Jim Hawkins is a young boy who lives at his parents’ inn, the Admiral Benbow, near Bristol, England, in the eighteenth century. An old sea captain named Billy Bones dies in the inn after being presented with a black spot, or official pirate verdict of guilt or judgment. Jim is stirred to action by the spot and its mysterious, accurate portent of Billy’s death. Hastily, Jim and his mother unlock Billy’s sea chest, finding a logbook and map inside. Hearing steps outside, they leave with the documents before Billy’s pursuers ransack the inn.

Jim realizes that the contents he has snatched from the sea chest must be valuable, so he takes one of the documents he has found to some local acquaintances, Dr. Livesey and Squire Trelawney. Excited, they recognize it as a map for a huge treasure that the infamous pirate Captain Flint has buried on a distant island. Trelawney immediately starts planning an expedition. Naïve in his negotiations to outfit his ship, the Hispaniola, Trelawney is tricked into hiring one of Flint’s former mates, Long John Silver, and many of Flint’s crew. Only the captain, Smollett, is trustworthy. The ship sets sail for Treasure Island with nothing amiss, until Jim overhears Silver’s plans for mutiny. Jim tells the captain about Silver and the rest of the rebellious crew.

Landing at the island, Captain Smollett devises a plan to get most of the mutineers off the ship, allowing them leisure time on shore. On a whim, Jim sneaks into the pirates’ boat and goes ashore with them. Frightened of the pirates, Jim runs off alone. From a hiding place, he witnesses Silver’s murder of a sailor who refuses to join the mutiny. Jim flees deeper into the heart of the island, where he encounters a half-crazed man named Ben Gunn. Ben had once served in Flint’s crew but was marooned on the island years earlier.

Meanwhile, Smollett and his men have gone ashore and taken shelter in a stockade the pirates have built. Jim returns to the stockade, bringing Ben with him. Silver visits and attempts a negotiation with the captain, but the captain is wary and refuses to speak to him. The pirates attack the stockade the next day, and the captain is wounded. Eager to take action, Jim follows another whim and deserts his mates, sneaking off to hunt for Ben’s handmade boat hidden in the woods.

After finding Ben’s boat, Jim sails out to the anchored ship with the intention of cutting it adrift, thereby depriving the pirates of a means of escape. He cuts the rope, but he realizes his small boat has drifted near the pirates’ camp and fears he will be discovered. By chance, the pirates do not spot Jim, and he floats around the island until he catches sight of the ship drifting wildly. Struggling aboard, he discovers that one of the watchmen, Israel Hands, has killed the other watchman in a drunken fit. Jim takes control of the ship, but Israel turns against him. Jim is wounded but kills Israel.

Jim returns to the stockade but finds it occupied by the pirates. Silver takes Jim hostage, telling the boy that the captain has given the pirates the treasure map, provisions, and the use of the stockade in exchange for their lives. Jim realizes, however, that Silver is having trouble managing his men, who accuse him of treachery. Silver proposes to Jim that they help each other survive by pretending Jim is a hostage. However, the men present Silver with a black spot and inform him that he has been deposed as their commander.

In a desperate attempt to gain control of his crew, Silver shows them the treasure map to appease them. Silver leads Jim and the men to the treasure site, but they are shocked to find it already excavated and the treasure removed. The men are angered and near mutiny again. At that moment Dr. Livesey, Ben Gunn, and the others fire on the pirate band, which scatters throughout the island. Jim and Silver flee, and are guided by the others to Ben’s cave, where Ben has hidden the treasure, which he had discovered months before.

After spending three days carrying the loot to the ship, the men prepare to set sail for home. There is a debate about the fate of the remaining mutineers. Despite the pirates’ submissive pleas, they are left marooned on the island. Silver is allowed to join the voyage, but he sneaks off the ship one night with a portion of the treasure and is never heard from again. The voyage home comes to a close. Eventually, Captain Smollet retires from the sea, and Ben becomes a lodge-keeper. Jim swears off treasure-hunting forever and suffers from nightmares about the sea and gold coins.

Book Summary

An old sailor, calling himself "the captain" but really called Billy Bones, comes to lodge at the Admiral Benbow Inn on the English coast during the mid 1700s, paying the innkeeper's son, Jim Hawkins, a few pennies to keep a lookout for "seafaring men." One of these shows up, frightening Billy (who drinks far too much rum) into a stroke, and Billy tells Jim that his former shipmates covet the contents of his sea chest. After a visit from another man, Billy has another stroke and dies; Jim and his mother (his father has died only a few days before) unlock the sea chest, finding some money, a journal, and a map. The local physician, Dr. Livesey, deduces that the map is of an island where the pirate Flint buried a vast treasure. The district squire, Trelawney, proposes buying a ship and going after the treasure, taking Livesey as ship's doctor and Jim as cabin boy.

