening the illusion that the account is real and making the reader feel more involved and empathetic. However, the danger is that it is a limited point of view. Stevenson uses this to his advantage, highlighting how blind to the real events the heroes are, resulting in an increase in drama and tension, as well as sometimes adding humour.



# Structure

*Structure is the order or pattern in which a novel is put together and should*

- Maintain the interest of the reader
- Move the action from one episode to the next
- Arouse a reader's interest in character or situation
- Create a moment of crisis
- Create expectation or surprise



The creation of mystery, suspense and tension are paramount in this novel. First of all, what we are about to hear is already over; the reader is told this right from the beginning. The focus is not on 'who done it', but how it was done. The reader is not sure who the main villain is to begin with as Billy Bones and the terrifying Blind Pew quickly die and Long John Silver, though talked of in warnings is initially presented as harmless and genial. In fact, characters are often introduced through hearsay or sound first, then as a figure in the distance and then a physical description. Overheard conversation is a structural device to quickly fill in more about a character's background, create suspense and dramatic irony. For example in 'The Apple Barrel' chapter, the reader and Jim now know more about Long John Silver, but Long John Silver doesn't know they know! Stevenson layers complication after complication to thicken the intrigue and suspense.

Stevenson uses the technique of 'form within form' to move the action from one episode to the next. In Chapter 7, Squire Trelawney's letter propels the plot forward and provides the subtext that the squire is an idiot who cannot keep the secret that in the previous chapter all the characters agreed to keep. As a result, the reader understands the possible consequences of his indiscretion and suspense is created. This technique is repeated later in the novel when Smollett's log is included to fill in any narrative gaps.

Stevenson employs in Chapter 13, 'a story within a story' to create tension. The reader is aware of two plans going on, but the characters do not have the same information. Chapter 15 slowly reveals how the treasure came to be on the island, after much speculation on the side of the reader.

## Language

The language of sound is incredibly important in providing drama and adding confusion: people are overheard plotting or shouting; the sound of movements - 'creaking'; the noise from the weather and the sea - 'shore birds...crying all around us'; the sound of gunfire and sudden noises. In Chapter 15, sounds could give Jim away, highlighting his fragility, vulnerability and the danger he is in. Words like 'said', 'says', 'told', 'continued', 'replied' are used after dialogue. The odd 'roar' is used towards the end of the novel, but otherwise Stevenson is not overly dramatic in his description of speech. It also highlights that this is a written report and the use of similes adds to the colloquial nature of the account.

Description is important to Stevenson in creating a sense of atmosphere and descriptive verbs are used to reflect the action genre of the novel. Notice for example:

- When Long John Silver murders Tom in Chapter 14, Stevenson highlights his bestial nature by using language which likens him to animals
- The strange, rotten and gloomy descriptions of the island helps place the men in unfamiliar terrain, making them appear more vulnerable
- In Chapter 21, a sense of confusion is achieved in the attacking scene by using short sentences, sounds, imperative verbs, similes (to do with animals), physical descriptions and connectives
- The technical vocabulary used when describing the ship.

Punctuation and sentence structure are used to show the varying emotions felt by the characters throughout the novel:

- Jim uses rhetorical questions on the island for the first time, prompting the reader to empathise with his helplessness and confusion
- Hyphens are used to add drama and show the character's fears. In Chapter 15 for example, "'Not a man - with one - leg?' he gasped." (Page 129)
- Repetition is used to emphasise amazement, 'Here and there were flowering plants, unknown to me; here and there I saw snakes...' (Chapter 14)
- A short sentence on its own line, 'An hour passed away' in Chapter 21, *The Attack* creates suspense
- In the same chapter, complex sentences are heavily punctuated to halt any rhythm and portray disruption and panic.

