***Treasure Island***

***Chapter 1:***

***The Old Sea-dog at the Admiral Benbow***

***Brief Summary:***

* Squire Trelawney, Doctor Livesey, and others have asked Jim Hawkins (our hero and first-person narrator) to write down his adventures.
* So Jim is going to start where it all began: at the Admiral Benbow inn, owned by Jim's father.
* One day, a tall, ragged, suntanned sailor walks into the inn.
* He is singing a song: "Fifteen men on the dead man's chest – Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!" (1.2).
* The man asks Jim's father if they get many customers. When he hears that business is slow, he decides to stay at the inn.
* Even though the man's clothes are ragged, his manner is proud and commanding. He tells Jim's father he is a captain, but he won't say much more about himself.
* He spends all day looking out at the sea through his telescope and spying on the few sailors who pass through the area.
* The captain takes Jim aside and promises to pay him an allowance each month if Jim will help him keep an eye out for a one-legged sailor.
* The captain tells terrible stories about the violent life on the high seas, which terrify and fascinate all the men of the neighborhood.
* The captain keeps staying at the Admiral Benbow inn long after his money runs out. Jim's father is too afraid to ask him to leave.
* Jim's father is sick, and one evening Doctor Livesey comes by the inn to see him.
* After seeing Jim's father, Doctor Livesey sits talking to Taylor, the gardener.
* The captain is singing as usual – the same old song about the "dead man's chest."
* The captain signals for the whole inn to be quiet, and everyone shuts up except Doctor Livesey.
* The captain tells Doctor Livesey directly to be quiet.
* Doctor Livesey asks if the captain is talking to him.
* When the captain says yes, Doctor Livesey tells him that if the captain doesn't knock off drinking so much rum, the world will have one less "very dirty scoundrel" (1.14) in it. (Oooh, snap!)
* The captain jumps up and draws a knife.
* Doctor Livesey doesn't bat an eyelid. He just warns that captain that if he doesn't put the knife away, he'll hang for it.
* The captain knuckles under, grumbling.
* Doctor Livesey warns that he's going to keep an eye on the captain from now on.
* Doctor Livesey is also the local magistrate (kind of like a judge). If he hears any complaints about the captain, he's going to have him thrown out of the district.
* Doctor Livesey rides away, and the captain continues to sit quietly.

***Brief Summary:***

At the urging of Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and others, a boy named Jim Hawkins records his story about Treasure Island. He omits the island’s exact location, as a portion of its treasure still remains buried there. Jim begins the story by recounting his first meeting with a ragged but imposing old seaman who shows up at the Admiral Benbow, the inn Jim’s father owns.

The old sailor throws down a few gold coins and moves in, staying at the inn for far longer than his payment covers. He hires Jim to stay on the lookout for a one-legged sailor whom he apparently fears. He terrorizes the others in the inn with his coarse sailor’s songs and heavy drinking. Livesy cautions the sailor about the dangers of drinking, but these warnings enrage the seaman, who threatens Livesey with a knife. Livesey subdues the man with his calm authority.

***Summary in detail:***

The book begins with the narrator, [Jim Hawkins](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#jim-hawkins), explaining his motive for telling this story: [Squire Trelawney](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#squire-trelawney), [Dr. Livesey](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#dr-livesey), and other gentlemen have requested him to write down the details his experience with [Treasure Island](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island), since the treasure remains on the island. He proceeds by recounting a pirate that resided with his family while he was a boy, living at his father's inn, the "Admiral Benbow," near Bristol, England, during some unspecified part of the 18th century. One day, an old, brown, dirty, ragged seamen with a sabre cut on his cheek, arrives at the inn and satisfied that the inn contains few people, throws down some gold money and stays for several months. Calling himself a Captain, he often sings (especially when drunk) the following verse:

"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."

During the day, he spends his time near the cove or the cliff, looking for something or someone through his telescope. Without fail, he always inquires if any new seaman has appeared and if they had, he kept a low profile. Even more mysterious, he also hires Jim for a four penny a month to "weather-eye open for a seafaring man with one leg." The boy is in awe of the stories he told, dreadful stories about far-off places told in crude language. Even more awe-inspiring, the man had a chest upstairs whose contents no one had ever seen.

After a few months, the initial money for lodging ran out and Jim's father was too afraid to ask the stranger for more money, a worry that the narrator believes led to his premature death. Jim, however, was significantly less terrified of the pirate than everyone else.