Several weeks later, Trelawney sends for Jim and Livesey and introduces them to Long John Silver, a Bristol tavern-keeper whom he has hired as ship's cook. They also meet Captain Smollett, who tells them that he does not like the crew or the voyage, which it seems everyone in Bristol knows is a search for treasure. After taking a few precautions, however, they set sail for the distant island. During the voyage the first mate, a drunkard, disappears overboard. And just before the island is sighted, Jim overhears Silver talking with two other crewmen and realizes that he and most of the others are pirates and have planned a mutiny. Jim tells the captain, Trelawney, and Livesey, and they calculate that they will be seven to nineteen against the mutineers and must pretend not to suspect anything until the treasure is found, when they can surprise their adversaries.

But after the ship is anchored, Silver and some of the others go ashore, and two men who refuse to join the mutiny are killed — one with so loud a scream that everyone realizes there can be no more pretense. Jim has impulsively joined the shore party, and now in running away from them he encounters a half-crazy Englishman, Ben Gunn, who tells him he was marooned here and can help against the mutineers in return for passage home and part of the treasure.

Meanwhile Smollett, Trelawney, and Livesey, along with Trelawney's three servants and one of the other hands, Abraham Gray, abandon the ship and come ashore to occupy a stockade. The men still on the ship, led by the coxswain Israel Hands, run up the pirate flag. One of Trelawney's servants and one of the pirates are killed in the fight to reach the stockade, and the ship's gun keeps up a barrage upon them, to no effect, until dark, when Jim finds the stockade and joins them. The next morning Silver appears under a flag of truce, offering terms that Captain Smollett refuses, and revealing that another pirate has been killed in the night (by Ben Gunn, Jim realizes, although Silver does not). At Smollett's refusal to surrender the map, Silver threatens an attack, and, within a short while, the attack on the stockade is launched. After a battle, the surviving mutineers retreat, having lost six men, but two more of the captain's group have been killed and Smollett himself is badly wounded.

When Livesey leaves in search of Ben Gunn, Jim runs away without permission and finds Gunn's homemade boat. After dark, he goes out and cuts the ship adrift. The two pirates on board, Hands and O'Brien, interrupt their drunken quarrel to run on deck, but the ship — with Jim's boat in her wake — is swept out to sea on the ebb tide. Exhausted, Jim falls asleep in the boat and wakens the next morning, bobbing along on the west coast of the island, carried by a northerly current. Eventually, he encounters the ship, which seems deserted, but getting on board, he finds O'Brien dead and Hands badly wounded. He and Hands agree that they will beach the ship at an inlet on the northern coast of the island. But as the ship is finally beached, Hands attempts to kill Jim, and Jim shoots and kills him. Then, after securing the ship as well as he can, he goes back ashore and heads for the stockade. Once there, in utter darkness, he enters the blockhouse — to be greeted by Silver and the remaining five mutineers, who have somehow taken over the stockade in his absence.

Silver and the others argue about whether to kill Jim, and Silver talks them down. He tells Jim that, when everyone found the ship was gone, the captain's party agreed to a treaty whereby they gave up the stockade and the map. In the morning Dr. Livesey arrives to treat the wounded and sick pirates, and tells Silver to look out for trouble when they find the site of the treasure. After he leaves, Silver and the others set out with the map, taking Jim along. Eventually they find the treasure cache — empty. Two of the pirates charge at Silver and Jim, but are shot down by Livesey, Gray, and Ben Gunn, from ambush. The other three run away, and Livesey explains that Gunn has long ago found the treasure and taken it to his cave.

In the next few days they load the treasure onto the ship, abandon the three remaining mutineers (with supplies and ammunition) and sail away. At their first port, where they will sign on more crew, Silver steals a bag of money and escapes. The rest sail back to Bristol and divide up the treasure. Jim says there is more left on the island, but he for one will not undertake another voyage to recover it.

## About *Treasure Island*

To encounter *Treasure Island* for the first time is a great and uncomplicated pleasure for a reader of any age. One of the classic adventure stories in English, published first in 1881, Stevenson's novel transcends its time and genre and remains today not only a page-turner but also an engaging portrayal of personality and conflict. *Treasure Island*, once described as a "boys' book," appeals now not to boys alone but to anyone who likes exciting, believable, non-stop action and colorful characters in an exotic setting.

Set in the mid 1700s, first along the coast of western England and then in the seaport of Bristol, the book takes readers quickly to the high seas and finally to a remote and secret island on a quest for pirate treasure. And although this premise may sound far-fetched, in reality it is anything but that, as a brief look at history shows.

