

The Whipping Boy

by Sid Fleischman

Classroom Favorites



Teacher's Guide by Kathleen Greenholdt

A Perma-Bound Production

Synopsis

This story takes place in a feudal kingdom in the Middle Ages. We first meet Prince Brat, heir to the throne, in the midst of one of his usual pranks, for which he is often punished. However, Prince Brat is never the direct recipient of punishments. Instead, his whipping boy must bear the blows. The prince's current whipping boy is Jemmy-From-The-Streets, an orphaned peasant and son of a rat-catcher. Jemmy does not like Prince Brat, who is very selfish.

One day, Prince Brat decides to run away from the castle and takes Jemmy with him. While Jemmy is worried about taking a whipping for the prince's new mischief, he also sees this as an opportunity to escape and return to the streets where he was happy.

The two boys quickly meet up with notorious highwaymen, Hold-Your-Nose Billy and Cutwater. The cutthroats soon discover that the boys are from the royal palace and decide to kidnap them for ransom. Because Prince Brat cannot write his name, Jemmy pretends to be the prince, so that he may write a fake ransom note for the illiterate villains. Eventually, however, the boys escape.

Jemmy runs to the city, and the prince follows him. Along the way, they meet a gypsy named Betsy and her dancing bear Petunia. They also help a man selling hot potatoes who gives them a ride to the city fair. Before they are able to proceed to the city, though, the highwaymen catch up with them. They begin to whip the prince, but Betsy sends Petunia to the rescue.

At the fair, the boys stop to eat. Now, they are working together as a team and consider themselves to be friends of sorts. A royal soldier passes them, but he does not recognize the prince, who is dressed in rags like those of any common boy. While he is "in disguise," the prince also learns of his nickname "Prince Brat."

Soon, however, the highwaymen find the boys. Jemmy leads the prince into his secret hiding place, the sewer, and a chase begins. Prince Brat ultimately saves the boys by outwitting the highwaymen. Previously, the prince was helpless and relied solely on Jemmy for protection.

Prince Brat decides to return to the castle and promises Jemmy that he will not be punished. The king names Petunia the Official Dancing Bear and places Jemmy in the prince's custody.

Biographical Sketch

Sid Fleischman was born in 1920 in Brooklyn, New York. He has written many books for children, and they have been translated into

fourteen languages. His favorites include *Mr. Mysterious & Company* and the *McBroom* series. His first book was published in 1948, and his most recent, *The Scarebird*, in 1988. Mr. Fleischman currently works in Santa Monica, California.

Critic's Corner

The Whipping Boy received the 1987 John Newbery Medal, which is awarded to the most distinguished children's book written by a United States citizen. This honor is presented annually by the Children's Librarians Section of the American Library Association.

The book is illustrated by Peter Sis, a noted illustrator of children's books. The magical quality of the artwork enhances the fantasy-like adventures of the story.

General Objectives

1. To learn the importance of judging people by their internal, rather than external, qualities—"You can't judge a book by its cover"
2. To understand the foundations of friendship - trust, forgiveness, generosity, humility
3. To gain a historical perspective of life in a feudal system of the Middle Ages

Specific Objectives

1. To understand the motivations behind Prince Brat's initial behavior
2. To explore the character transformations of both Prince Brat and Jemmy
3. To compare and contrast the feudal system in the story with modern times.

Meaning Study

The following words and phrases help form the setting of this story. Consult the book and explain the meaning of each.

1. Highwayman (p. 13)
(Highwaymen were thieves and "cutthroats," often on horseback, who made their living by robbing people on public roads. Cutwater and Hold-Your-Nose Billy are cutthroats.)

