

William and Mary Navigator

The Door in the Wall

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This is an abbreviated version of the original William and Mary Navigator for this text. To learn more about Navigators, visit <http://cfge.wm.edu/curriculumfags.php>. For copies of the William and Mary Teaching Models that are used in Navigators, visit <http://cfge.wm.edu/teachingmodels.php>.

About the Book

The Door in the Wall tells the story of a young boy named Robin whose life course is altered by a debilitating illness. The events of the story take place over the course of approximately one year, during which time Robin, with the help of a friar and a minstrel, acquires a multitude of new skills; plays a significant part in a war; and finds “the door in the wall.”

NOTE: Page numbers used in the Navigator refer to the Yearling Book edition of the text, ISBN: 0-440-40283-2.

Questions about the book

While you read

- What is expected of Robin as “son of his father?” (p. 7) What assumptions are being made by those who hold these expectations?
- How do you think Robin feels on p. 11 as he begins to realize Ellen is not coming back? What evidence supports your conclusion?
- What does the first paragraph on p. 18 foreshadow? Use examples from the text to support your answer.
- Why do you think Brother Luke decides to teach Robin woodworking?
- On p. 55, what do you think the outside appearance of the White Hart Inn symbolizes? Were your inferences correct?
- What does the author seem to foreshadow on p. 64? Do events happen as you would expect? Why or why not?
- On p. 73, why does Robin long to be able to ride a horse properly? What are the implications for Robin if he is unable to do so?
- On p. 87, the author states, “He had found out that the harder it was to do something, the more comfortable he felt after he had done it.” What does this quotation mean?

- Why do you think Sir Hugh was so willing to help Sir Peter reclaim the city of Lindsay (p. 99-101)? How does his reasoning relate to the concept of family as it is explored in the novel?
- Beyond Robin's physical characteristics, what is the significance of his father's comment to him on p. 117?

Exploring the story

- Why do you think Robin is so concerned about what his father will think of him and his crutches?
- Is the main conflict of the story internal or external? Justify your answer.
- What is the setting of the story? Could the story have been set at any other time or in any other place? Why or why not?
- What is the significance of Brother Luke's and Robin's harps in the story?
- How does the author use foreshadowing to enhance the story? Use examples to support your answer.

Meeting the characters

- Do you think learning how to woodwork contributed to Robin's recovery? Why or why not?
- Why do Brother Luke and John Go-in-the-Wynd take such good care of Robin? Give reasons to support your answer.
- What does Robin learn about himself during his stay in the monastery and Sir Peter's castle? Explain your answer with specific evidence.
- Do you believe Brother Luke when he tells Robin, "Thy mother will know and love thee always, my son" (p. 77)? Why or why not?
- How does Robin change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? Is the change in Robin good? Why or why not?
- What kind of person is Robin's father? What evidence supports your answer?

Understanding the ideas

- What is the "door in the wall?"
- Why is Robin a hero? Provide evidence to support your answer.
- How is the concept of strength important in the story?
- How is the concept of patience important in the story?
- What is the relationship between the two concepts of strength and patience? What evidence in the text suggests this link?
- What does Brother Luke mean when he says, "None of us is perfect. It is better to have crooked legs than a crooked spirit" (p. 76)?
- What does Sir Peter mean when he says to Robin, "Each of us has his place in the world . . . If we cannot serve in one way, there is always another. If we do what we are able, a door always opens to something else" (p. 71)? Provide an example to support your interpretation of the quotation.

Connecting to you

- Robin is very worried that he will not meet his father's expectations. Have you ever worried that you would not live up to your parents', teachers', or someone else's expectations? If so, please describe the situation and its outcome. Were your concerns justified?
- At a very young age Robin voluntarily puts others before himself in an effort to save the city. Have you ever been in a situation in which you could help others by thinking of them before yourself? What was the situation, and did you take advantage of it? Why or why not?
- The first time Brother Luke takes Robin swimming, the narrator states, "All the troubles of the past months seemed to float away with the running of the brook and strength and power to flow into his arms" (p. 37). Do you participate in an activity that allows you to release stress and tension and makes you feel empowered? If so, describe the activity and how you feel when you participate in it.
- Robin is separated from his parents during a serious illness and for many months afterward. Can you think of a situation that would separate you from your parents for an extended period of time? Would you like to be away from your parents for nearly a year? Why or why not?
- At the beginning of the book, Robin was very sick and unable to participate in his normal daily activities. Have you ever been too sick to go to school, spend time with your friends, or participate in other activities you enjoy? How did this experience affect you? What aspect of being sick frustrated you the most? Create a journal with entries detailing this time in your life.