## Special feature

### *Pathetic fallacy*

*Pathetic fallacy is a technique where the weather or environment reflects the feelings of the characters in a novel.*



Stevenson's description of the weather plays an important part in the novel. It signals a change in tone and the type of action likely to occur next. It is a literary device used here to further unnerve and discomfort the reader, for example:

- *The sun reflects the cruel, harsh feelings of Long John Silver after he has just murdered Tom: "...the sun [was] still shining mercilessly on the steaming marsh...' Chapter 14*
- *Long John Silver and his men are linked to cold and unfavourable weather imagery such as '...a chill that pierced the marrow...' and '...a low, white vapour that had crawled during the night out of the morass.' Chapter 20*
- *The heightened anxiety within Jim as he approaches the Hispaniola is portrayed in Chapter 23, when water that had previously been calm becomes a '...rippling current that bubbled and chattered...' In the next chapter, it escalates to showing breakers that 'spouted and bellowed' with 'loud reverberations'.*



# Activities for children



## Before reading

### Ideas for getting started

Engaging with the world of the novel

#### Pirates and sailors

*Discuss why there were pirates in the 1700s?*

*What did they look like?*

*What was it like to be at sea in the 1700s?*

*What drove people to go to sea?*

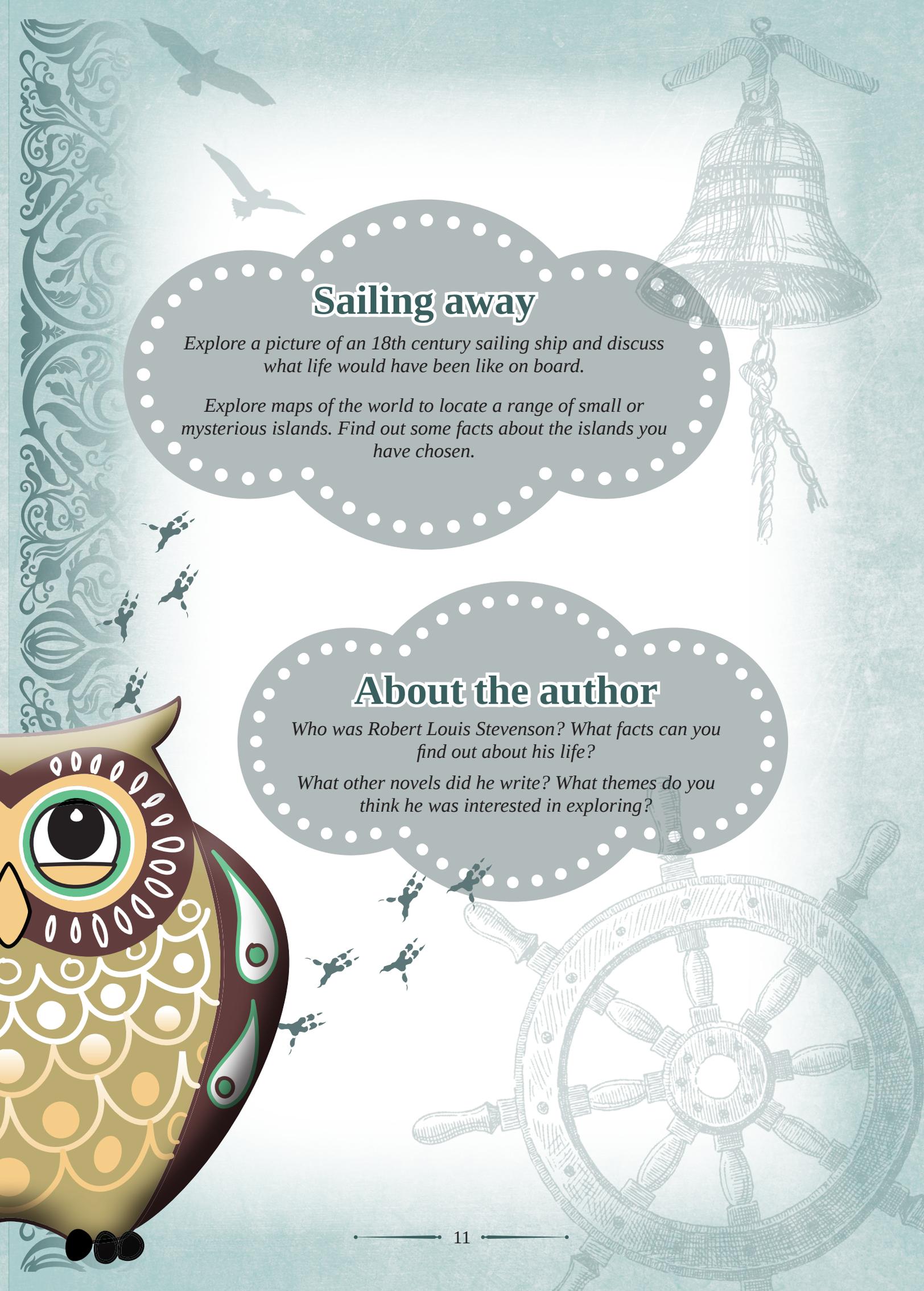
#### What do you think?