2. Duke (p. 66)
(A duke was a member of the royal class ranked just below a prince and above a marquis. Jemmy's friend Smudge thought that Jemmy could rise above his station to become a duke.)
3. Ballad (p. 72)
(A ballad is a song. In Jemmy's time, "ballad sellers" sold songs to people. These songs told stories in rhyming verses. In the book, the ballad sellers sing about the legendary Hold-Your-Nose Billy.)
4. Crest (p. 14)
(Also called a "coat of arms," a crest was an elaborate symbol that identified a royal family. The crest usually consisted of a shield, swords and other symbols of the monarchy. In the story, the highwaymen recognize Prince Brat when they see his crest.)
5. Garlic (p. 26)
(One of the many superstitious beliefs of the time period was that garlic could keep sickness, especially bubonic plague, away. The plague wiped out much of the population of Europe. Hold-Your-Nose Billy eats garlic for this purpose.)
6. "come up in the world" (p. 65)
(To "come up in the world" means to increase one's wealth and recognition. In the time period in which the story is set, it was not generally possible to "come up in the world" if one was a peasant.)
7. Broadside (p. 74)
(A broadside was an early predecessor of the modern newspaper. Broadside were sold by running patterers. The facts were not always correct, as in today's tabloids. Jemmy is the subject of a slanderous broadside in the story.)
8. "heir to the throne" (p. 13)
(The "heir to the throne" is the person who will become king or queen when the monarch dies. Prince Brat is heir to his father's throne.)
9. roast pheasant (p. 16)
(Pheasant, meat pies and fruit tarts are examples of food in the story that are only eaten by royalty. The peasants ate potatoes, herring and stale bread, food which Prince Brat found repulsive.)
10. "pounds of gold coin" (p. 18)
(Pounds were "dollars," but they were made of coin, not paper. A pound is still the basic monetary unit in many modern European countries.)

Discussion Questions

Literal (Questions 1-3):

1. Compare and contrast Prince Brat's character in the beginning of the story to that of Jemmy.
(The prince is haughty, mischievous, selfish and stubborn. Jemmy is brave, humble and hard-working. Both boys are lonely, and both have great pride in themselves. Also, both boys judge each other on physical attributes.)
2. Describe the city fair setting.
(There are many merchants and booths. Examples include the following: Smudge and the dog-and-rat pit; a juggler; sellers of fowl, milk and potatoes; a magician; a street fiddler; Betsy and her dancing bear; a ballad seller; etc. Note the archaic names

used for many of the occupations. Also note the fact that a convict ship sits near the festivities.)

3. Contrast the lifestyle of peasants with the lifestyle of royalty in the story.
(Examples: types of food, sanitation, clothing, speech, education.)

Interpretive (Questions 4-8):

4. If Jemmy had stayed behind in the city, how would he have fit in after having lived in the castle?
(He would probably have been unhappy. He now can read, but he would have no books in the city. He is also now used to cleaner clothes, food and shelter.)
5. Why is the prince a brat?
(Rules of the feudal kingdom place the prince on a pedestal. It is illegal to strike or shake hands with royalty. In his relations with Jemmy, Prince Brat behaves badly for two reasons: 1) He sees Jemmy as a peasant, rather than as a person, and 2) He feels insecure about his own skills and mental agility.)
6. Explain Jemmy's feelings toward being the royal whipping boy.
(Jemmy is ashamed that this is his role in the castle. He does not feel that it is an honorable occupation. Jemmy also feels that the king has wronged him by taking him out of the streets, where he was happy. He is especially resentful because the prince is so selfish.)
7. Describe how Jemmy's old city friends view his new royal station.
(Jemmy's friends are naive. They think that Jemmy has "come up in the world" because he lives in the grand castle. They do not realize that he is unhappy and ashamed to be there.)
8. As Prince Brat is transformed into a "peasant," what things does he learn about himself?
(The prince learns that his royal subjects hate him. He learns that he must be unselfish and trustworthy to earn friendship. He also learns that he is able to do some things for himself. After all, the prince is the one who ultimately saves the boys from the villains.)

Critical (Questions 9 and 10):

9. What does Jemmy mean when he asks, "Was it clothes that made a prince, just as rags made a street boy?"
(By this point in the story, Jemmy and the prince are friends. They have created an internal bond with one another. Therefore, Jemmy recognizes that what separates peasants from royalty is merely external qualities, such as clothing and wealth.)
10. Is it possible for the peasants in the story to become members of the royal class?
(No. The peasants may be appointed royal servants, just as Betsy and Petunia are. Peasants may also be placed under protective custody of royalty, as Jemmy is placed in Prince Brat's care. Historically, we learn that to be a member of royal class, one must be born or marry into it.)