One night, Dr. Livesey arrived to check the condition of the narrator's father. The captain sings of the "dead man's chest," once again and then bangs on the table for silence. Everyone in the room follows his request, except for Dr. Livesey. The captain repeats his request, which again, Dr. Livesey ignores, and then calls the captain names and warns him that if continues drinking in this quantity, he will die. The captain pulls a knife, but eventually backs off the doctor. The doctor leaves, but not before warning the stranger that he is a magistrate and if he so much as disturbs any of the peace, he shall be severely punished.

***Analysis in detail:***

Significantly, the first chapter sets the background for many of the stylistic elements that [Robert Louis Stevenson](https://www.gradesaver.com/author/robert-stevenson) later explores in Treasure Island. First, Stevenson's narrative style is notable. The first paragraph is a good example of Stevenson's narrative technique, as well as a model of romance suggestion. Its single sentence conveys a degree of haste as it plunges the reader directly into the action. The reader learns that the story is to be told by one of the participants in an adventure; the adventure is to concern buried treasure, some of which still remains on the island where it was concealed; the adventurers are gentleman who hop to benefit from their discovery; and their adversaries in the hunt are pirates. By the end of the first chapter, all the elements of the subsequent action are established, an impressive feat in a chapter of this length. The harried pace of the narrative continues throughout the book, marking a distinctive style.

More significantly, Stevenson's narrative technique is significant because of the first person narrative. In this book, the majority of action is to be seen through the eyes of a small boy, innocent and childlike. This however, is not entirely true because the older Jim Hawkins relates the child's perspective, therefore in some places perspective and focus can be added to events that only gain significance with hindsight. In this chapter, for instance, the older Jim Hawkins anticipates the death of his father, something that has not yet occurred.

The narrative, however, accompanied with the vagueness of the date and time adds to the timeless and mythical quality of the novel. The tone of the novel from the beginning is mysterious, dark, and increasingly ominous. Jim's father is weak (an unknown cause) and the reader realizes his death is eminent, the pirate is clearly watching for someone he does not want to see, the unknown contents of the treasure chest, all add to the mystery surrounding the novel, a tome that is established with exquisite skill. The setting adds to the mood. The place is a secluded inn, cut off from hope of human intervention or human guidance.

The ending action between the doctor and the pirate sets up one of the continuous themes of the novel - a comparison and confrontation between the good and the bad, the respectable and the disrespectable. The two's mere appearance is a stark contrast from each other. The ragged pirate with his patched clothing stands strikingly different than the tailored doctor. Another metaphor of the book is introduced in the first chapter, as well, is the metaphor of money. It is significant that the people in the first chapter believe that the pirate has a lot of money but won't pay the bill, something that helps speed the deterioration of the health of Jim's father. Also, Jim is paid by the pirate to help, something that increases the two's relationship. Money is the ruling force of the novel, motivating people's actions, as it is in this chapter.

***Critical Study:***

The narrator, [Jim Hawkins](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Jim_Hawkins), begins his story about Treasure Island with a brief explanation. The account, he says, is being written at the request of [Squire Trelawney](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Squire_Trelawney), [Dr. Livesey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Dr._Livesey), and some unidentified gentlemen. He then quickly sets up the tale and slips into the strange arrival of an old seaman at the Admiral Benbow Inn.

The new guest is a "tall, strong, heavy, nut-brown man" with a "tarry pigtail," looking for a secluded place to live for an extended stay. Drunk on rum much of the time, the "captain" is always on the lookout for a "seafaring man with one leg." He hires Jim to help him keep watch at the rate of a silver fourpenny a month.

The months pass. Though the captain owes more money for his room, Jim's father is too intimidated by the fearsome old seaman to ask for it. Jim suggests that the strain of it all contributes to an illness that eventually kills Mr. Hawkins.

One evening the captain's drunken storytelling leads to a confrontation between the captain and Dr. Livesey, who has been looking in on Jim's ailing father. When the doctor refuses to listen attentively, the old seaman threatens him with a knife. But Dr. Livesey will not be intimidated and stares the man down.

A short poem, or epigraph, precedes this chapter and encourages potential readers to purchase the book. The first verse hints at the exciting story they will read. In the second, [Stevenson](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/author/) aligns his book with those of other popular authors: Kingston, Ballantyne, and Cooper. William Kingston was an English writer of adventure stories for boys. Robert Ballantyne was a prolific Scottish author of juvenile fiction. James Fennimore Cooper is known for his historical, though somewhat romanticized, stories of frontier and Indian life in the early years of America. Perhaps the best known is *The Last of the Mohicans*.