*Key themes in the novel are loyalty, betrayal and morality.*

*What do these words mean to you?*

*How would you define them?*





## Sailing away

*Explore a picture of an 18th century sailing ship and discuss what life would have been like on board.*

*Explore maps of the world to locate a range of small or mysterious islands. Find out some facts about the islands you have chosen.*

## About the author

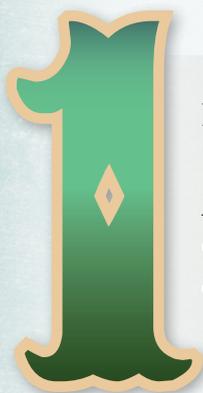
*Who was Robert Louis Stevenson? What facts can you find out about his life?*

*What other novels did he write? What themes do you think he was interested in exploring?*

## During reading

### Stopping places

Developing understanding of narrative and literary techniques



**Read to the end of Chapter 1**

*The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow*

Focus on...

- First impressions of the novel
- The narrative viewpoint and structure of the novel



#### *Things to discuss*

**Structure:** What impact does it have on you, knowing that what you are about to read is already over? Why might Stevenson have chosen to start the story in this way?

In conversation with the Old Sea Dog (Billy Bones) and Jim's father, the reader is only presented with the Old Sea Dog's side of the conversation. Why have one and not the other?



'psst...'

*Only showing one side of the story is a recurring technique used by Stevenson in 'Treasure Island'. It is a technique that promotes curiosity and suspense.*

**Narrative:** The narrative viewpoint is from Jim Hawkins, a young boy. How reliable might he be as a narrator? Why does Stevenson choose him as the narrator? What do you find out about him?

**Character:** What characters are introduced? What do you learn about them?

Is the character of the Old Sea Dog going to be important? How do you feel about him from the description, what he says and what he does?

Long John Silver is presented through report, the description of his leg, the warning and Jim's dream. Having Jim terrified by the idea of Silver, suggests that Stevenson wants the reader to be terrified also. The slow unveiling of this character piques the reader's interest and intensifies the desire to meet him. By creating mystery and suspense in advance it heightens the reader's expectations for when he finally appears.

**Language:** Lots of wonderful, colourful verbs are used in Chapter 1 and throughout the novel. For example: 'rapped', 'lingering', 'trundled', 'shivering'.

**Plot:** What do you think the novel is going to be about?

#### **You could...**

Start a list of colourful verbs which you could add to as you read the rest of the novel. These verbs help to create the idea of action and adventure.

# 2

## Read to the end of Chapter 8 *At the Sign of the 'Spy-glass'*

Focus on...

- *The presentation of Long John Silver*



### *Things to discuss*

**Character:** Discuss Long John Silver's first appearance in the novel. How is he described? What does he say? What do others say about him? How does he act? How do other characters react to him?

How do you feel about him? Is he what you expected? If not, why not?