Activities

1. Complete a **Literature Web** about the book. Fill in your responses to each of the bubbles using the questions as a guide.
2. Write a book review on the novel. In your review, state and explain your point of view about the quality of the novel and provide specific details about why you would or would not recommend this book to other students your age. Use the **Hamburger Model** as a guide, and follow the steps of the writing process to review and revise.
3. Identify 3-5 different references to the "door in the wall." How is the meaning of this phrase similar in each use? How is it different? Why is this phrase also the title of the book? Provide evidence from the text to support your answer. Create a PowerPoint presentation explaining the different uses of this phrase, and share your presentations with your classmates.
4. Choose one of the following quotations from the novel. Write a persuasive essay in which you discuss whether or not you agree with the statement, using examples from the novel, other books you have read, and/or your own experiences. Use the

Hamburger Model as a guide for your writing, and follow the steps of the writing process to review and revise.

- “Each of us has his place in the world . . . If we cannot serve in one way, there is always another” (p. 71).
- “None of us is perfect. It is better to have crooked legs than a crooked spirit” (p. 76).
- “Besides, it strengthens thy body, and best of all, it strengthens thy spirit to do a hard thing” (p. 78).
- ““Anyone could not do it”” (p. 92).

5. Identify 3-5 times throughout the novel where music plays a significant role. What roles does music play in each of these instances? Why is music important to the characters in the story? Provide evidence to support your answer. Develop a visual aid, such as a chart, that can be used to explain your findings to someone else.

6. This story takes place in 14th century England. One of the important celebrations was Midsummer’s Eve. Research Midsummer’s Eve, including its origins, traditions, myths, religious significance, etc. Also research the inclusion and significance of this celebration in other literary works. Provide a brief synopsis of several examples and explain how Midsummer’s Eve is important in each.

- To further explore this topic, research Midwinter’s Eve. Compare and contrast, using a Venn diagram or chart, the traditions and celebrations of the two holiday seasons. Then, using the information you have collected, write an expository essay explaining why you think the December celebrations have been transferred to modern-day life more fully than the June celebrations.

7. Music was a very important component of life in 14th century England and in *The Door in the Wall*. Research the music of this time, including instruments, lyrics, common rhythms, popular themes, and the purposes for different types of music. Choose 3-5 songs and/or instruments that are of particular interest to you. Find recordings (use the library, Internet search engines, and Web pages such as <http://www.indiana.edu/~harmonia/>) of these songs and/or instruments being played. Write narratives of scenarios during which you imagine these songs and/or instruments would have been used in 14th century England.

Books and Internet sites

For further reading – some other books you might enjoy:

- Gray, E.J. (1942). *Adam of the Road*. New York: Viking Press.
McGraw, E. J. (1961). *The Golden Goblet*. New York: Coward-McCann.
O’Dell, S. (1990). *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.
Paterson, K. (1987). *Bridge to Terabithia*. New York: HarperTrophy.

Shakespeare, W. (1992). *A Midsummer's Night Dream*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Speare, E. G. (1989). *The Bronze Bow*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Sperry, A. (1968). *Call it Courage*. New York: Simon & Schuster.

Useful websites

The Road Not Taken, read by Robert Frost

<http://extension.ag.uidaho.edu/bonneville/poem.htm>

Medieval England webquest

<http://www.deangeli.lapeer.org/lessons/webquest/index.htm>

Bookfolio for *The Door in the Wall*

<http://www.literatureplace.com/bookfolios/bookfolio.asp?BookfolioID=140>

Origin of Words and Names

<http://www.krysstal.com/wordname.html>

Early Music Studies at Indiana University with an archives and links to many other sites dealing with early music studies

<http://www.indiana.edu/~harmonia>

Merriam-Webster Dictionary

www.m-w.com

Glossary of Literary Terms

www.virtualsalt.com/litterms.htm