*Treasure Island* begins at the Admiral Benbow, a secluded inn located in Black Hill Cove, on the southwest coast of England, not far from the seaside port of Bristol. The inn is named after a successful pirate hunter and naval hero in the 1600s, who lost a leg in battle against a French fleet. The time is vaguely the mid-18th century.

With the opening paragraph Stevenson plunges the reader into the story, setting its quick pace while creating a tone of dark mystery and hinting at ominous events to come. The reader meets the narrator and two additional main characters, as well as an old, scarred seaman (as yet unnamed). The inn, Treasure Island, and the time period are also introduced. There are allusions to a treasure "lifted" and a treasure yet to be found.

Stevenson quickly establishes several themes. Jim's innocence and youthfulness are apparent. In reporting events he seems to stand off to the side and observe the action with a child's keen eyes. In his dealings with Billy Bones, Jim defers to the old seaman and does as he is asked. Alone in his childish world, he grapples with his nightmares about the one-legged seaman. As the "coming of age" theme develops, Jim will be forced to mature or die on Treasure Island.

The thread of a minor theme is bound to Jim's coming of age. This is Jim's search for a father figure. Jim's real father is weak and sickly and fears Billy Bones. Though Jim loves his father, there is nothing manly here to respect. Jim admires [Dr. Livesey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Dr._Livesey), who courageously stands up to the old seaman, and will look to him for advice later. Even so, Jim's yearning for a guide along his road to adulthood will lead him to trust a man undeserving of the role.

Another minor theme set up in this chapter is the contrast between savagery and civilization. Jim paints a picture of Billy Bones as ragged, dirty, and scarred; always drunk on rum; and wildly uncivilized in his manners. He frightens decent people. Jim presents Dr. Livesey as the flip side of that coin: clean and neat; his wig always powder-white. Without a weapon, he bests Billy Bones in their confrontation at the inn. Stevenson uses contrasts in physical appearance and behavior to mark the division between the savage and the civilized men in *Treasure Island*. Only one character will break the mold and demonstrate both sides of the coin.

Finally, the quest for adventure is another minor theme suggested by Jim's account of guests of the Admiral Benbow. They are horrified by the tales of the sea spun by Billy Bones. Simultaneously, they are enthralled. As Jim notes, "it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life." Pursuit of excitement will draw Jim and others into a real life adventure.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

The narrator, [Jim Hawkins](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins), has been asked by a few men, including [Squire Trelawney](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/squire-trelawney) and [Dr. Livesey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey), to write down all the details of their adventure to Treasure Island, beginning sometime in the eighteenth century (though we’re not given the exact year). Jim begins with the setting of the Admiral Benbow inn, owned by his [father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), where one day an old seaman comes to lodge.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The narrator of the novel, we learn, is the same person as the protagonist. But the adult Jim Hawkins has the benefit of hindsight, as he is looking back onto his past adventures and will be able to contemplate what he has learned—as well as foreshadow certain key elements that his younger self could not know.

***Summary part 2:***

The man is strong and heavy, with long hair and ragged hands: he breaks out now and then into a “sea song,” ending “Yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!” He drinks lots of [rum](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum), and tells [Jim’s father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) to call him [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain), but doesn’t share details about himself, only asking each day if any seamen had come up the road.

***Analysis Part 2:***

The newest guest to the Admiral Benbow inn is somewhat of an enigma: Jim’s father isn’t able to clarify the mysteries of his character to his son, leaving Jim to figure it out on his own.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins) is not as afraid of the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain) as others: he sees how often the captain drinks himself into a stupor. Other guests are scared by the captain’s stories about hangings, walking the plank, and other sea adventures. [Jim’s father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) worries that the captain will drive away business, but Jim thinks the fascination he inspires in others is good for them.

***Analysis Part 3:***

This is Jim’s first realization of both the power and danger of rum, which so many pirates drink to great excess. Jim is beginning to learn that even frightening characters have their weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and he internalizes this knowledge.

***Summary part 4:***

For months the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain) stays, eventually no longer paying: when [Jim’s father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) asks for payment, he roars and scares him away. Jim’s father’s health begins to decline.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Jim’s father doesn’t seem to have the same kind of pluck and quick wit as his son—he is a flat character who doesn’t last long.