Student Activities

1. Research real “feudal systems” of the Middle Ages and write a report about one famous peasant or member of royalty. (Examples: Henry VIII, Marie Antoinette, Joan of Arc)
2. In a drawing or painting, re-create the city fairgrounds scene. Include the many booths and merchants discussed in the book.
3. Pretend you live in Jemmy’s city. Write a short story about your visit to the fair, and use the common dialect, terms and phrases spoken by peasants in the book.
4. Write a verse for a ballad seller to sing. Choose Prince Brat, Jemmy or Captain Nips as the subject of your ballad.

TEACHER’S NOTES

THE WHIPPING BOY TEST

Vocabulary (30 points)

For each italicized word, find a definition from the list below. Write the letter of the definition in the correct space.

- ___ 1. "The prince lowered his head so as to appear humbled and *contrite*."
- ___ 2. "Take your hands off me, you *insolent* rascal!"
- ___ 3. The prince thought that Jemmy was *contrary* because he never bawled.
- ___ 4. There were legendary tales about Hold-Your-Nose Billy, the *highwayman*.
- ___ 5. They sloshed through the *cavernous* sewer.
- ___ 6. Smudge thought that Jemmy would grow up to be "*duke* or something."
- ___ 7. Jemmy was *dumfounded* when he thought his new friend betrayed him.
- ___ 8. Cutwater was not as *notorious* as his partner.
- ___ 9. *Ballad* sellers knew the story of Hold-Your-Nose Billy.
- ___ 10. "The prince's voice was almost *inaudible*."
- ___ 11. Jemmy made an *abrupt* turn while being chased in the sewer.
- ___ 12. Jemmy began to *gorge* himself, not knowing when he would eat again.
- ___ 13. "I'm thinking these lads have mixed themselves up to *flummox* us."
- ___ 14. The prince stood motionless with "a *vague*, unseeing look in his eyes."
- ___ 15. "Jemmy crawled over the *embankment*. A ride to the city would suit him fine."

- | | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|
| A. unwilling | F. sudden | K. nobleman, ranked just below a prince |
| B. unfavorably well known | G. bold | L. sorry |
| C. robber on the road | H. stuff | M. hollow |
| D. confuse | I. song | N. wall of earth at roadside |
| E. unable to be heard | J. expressionless | O. puzzled |

True or False (20 points)

Decide if each statement is true or false, and mark T or F in the blank.

- ___ 1. The king did not love his son.
- ___ 2. Jemmy was an orphan.
- ___ 3. It was illegal to shake hands with a prince.
- ___ 4. Prince Brat cried when he was whipped.
- ___ 5. The soldiers could identify Prince Brat while he wore rags.
- ___ 6. Jemmy missed the books in the castle.
- ___ 7. Smudge's rats were very tame.
- ___ 8. There was a ship of convicts near the fairgrounds.
- ___ 9. The prince did not know that people called him "Prince Brat."
- ___ 10. Betsy sent her bear to save Jemmy from being whipped.

Fill in the Blank (20 points)

Fill in each blank with the correct word missing from the sentence.

1. Jemmy's father was a _____ .
2. Roots, such as _____ , were considered peasant food.
3. Hold-Your-Nose Billy earned his name by eating _____ .
4. Prince Brat threw the _____ at the sewer wall to mislead the villains.
5. Betsy had a dancing bear named _____ .
6. The boys did not want to go near the _____ because many rats lived there.
7. Prince Brat was unable to _____ his own name.
8. Jemmy's most secret hiding place was the _____ .
9. At a feast in the castle, Prince Brat tied the guests' powdered _____ to the backs of their chairs.
10. Jemmy asked the man in the sewer to snuff out his _____ .

Essay Questions (30 points)

Answer each question in paragraph form.

1. Explain the difference between the type of government in the story and the type of government in the United States.

2. Discuss ways in which Jemmy and Prince Brat learn to respect each other.

ANSWER KEY

Vocabulary (30 points)

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. L | 6. K | 11. F |
| 2. G | 7. O | 12. H |
| 3. A | 8. B | 13. D |
| 4. C | 9. I | 14. J |
| 5. M | 10. E | 15. N |

True or False (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. T | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. T |
| 4. F | 9. T |
| 5. F | 10. F |

Fill in the Blank (20 points)

- | | |
|----------------|------------|
| 1. rat-catcher | 6. brewery |
| 2. potatoes | 7. write |
| 3. garlic | 8. sewer |
| 4. birdcage | 9. wigs |
| 5. Petunia | 10. candle |

Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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