In the early twentieth century, pirates still plundered shipping and private vessels on the world's seas, but they were relatively few and not newsworthy. Two hundred years earlier, however, they were big news. Between 1713 and about 1725, thousands of pirates prowled the Atlantic; in 1717 alone, American colonial officials put the number at approximately 1,500 waiting off the eastern coast of North America to take advantage of a rich commercial trade that included several European nations. Mercantile vessels were easy pickings for these pirates — partly because the crewmen on such ships were so badly treated and poorly paid that they often volunteered to join their captors. And, although many merchants and government officials, especially in the American colonies, turned a blind eye to piracy and often actually supported it, it was not always easy for the pirates to find ready markets for goods. Coins, precious metals, and other nonperishable items in particular were likely to be stored in safe places, awaiting the pirates' opportunity to dispose of them profitably — and what safer place than buried on one of the many small islands around the Caribbean Sea, with nothing to reveal the cache but a cryptic map secreted in an old man's sea chest? Certainly, believing in the existence of such a map and its discovery by someone willing and able to go in search of the riches, as in *Treasure Island*, does not require much stretch of the imagination.

The other circumstances of the novel, in particular the characters of the pirates, are equally believable; Stevenson's "sea dogs" bear the mark of authenticity. During the so-called Golden Age of Piracy in the Atlantic, it was not unusual for the men sailing under pirate flags to be in their teens or sometimes even younger (one such, of whom a record was kept, was "Thomas Simpson, about ten"). Most, before they were forty, were retired, blind, crippled, or dead. The pirate's life at sea was in most cases easier — and surely a lot more fun, for those of a certain turn of mind — than that of navy crewmen or merchant sailors, but it was still hard and dangerous, requiring a young man's energy and fitness. The older pirates of *Treasure Island*, including Billy Bones, Pew, Tom Morgan, Long John Silver, and perhaps several others, in their fifties at most, had had their day in the late teens and early twenties of the century (Silver says he sailed with Edward England, who died shortly after 1720), and had either spent their shares of the loot taken from ships and towns or, no doubt infrequently in real life, had saved what they could. The chance to recover a large treasure, like the one Billy Bones' map leads to, would have been a dream come true for such men. Pirate crews (unlike the crews of naval or merchant ships, who served under the strict rule of a captain and officers they had not chosen) were generally democratic, electing their captains and reserving the right to depose them. Thus, Stevenson's pirates, freely choosing the redoubtable Silver as their leader, are off on a last grand adventure with a captain whom they trust, or so they must believe.

Jim Hawkins himself would not have been an unusual boy in the English (or colonial New England) eighteenth century, although he may seem to the twenty-first-century reader remarkably free from the normal responsibilities of a twelve- or thirteen-year-old. An innkeeper's son, he would have expected to inherit his father's trade and would have been educated early in the skills to pursue it. Those that required schooling — reading, writing, and arithmetic — he would have acquired by age ten or so; the others would be learned on the job, and (especially with his father ill and the inn not particularly successful) he would have been needed there to do as much work as he could. At the same time, an intelligent boy like Jim, with a man like Dr. Livesey to befriend him, may have had the opportunity to read adventure stories and see traveling actors perform (as Jim hints that he has done). At thirteen or nearly so, he would have been considered a man in all but physical strength, and, given the prospect of going on a voyage like the one Squire Trelawney invites him to join, he would likely have jumped at the chance — probably the only one he would get in his lifetime. He could take the voyage, however, only if his mother would have other help in running the family business, as the generous Trelawney offers.

So the reader may be assured that, although *Treasure Island* is in some ways more romantic than entirely realistic, it is true to its time and place. But is this a book that you, in your time and place, can still enjoy? Yes, and although some students may tend to resist so simple a truth, there's no better reason for reading *Treasure Island* than enjoyment. To comb it for learning experiences or moral guidelines would be to miss the point completely, although the novel does yield some of each. To "deconstruct" it would be possible but equally pointless and would tend to mutilate a lively and live book.

Moreover, to view *Treasure Island* solely as a classic text or an example of fine popular writing (although it is both of these) or especially as a period piece (for it is certainly not typical of the popular fiction of the late nineteenth century) is to do it an injustice. While many best-selling novels published in the 1880s are difficult or nearly unreadable today, *Treasure Island* has never lost its seductive power, from the first page, to engage a willing reader — a strength derived from Stevenson's narrative genius and the sheer, sure revelation of his characters through their language.

No summary can do *Treasure Island* justice, and to rely on a summary without reading the text is to do oneself no favor. However, if its nautical and other terms are unfamiliar, the glossaries included in the Critical Commentaries section can help, as can a dictionary. And if you have trouble following the closely described action, the summaries and commentaries can help, too. To use a metaphor based in the novel, any reader who allows himself or herself to be swept out on the tide of Stevenson's narrative, and who then comes about and sets sail to windward, aided as need be by compass and chart, is in for a memorable and excellent adventure.

## Summary and Analysis Part I

Summary

The narrator, Jim Hawkins, begins the first chapter ("The Old Sea Dog at the Admiral Benbow") by saying that he is writing this history at the request of Squire Trelawney, Dr. Livesey, and other gentlemen, leaving out nothing but the location of the island, where some treasure still remains. Jim describes how a large, old sailor arrives one day to his father's inn, the Admiral Benbow, and rents a room. Saying they can call him "the captain," he spends his stay watching the sea. He pays Jim a small amount of money to watch out for other seamen, especially a sailor with one leg. He frequently gets drunk in the evenings and terrifies the other guests (who are nonetheless fascinated) by singing violent sea songs and demanding that everyone else join in. The captain is dressed in rough, filthy clothes and spends no money, not even to pay for his room and board, of which fact Jim's father is too intimidated to remind him.