***Summary part 5:***

One day [Dr. Livesey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/doctor-livesey) stays for a drink after checking on [Jim’s father](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), and grows annoyed at the [captain](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain)’s sailor songs about a “dead man’s chest.” He tells the captain that he’ll drink himself to death if he keeps up with the [rum](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum), and the captain, furious, draws a knife against the doctor. The doctor remains calm, however, and simply tells him to put it away or he’ll be hanged. As a magistrate, he says, he’ll keep his eye out for the captain.

***Analysis Part 5:***

Dr. Livesey knows what Jim has already intuited, that rum can wreak havoc on a person’s health. Dr. Livesey, too, is not as afraid of the captain as other people at the inn are: he is confident in his own expertise. Still, Dr. Livesey seems to pick up on some of the significance of the “dead man’s chest.”

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

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!

This pirate’s ditty, first sung in Chapter I and recalled many times afterward, remains one of the best-known legacies of Treasure Island. The poem encapsulates drink, death, and wickedness, which are inextricably linked to the pirates, and which give them an aura of wild glamour. The “bottle of rum” recalls the almost constant state of drunkenness of Silver’s ragged brigade. This reference to alcohol is also connected to idea of the “dead man,” as the pirates’ drunkenness results in mishaps, losses, and deaths, and is perhaps responsible for their ultimate failure.

***Explanation:***

The “dead man’s chest” symbolically refers to both Billy Bones’s sea chest and Flint’s hidden treasure. The pirates’ song associates the treasure chest with a dead man rather than a living one, suggesting that the pirates are unconsciously aware that their mission will end in death and failure. In a sense, they are singing of their own downfall, almost displaying a death drive. The image of the dead man’s chest also refers to the way in which greed leads to a man’s loss of soul and also recalls the ultimate futility of finding material treasure, as all humans eventually die in the end.

***Quotation 2:***

[Billy Bones's] stories were what frightened people worst of all. Dreadful stories they were--about hanging, and walking the plank, and storms at sea, and the Dry Tortugas, and wild deeds and places on the Spanish Main. By his own account he must have lived his life among some of the wickedest men that God ever allowed upon the sea, and the language in which he told these stories shocked our plain country people almost as much as the crimes that he described. [...] People were frightened at the time, but on looking back they rather liked it; it was a fine excitement in a quiet country life, and there was even a party of the younger men who pretended to admire him, calling him a "true sea-dog" and a "real old salt" and such like names, and saying there was the sort of man that made England terrible at sea. (1.10).

***Explanation:***

It's only appropriate, given that Robert Louis Stevenson is a writer, that he assigns so much magical power to language and storytelling. Billy Bones is charismatic and exciting because he tells amazing pirate stories – ones much like the one we are reading. Billy Bones foreshadows what's coming down the road for Jim. By placing this outlandish, larger-than-life pirate in the middle of quiet English society, Stevenson is really highlighting how different Jim's future with the pirates will be from the quiet life he's led up until now.

***Quotation 3:***

Doctor Livesey

"And now, sir," continued the doctor, "since I now know there's such a fellow in my district, you may count I'll have an eye upon you day and night. I'm not a doctor only; I'm a magistrate; and if I catch a breath of complaint against you, if it's only for a piece of incivility like tonight's, I'll take effectual means to have you hunted down and routed out of this. Let that suffice." (1.16)

***Explanation:***

Doctor Livesey is a local judge as well as a doctor. In that capacity, he has words with Billy Bones after a run-in at the Admiral Benbow Inn. Because they operate at sea, we rarely see pirates coming up against actual agents of the law. Who in this novel seems most afraid of legal punishment? Why?

***Quotation 4:***

All the time he lived with us the captain made no change whatever in his dress but to buy some stockings from a hawker. One of the cocks of his hat having fallen down, he let it hang from that day forth, though it was a great annoyance when it blew. I remember the appearance of his coat, which he patched himself upstairs in his room, and which, before the end, was nothing but patches. He never wrote or received a letter, and he never spoke with any but the neighbours, and with these, for the most part, only when drunk on rum. The great sea-chest none of us had ever seen open. (1.12)

***Explanation:***

The captain in this passage is Billy Bones. The funny thing about his appearance is that he's living this incredibly miserly existence and trying to keep a low profile. But how much more obvious can you be as the only sailor in a small town? Of *course* his buddies are going to find him.