Why does Stevenson have Jim, and subsequently the reader, consider Long John Silver to be a 'clean and pleasant-tempered landlord' when we are previously told to fear him? Is Stevenson lulling the reader into a false sense of security? Why might he do this?

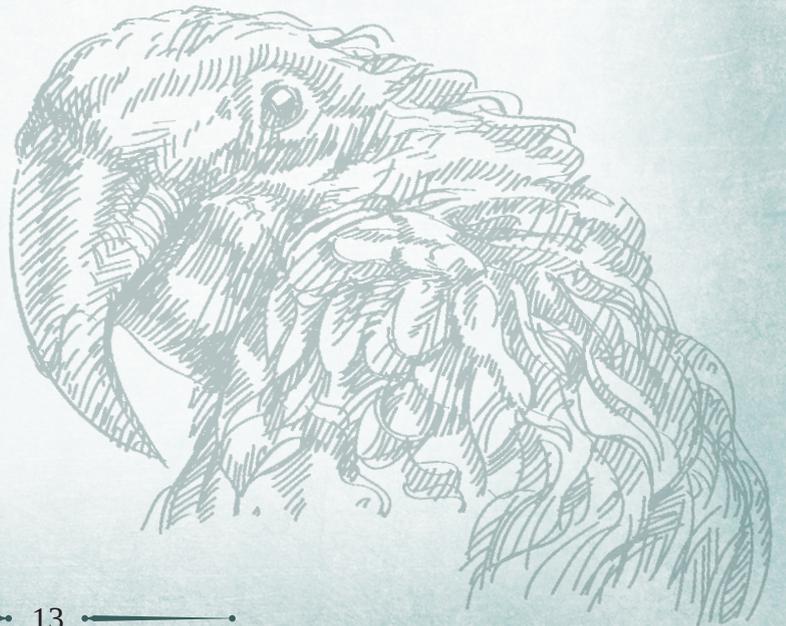
Who is lying? Who is telling the truth? Is there ever a good reason to lie?

How do you feel about the other characters - Jim Hawkins, Squire Trelawney and Doctor Livesey - at this point?

**Structure:** Why does Stevenson wait until eight chapters into the novel to introduce such a formidable character?

### *You could...*

Collect words and phrases to do with Long John Silver and add them to a class picture of him.



# 3

## Read to the end of Chapter 11 *What I Heard in the Apple Barrel*

Focus on...

- How Stevenson creates suspense and a turning point



### *Things to discuss*

**Structure:** What impact does overhearing Silver's conversation have on your reading of the novel? How is Chapter 11 a turning point in the novel?

The reader and Jim Hawkins are left in no doubt as to the scurrilous and conniving nature of Long John Silver, but Silver doesn't know that they know! Who has the power?

**Character:** Compare the language of Silver here to when the reader meets him in Chapter 8. How is it different? How do you feel about Silver now? Who do you side with?



# 4

## Read to the end of Chapter 14 *The First Blow*

Focus on...

- *The change in tone and mood of the novel*



### *Things to discuss*

**Character:** How do you feel about Long John Silver after the murder? Were you surprised by the murder? Where were you in the story? Were you, for example, watching the scene from a particular viewpoint? How do you think you were meant to feel about it? Why was Stevenson so vivid in his description?

What do you think of Jim running away in Chapter 13? What might the repercussions be? What would you have done?

**Language:** Highlight all the sounds in this chapter. What are the sounds and how do they make you feel?

**Structure:** Why does Stevenson write so much about what can be heard rather than seen? How does it make you feel?

What do you notice about the language used to describe Silver in this chapter?

What do you notice about the language used to describe the island and the men on the island in Chapters 13 and 14?

**Tone:** Has the mood or tone of the novel changed at all?





**Read to the end of Chapter 17**  
*Narrative Continued by the Doctor:*  
*The Jolly-Boat's Last Trip*

Focus on...

- *The change in narrative viewpoint*



*Things to discuss*

**Narrative:** Why has Stevenson decided to write three chapters from the point of view of the Doctor? How is it different to Jim's?