One night the captain, drunk and roaring, signals for silence while he sings, but Dr. Livesey, the local physician who has come to treat Jim's ill (indeed, dying) father, goes on with his conversation. In response to the captain's curses and threats, Livesey calmly predicts that he'll die soon if he keeps on drinking. And the doctor, who is also a district law enforcement official, says he'll have the man arrested if he keeps on threatening people.

In the second chapter ("Black Dog Appears and Disappears") a stranger arrives one January morning while the captain is on the beach with his telescope and Jim is readying the breakfast table. The stranger asks if "his mate Bill" is there, and Jim tells him he knows no one by that name, that he is preparing the table for "the captain." Jim feels that this person means the captain no good, and he starts out to warn their guest, but the man prevents him from leaving. When the captain approaches, he reacts to the stranger with a kind of sickly fear, addressing him as "Black Dog." Black Dog orders Jim to bring him rum and then leave the room, and although Jim tries to overhear their conversation, he can make out nothing until suddenly there's a great crash and a clash of swords. He runs back in, just in time to see Black Dog, wounded, hurrying away. The captain seems greatly upset, demands rum, and says he must leave the inn. But before anything else can happen, he falls down unconscious. Soon the doctor arrives and tells Jim and his mother that the old man has had a stroke. He gets Jim to help him treat the captain, who eventually recovers consciousness. Livesey tells him that unless he stops drinking immediately he'll have another stroke, which will kill him.

Chapter 3 ("The Black Spot") begins later that day. When the captain hears he has been ordered to stay in bed for a week, he declares that this will be impossible. Black Dog and others worse than he will return, wanting to steal his sea chest. They will give him "the black spot," which he says is a summons. When they come, he says, Jim must get Dr. Livesey to call down the law on them. He explains very little, but says these men are "old Flint's crew," that he himself was Flint's first mate, and that Flint gave him something — he does not say what — before he died. Then the captain takes the medicine the doctor left for him and sleeps.

That evening, Jim's father dies, and Jim has little time to worry about their guest and his troubles. The next day the captain manages to come downstairs and help himself liberally to rum. For several days he keeps this up, growing weaker and weaker, until the day after the funeral. That afternoon another stranger arrives, a ragged and fearsome-looking blind man. He forces Jim to take him to the captain, who sees him with terror. The blind man puts something into the captain's hand and leaves quickly. When the captain sees what he has been given, he says: "Six hours. We'll do them yet." But as he gets to his feet he reels, sways, and falls dead to the floor.

As Chapter 4 ("The Sea Chest") begins, Jim tells his mother what the captain has told him and, knowing their danger, both walk to the nearby village for help. They arrive at dusk and can find no one brave enough to go back with them, although one boy says he'll ride for Livesey. Mrs. Hawkins says she'll go back alone, then, to get what the captain owes her, and Jim has no choice but to go with her. They return to the inn, and Jim reluctantly searches the captain's corpse to find the key to the sea chest. In the chest they discover various articles, including a few bars of silver, a few English and foreign coins, and a sealed packet. Jim's mother begins to count what coins she can recognize, but they hear the blind man's stick approaching and, in the dark, they run out of the inn. They are badly frightened, and Mrs. Hawkins faints. Jim hides her as well as he can, listening, as Chapter 5 ("The Last of the Blind Man") opens. He hears several men run into the inn, where they discover the captain is dead and the sea chest has been opened. Whatever they are looking for is gone. As a signal from their watchman sounds, most of the pirates want to run, but the blind man, Pew, insists they stay to search for Jim and his mother. They have reluctantly begun to do so when horsemen approach. The pirates scatter — all but Pew, who blunders down the road, deserted by his comrades, and is run down and killed by a man on horseback.

The boy who rode for Dr. Livesey has returned with a company of revenue men (tax collectors), whom Jim recognizes and hails. They find that the inn has been ransacked and robbed. The revenue officer, Mr. Dance, hearing Jim's story, says he must go report to the magistrate, Livesey, and will take Jim with him.

Chapter 6 ("The Captain's Papers") begins at Dr. Livesey's house, where they are told that the doctor has gone to dine with Squire Trelawney at his hall. They proceed there, and Dance tells his story to the doctor and squire. Livesey is interested in the packet Jim took from the sea chest, but he waits to open it until after Dance has gone. When it is opened, it is found to contain a book listing sums of money and dates covering over twenty years. Livesey deduces it is a record of the captain's share in plunder taken from many ships and towns by the notorious pirate Flint and his crew. Along with the book is a map showing where the treasure is hidden, buried on an island about 45 square miles in area. The squire immediately proposes to leave for the port city of Bristol, where he'll obtain a ship, hire a crew, and — taking Livesey as ship's doctor, Jim as cabin boy, and three other men whom he names (Redruth, Joyce, and Hunter) — they will sail in search of the island and the treasure. Livesey warns him not to tell anyone of his plans and destination, and the squire promises he'll be "silent as the grave."

Analysis

To read the opening paragraph of *Treasure Island* is a bit like sneaking a look at the last page first. When you come to the end of the first sentence, you know that the treasure-seeking voyage is over and was successful — with part of what was found still left on the island — and that at least three of the major characters (although you do not yet know that they are major characters), the squire, the doctor, and the narrator, have survived it. That you are told these details at the outset does not affect your reading of the story, because you can tell from the tone of the paragraph that the story is not about whether Treasure Island and its cache of riches can be found but about how the story unfold and all the particulars that take place on the way. It is, in other words, about an adventure. And you believe in that adventure because its details are set down in writing by someone who experienced it, someone whom you are inclined to trust because he is recording it at the request of other men who experienced it, too. Thus, Stevenson's first-person narrator immediately transcends fiction and becomes, for the willing reader, a real person writing about real events.

The first part introduces you to several of the major characters of the novel. One of them, Billy Bones (whom Jim innocently calls "the captain," although this rank has been conferred on Billy by himself alone), is dead before the third chapter ends. Billy, despite his rough talk and ragged appearance, seems to Jim, and indeed to some of the neighbors who come to the inn for evening refreshment and conversation, to be fierce and commanding, something of an exotic figure. These are country people who, despite the fact that they live on the coast of southwestern England, are not very familiar with sea-faring men and their ways, and Billy is entertaining. But he is mostly bluster. He is a drunken old miser who bullies everyone he can, frightening Jim's father into giving him room, board, and plenty of rum at no charge and scaring the neighbors into joining him in drink and raucous song. But he backs down immediately when his loud bullying has no effect on Dr. Livesey, and he is horribly frightened of his erstwhile shipmates, especially the one-legged man for whom he urges Jim to keep a sharp lookout. What is Billy Bones doing at the Admiral Benbow? In fact, he seems to have no real idea. He has Flint's map, the key to a vast fortune, given him — as he says — by Flint on his deathbed, which is probably true, because Flint was much taken with rum himself (as is described in a later chapter) and perhaps Billy Bones seemed to him an appropriate heir. But Billy's former mates know that he has the map, and Billy knows that they know, and he knows they will eventually come after it and him (as of course they will, for his behavior has made it inevitable that people will spread the word of his being there, and he will be recognized by his description).

Billy has good reason to fear his pursuers, because they want his treasure and he does not want to share it. So he waits for the inevitable approach of his former shipmates and, meanwhile, drinks himself to death in an effort not to think about what will happen to him as a result of his unwillingness to give up any of the treasure. In the end, Jim Hawkins pities him.

Trelawney reveals himself as another blusterer, although of a pleasanter sort than Billy. He is openhanded, quick to think well of people (he pronounces Jim a "trump" without having any good reason to think so and offers him a hearty meal), and he is impulsive, deciding immediately to go after the treasure and telling not only Livesey but also Jim, whom he has just met and has no reason to trust, of his decision. He is also, as Jim says without resentment or irony, "condescending" — that is, he is aware of his wealth and position and pleased that others are aware of it. He has always been an important person in the district, a big frog in a small puddle, and you can see that he may be taken advantage of by a reasonably clever person. On the other hand, he is not offended when the doctor (a professional man but not the squire's social equal) tells him that he is likely to talk too much; the squire knows this is true and does not care, because it has never cost him what it may cost him now. Trelawney is a hearty man and, so far, a lucky one; readers like him but do not really trust him.

Dr. Livesey is trustworthy. He is revealed as a conventionally good man: honest, outspoken, courageous, steady, and notably un-condescending. You discover very little more about him than this as the novel progresses. But because you already know that he survives the voyage, Livesey becomes a sort of anchor for the reader, an adult whom you know will act firmly and with good sense throughout the book.

The fourth major character presented is Jim Hawkins himself, the narrator and apparently the novel's protagonist. What do you discover about Jim? His age is not immediately obvious, but you know something about the century in which he lives: "17\_\_," he writes, and from later evidence in the book, you may put the events of this first chapter at no earlier than 1730 or so and no later than around 1750 or '55. During this time period, the age at which young men were considered adults and at which they often went to sea as common sailors or even junior officers was about sixteen; because the squire suggests that he be a cabin boy instead of an ensign or mate, you can guess that Jim is in or very near his early teens. He is young enough that Black Dog can patronize him as "sonny" and that blind Pew recognizes his youth; his voice has apparently not begun to deepen. (Stevenson's stepson, Lloyd Osbourne, in whose company he wrote *Treasure Island,* was about twelve years old when this writing began, so it is tempting to think that the young protagonist himself is about that age or perhaps a year older.) Jim must be literate and fairly intelligent, and he must subsequently have proved himself honest, or he would probably not have been asked to write this record of events. He is open and trusting, first of "the captain" and later of Black Dog and then of Pew, but he learns quickly and is mature enough to pity Billy Bones. He is responsible at his work, and although much later he tells you that he had often played "boys games," you do not see him doing that now, only working. It's probably fair to say that Jim at this point is a normal young teenager of his (or at least of Stevenson's) time, and, like boys of our own time — although perhaps in different ways — sometimes still a child and sometimes, when circumstances demand it, almost an adult.