*Stevenson uses the technique of a different narrator to show someone else's point of view. This fills in for the reader what has been going on at the island since Jim disappeared and another narrative viewpoint adds authenticity to the novel.*

The Doctor's style is quite different to Jim's. He uses longer, more complex sentences which portray him as a more learned, adult figure and his narration is smattered with moments of pride and boastfulness. Another reason for the second narrative viewpoint is so that the reader has another point of view regarding the pirates. It also provides an example of narrative bias - how far is the Doctor exaggerating for effect? Who is this narrative meant for?

Finally, the reader discovers that all the tension and suspense created in Chapters 16 and 17 were largely needless, for example, the Doctor leads the reader to believe that his group might have drowned only to discover that they could have just simply stepped out of the boat. Stevenson is gently ridiculing the Doctor here as he did earlier in the novel with the Squire (his letter in Chapter 7, *I Go to Bristol*).

Why might Stevenson want to mock such upright gentlemen?



# 6

## Read to the end of Chapter 21 The Attack

Focus on...

- The presentation of Captain Smollett and the battle



### Things to discuss

**Structure:** Whose side are you on – Smollett’s or Silver’s? Compare their different reactions to each other. Who is the most powerful? After his confrontation with Silver, the opening of the attack begins with a presentation of the Captain. How does he react to the men? How does it compare to his reaction to Silver?



*'psst...'*

*He is very calm and controlled with Silver, but 'roars' at the men, who are not in post, when he is gone. Stevenson is highlighting the hidden tensions dwelling within the Captain. It also flags up what the mood of the chapter will be: serious. He wants discipline for the up-and-coming battle and is also letting off steam, thus creating a very 'human' character.*



*'psst...'*

How is the Captain shown to be in charge?

*The Captain is very matter of fact, military, direct and precise - very little description is used. He uses short sentences and imperative verbs.*

**Language:** A sense of confusion achieved in this chapter. Notice the use of the connective 'suddenly' and verbs like 'swarmed', 'snatched', 'dashed'. There is also lots of short sentences with prolific use of commas and semi-colons to disrupt longer sentences. Also notice the use of sounds for example: 'loud huzza', 'shouting', 'roared in a voice of thunder', 'hurley-burley', 'cries and confusion'. There are many more language examples to be identified.

**Structure:** Why has Stevenson included a footnote at the end of the chapter? Does it stop the action? What does it inform the reader of?

Contrast this to the opening of the next chapter which is calm. Why has Stevenson done this? What effect might he be trying to achieve?

### You could...

Identify words and phrases that make the battle sound exciting.

# 7

## Read to the end of Chapter 27 *Pieces of Eight*

Focus on...

- How the focus shifts away from the heated battle to Jim



### *Things to discuss*

**Structure:** Why has the focus moved to Jim now? What's going on where the action is? Why leave the action at that point? How do you feel when Jim is helpless? How does Stevenson present his helplessness?

The reader sees the aftermath of goings-on on the 'Hispaniola' through Jim's eyes. What's the difference between seeing and imagining what has gone on? Which is more powerful?

**Language:** There is a lot of technical language in this section. What might be Stevenson's reason for doing this?

### *You could...*

Create a poster for a casting director. Collect pictures of people you would like to see in the leading roles and explain why you have chosen them using evidence from the novel to support your ideas.





## Read to the end of the novel

### Focus on...

- How the novel ends
- Your response to the novel as a whole



### Things to discuss

How does Long John Silver compare to latter-day, popular pirates like Captain Jack Sparrow or squid-faced Davy Jones? How might *Treasure Island* have influenced the film *Pirates of the Caribbean* and its portrayal of pirate life?

With the exception of Jim's mother - who doesn't even get a name - there are no women in this novel. Why not? How might *Treasure Island* be different if Jim Hawkins were Jane Hawkins?

Did you feel any connection with the characters? Did they remind you of anyone? Did you prefer the villains or the heroes in the novel?