The minor characters who appear in this part are relatively few. The pirates, Black Dog and Pew, give you a taste of some of the pirates Jim will meet on the voyage. Black Dog is patently a cruel, vicious man, patronizing Jim, calling him "sonny," talking about "discipline" — all very thinly veiled threats: Do what I say or I will hurt you. Pew, the blind beggar (and you later discover that he is indeed a beggar, having wasted his own wealth in record time), applies pain directly instead of merely threatening. Like another character whom you meet later, Pew is physically daunting, having overcome his disability to an extent that would be admirable in a different man and is frightening in this one. Although you see Black Dog for an instant in the next part of the book, neither of these men figures in the rest of the story. Yet their presence as individuals is felt effectively here; like Billy Bones, they lend *Treasure Island* color and texture from the beginning.

Jim's father, on the other hand, is almost a nonentity so far as the book is concerned. He scarcely speaks, and Jim scarcely speaks of him. All you know of Hawkins senior is that he owns and operates an inn that has very little business, that he is ill (dead before the end of the third chapter, like Billy Bones), and that he allows the person who is apparently the inn's only actual guest free room and board, not out of charity but out of timidity — he is afraid to face the old sailor and demand the money due him. One may say, of course, that he is not important to the book, that his fictional existence is necessary only as a nearly anonymous innkeeper whose young son finds a treasure map left by a deceased guest. But why, then, does he appear at all? Note, for example, that in the 1934 MGM film directed by Victor Fleming, in some ways the best of the movies made of *Treasure Island,* Jim's father is said to have died well before the film opens.

One possible reason for Mr. Hawkins' appearance seems to be related to one of the themes of the book, that its central action is a quest for Flint's treasure (just as Jason's quest, in Greek mythology, is for the Golden Fleece). But Jim's quest, too, is for a father. Not only do you know that is he suddenly left fatherless, you also know that the man who raised him lacked courage to collect payment for services he provided. No wonder Jim's father appears in the book as a nonentity; although the comparison is unspoken, the reader is aware throughout the novel that Jim must be comparing him, perhaps unconsciously, with all the other men into whose company he is now thrust.

Another minor character deserves a mention. Jim's mother, whose first name is never given, is the only female character in the book, and she is barely sketched as an individual, let alone drawn in any detail. Yet in the one instance of action she is allowed, she shows herself to be a stronger person than her husband (to whom she defers, as convention required, when he is alive). He does not dare to ask Billy Bones for the money owed them, but after both he and Billy are dead, Mrs. Hawkins berates the men of the village who refuse to accompany her back into danger. She insists on going back to the inn, on opening the sea chest, and on counting out as well as she can the exact amount due her. Jim leaves no doubt that he would *not* have chosen to go back, or that — having been forced to accompany his mother — he would have taken a random number of coins and left immediately. He blames her, he says in an interesting phrase, for her honesty as well as for her greed.

And, while greed is certainly one of the themes of *Treasure Island*, it is interesting to note here that greed is not attributed solely to the "bad" characters, represented in the first part of the novel by Billy Bones and by Pew, who loses his life mainly because he insists (like Mrs. Hawkins) upon finding what he and his mates have come for, even after the signal of danger has been heard and the others want to run away without the map. Squire Trelawney, too, who has plenty of money, is immediately eager to spend quite a lot of it in a search for the treasure; and Dr. Livesey, who seems happy in his position in the district and also seems to have a better idea of the dangers this enterprise may hold, is anything but reluctant to agree with Trelawney's hastily-formed plan. Seven hundred thousand pounds — as the island's treasure is eventually estimated — is a lot of money, and to some extent everyone in the book is under its spell from the start.

**Introduction**

Stevenson has stated that the story was inspired by a detailed map he drew from his imagination. This map, Stevenson wrote in an essay called "Treasure Island," "was elaborately and (I thought) beautifully coloured; the shape of it took my fancy beyond expression; it contained harbours that pleased me like sonnets; and with the unconsciousness of the predestined, I ticketed my performance 'Treasure Island.'"