**The Story:** When you were presented with the novel, what kind of story did you expect? Did it match your expectations? What particularly caught your attention?

Which parts did you like/dislike the most?

Were you surprised by anything?

If the author asked you to improve the story, what would you suggest?

Has anything anyone said in the class or group surprised you or made you think about the story differently?

How long did it take for the story to happen? Did you feel any connection with the story? Did it end as you expected?

In what ways was it a successful adventure story?

**Prediction:** What do you think happened to Long John Silver? If you were Jim and you came upon him later in life, what would you do? What might you say to him?

What do you think became of Jim? What future do you see before him?

Will he ever fully recover from his ordeal?



## After reading

### Create & imagine

Developing a personal response to the novel

#### Off by heart

Find an example of speech or monologue by one of the main characters and learn it off by heart.

Find a range of poems with a sea theme. Choose a favourite to learn off by heart and perform it to an audience.

#### Message in a bottle

Imagine you are marooned on a desert island. Think about what you'd miss and how you would pass the time. What could you eat and drink? What's the island like? Do you meet anyone? Write a letter home and put it in a bottle.

Imagine you are a cabin boy or girl about to set sail for the first time. What is the ship like? Where will you sleep, eat and work? How is it different from home? What do you miss? Describe a typical day or perhaps one when there is a storm or adventure on board!





## Author's chair

Play 'Author's Chair'. Prepare questions you would like to ask Robert Louis Stevenson. Elect a class member or small group to take on the role of author and answer the questions in role.

Re-tell a part of the story using props, puppets, masks or dance and perform your adapted version for an audience.

## Pirates and monsters

Explore recognisable symbols associated with the pirate life, such as skull and crossbones, swords and cutlasses, compasses, anchors or an hourglass.

Design a unique flag for a new pirate ship or a tattoo for a modern pirate.

Design your own 'treasure island' map surrounded by sea. Use geography symbols to show features of the island terrain and fill any unexplored areas of water with mythical sea monsters!



# Memorable quotes

*"Seaward ho! Hang the treasure! It's the glory of the sea that has turned my head."*

*"There's never a man looked me between the eyes and seen a good day a'terward."*

*It was Silver's voice, and before I had heard a dozen words, I would not have shown myself for all the world. I lay there, trembling and listening, in the extreme of fear and curiosity, for, in those dozen words, I understood that the lives of all the honest men aboard depended on me alone.*

*"If it comes to a swinging, swing all, say I."*

*"If you keep on drinking rum, the world will soon be quit of a very dirty scoundrel."*

*"But what is the black spot, captain?"*

*"My dear," said my mother suddenly, "take the money and run on. I am going to faint."*

*It was high time, for I now began to be tortured with thirst. The glow of the sun from above, its thousandfold reflection from the waves, the sea-water that fell and dried upon me, caking my very lips with salt, combined to make my throat burn and my brain ache.*

*He was plainly blind, for he tapped before him with a stick, and wore a great green shade over his eyes and nose; and he was hunched, as if with age or weakness, and wore a huge old tattered sea cloak with a hood, that made him appear positively deformed. I never saw in my life a more dreadful-looking figure.*



*The bar silver and the arms still lie, for all that I know, where Flint buried them; and certainly they shall lie there for me. Oxen and wain-ropes would not bring me back again to that accursed island; and the worst dreams that ever I have are when I hear the surf booming about its coasts, or start upright in bed, with the sharp voice of Captain Flint still ringing in my ears: 'Pieces of eight! Pieces of eight!'*



*‘Fifteen men on the Dead Man’s Chest Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum! Drink and the devil had done for the rest Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!’*

**Robert Louis Stevenson, *Treasure Island***

*‘I loved the character of Silver. He has a cool personality.’*

**Luke, age 12**

*‘Treasure Island is without doubt one of the best-loved children’s adventure novels of all time.’*

**Katherine Swann, *Classic Literature***

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