The more Stevenson studied this map of his creation, the more his imagination expanded. First, he could see the vegetation of the island. Then the island became peopled in his mind's eye, and their stories began to appear. "It was to be a story for boys," Stevenson wrote; and with excitement and ease, he produced the first fifteen chapters in as many days. But then the inspiration disappearedthe author claims that he was at a very low point in his life at this time. He was thirty-one and had yet to make a salary on his own. He was supported by his father, and he wanted to write something that not only would make money but would please his father. Much of his writing up to this point Stevenson referred to as a failure; he was afraid that this current story he was working on would become one too.

Stevenson took a break from his work and went on a short vacation. Upon arriving at his destination, he sat down at a desk, determined to free himself from his despair. With great discipline, he started writing again. "And in a second tide of delighted industry," Stevenson wrote, "I finished 'Treasure Island.'" The book turned out to be a huge success for Stevenson, bringing both money and fame. It was published first as a magazine serial before being produced as a book in 1883. But that is not the end of the story. When Stevenson sent his manuscript to his publisher, the map, which had inspired the pirate story, was missing. It was never found. Stevenson had to create another map, "but somehow it was never 'Treasure Island' to me," Stevenson wrote.

**Overview**

Treasure Island is a classic adventure story, featuring an ordinary boy, Jim Hawkins, who is transported to a treacherous world of pirates and buried treasure. Jim's adventures begin when he and his mother discover a pirate map in the chest of Billy Bones, a guest at their lodging-house. Jim's experiences on the ship Hispaniola and on Treasure Island test his resourcefulness and teach him important lessons about loyalty and physical courage. Perhaps his most important lesson grows out of his relationship with the one-legged pirate, Long John Silver—a lesson about the moral ambiguity of good and evil.

**Author Biography**

Robert Louis Stevenson was born in 1850 in Edinburgh, Scotland, the only son of a famed engineer and inventor. Stevenson's grandfather was also an engineer, known around the world for the many beautiful lighthouses he designed. The family expected the young Stevenson to follow in his grandfather's and his father's footsteps. But in his earliest years, Stevenson suffered from a lung disease and spent much time in bed. To pass the time, he made up stories. Some of the earliest literary influences, authors he tried to mimic, included Daniel Defoe (*Robinson Crusoe*, 1719), Edgar Allan Poe ("The Raven," 1845), and Nathaniel Hawthorne (*Scarlet Letter*, 1850).

When it came time to go to university, Stevenson enrolled in engineering classes but later changed his mind. He was more interested in literature. Stevenson's father did not approve of his son's writing, however, and insisted that Stevenson gain a more respected and more practical degree. So Stevenson studied law and passed the bar in 1875, but he never practiced. Instead, he began to write in earnest, publishing several short stories, essays, and travel sketches, which were only modestly successful and did not provide him with enough money to pay all his bills. So his father continued to support him well through his twenties.

Stevenson's travel sketches were the byproduct of his hopes of finding a climate that would prove more beneficial for his health. While he was in Paris, where he found some relief in the warmer climate, he also found the woman who would later become his wife. Fanny Osbourne, an American, was older than Stevenson, was married and the mother of three children, and was apparently the inspiration of Stevenson's life and literary career. In 1879, three years after they met, Osbourne obtained a divorce, and she and Stevenson were married. He was twenty-nine; she was forty.

The couple traveled throughout Europe and the United States, still looking for a place that suited Stevenson's frail health. But it was during a visit to Scotland that Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island*, which first appeared in serialized form in a magazine between 1881 and 1882, before it was published as a book. *Treasure Island* finally made a name for Stevenson and provided him with a livable wage. The book also won the approval of Stevenson's father, who finally accepted his son's chosen vocation.

After living in Scotland for a short time, Stevenson and his wife moved to London. This move proved beneficial for Stevenson's career, as it was during this time that he made friends with the author Henry James and other literary figures. While in London, Stevenson wrote two more texts, which, together with *Treasure Island* became his most famous works. They were *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mister Hyde* (1886) and *Kidnapped* (1886).

Two years later, the Stevensons discovered the island of Samoa, which provided a tropical setting that suited Stevenson's health and the place in which he produced a very large collection of poems, short stories, essays, and novels before his early death. On December 3, 1894, while helping his wife fix dinner, Stevenson died of a brain hemorrhage. When his neighbors in Samoa heard the tragic news, they grabbed axes and machetes and cut a trail up the mountainside behind his house so as to honor Stevenson's final wish to be buried at the top of Mount Vaea.

**About the Author**

Robert Louis Stevenson was born on November 13, 1850, in Edinburgh, Scotland, the only child of a prosperous, middle-class family. His father and grandfather were lighthouse engineers.

Because his mother was of delicate health, Stevenson was raised primarily by his devoted nurse, Alison Cunningham, or "Cummy," to whom he later dedicated A Child's Garden of Verses (1885). His schooling was frequently interrupted by illness, but Stevenson traveled widely in Europe and was taught privately by tutors. At seventeen he enrolled as an engineering student at Edinburgh University, but changed to law after a year. Although he completed his degree, Stevenson never practiced law, and devoted himself to writing instead.

On a summer holiday to France in 1875, Stevenson met Fanny Osbourne, a married American ten years his senior who was traveling abroad with her two children. Osbourne was estranged from her husband, and when she traveled back to California in the fall of 1878 to obtain a divorce, Stevenson followed.

They married in San Francisco in May of 1880 and sailed back to Liverpool.

Meanwhile, Stevenson was forced to ask his parents for money to supplement the meager income derived from his writing efforts. During a cold, wet summer in Scotland in 1881, Stevenson drew a treasure map for his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne—thus originating the world of Treasure Island. Stevenson set to work creating a story to accompany the map, and published the novel in 1883. The family later settled in the British health resort of Bournemouth, where Stevenson wrote Kidnapped and Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, both of which were published in 1886.

After the death of his father in 1887, Stevenson took his family back to America. They hired a yacht in 1888 for a cruise to the South Sea Islands, stopping in the Marquesas and Hawaii, where Stevenson wrote The Master of Ballantrae. In 1889, they continued their cruise to Samoa, where Stevenson built an estate and settled. The tropical climate improved his health, but the stress of mounting debts and enforced writing brought on a cerebral hemorrhage from which he died on December 3, 1894.

Although Stevenson's reputation has declined since his death, he is still recognized as a master storyteller, and Treasure Island and Kidnapped remain among the most popular adventure stories of all time for young readers.

**Plot Summary**

**Part 1The Old Buccaneer**

*Treasure Island* is narrated by Jim Hawkins, the son of the owners of the inn, the Admiral Benbow. In the first pages, Billy Bones, a mysterious and ragged old seaman, appears at the doorstep of the inn, dragging a large sea chest. Bones decides to stay at the inn and asks Hawkins to warn him if he ever sees a one-legged man.

One day, while visiting Hawkins' father whose health has deteriorated, Dr. Livesey, local doctor and magistrate, inadvertently disregards Bones' demand for silence in the inn. Despite Bones' physical threats, Dr. Livesey calmly stands up to the old seafarer and even threatens to put him out of town if he hears of any more disturbances.

Bones dies by the end of this section; Hawkins discovers the map of buried treasure in Bones' sea chest and shares it with Livesey; and the two men, along with Squire Trelawney, begin their search for the buried treasure.

**Part 2The Sea Cook**

Hawkins meets Livesey and Trelawney in Bristol, where a ship, the *Hispaniola*, has been purchased. Here Hawkins meets Long John Silver, a seaman with just one leg. Although Hawkins remembers Billy Bones' warning, Hawkins finds himself unconcerned about Silver, who puts on a show of gentlemanly manners, poise, and confidence.

Silver is hired as the sea cook for the *Hispaniola*; and once the voyage gets under way the majority of the pirate sea hands look to Silver as their leader. There is little trouble on the ship as it makes its way toward Treasure Island. However, one night, while Hawkins climbs into a huge apple barrel to retrieve a fruit, he happens to overhear Silver talking to some of the men. It is upon this conversation that the story takes a major turn. Before this point, Silver has been painted as a reliable, intelligent, and fair-minded man. But after overhearing Silver, Hawkins has a new perception of this man, who is proving to be dishonest, cunning, and possibly murderous. Hawkins discovers that Silver is planning a mutiny. Hawkins tells Dr. Livesey, Squire Trelawney, and Captain Smollot about Silver's plans. The group makes counter plans as the ship heads toward the island.

**Part 3My Shore Adventure**

A depressive mood descends upon the crew once the ship is anchored in the harbor of Treasure Island. In order to ease this mood, the captain tells the crew that they can go ashore. The captain hopes this will keep them preoccupied so they do not mutiny prematurely, catching the captain and his cohorts off guard. Hawkins, aware that he is unneeded on board and overly excited about exploring the island, slips off the ship and heads toward land in a small dingy without waiting for his companions.

The first sign of trouble is the sound of a gun being shot. Upon hearing it, Hawkins, who hides in the bush, sees Silver kill one of his own men. Having witnessed the murder, Hawkins starts running. In his desperate need to put distance between himself and Silver, Hawkins runs into Ben Gunn, a sailor who has been marooned on the island for three years. He was left there by a Captain Flint, the pirate who hid the treasure on this island to begin with. Gunn had been a mate on Flint's ship, along with Billy Bones and Long John Silver. Gunn tells Hawkins about his experiences and about the treasure and a hidden boat that Gunn has made. He tries to tell Hawkins more but a volley of cannon balls is hurled at the island, and both men run for their lives.

**Part 4The Stockade**

In the beginning of this section, the narration is taken over by Dr. Livesey. Livesey relates the events that were happening on his part of the island while young Hawkins was experiencing his own. As Livesey and the trusted members of the crew are about to leave the *Hispaniola*, Livesey learns that Hawkins has already left the ship. He fears for Hawkins' safety. Upon arriving on the island, Livesey finds an old stockade, a six-foot-high structure made of logs. Inside he discovers a fresh water spring. The doctor concludes that this is a good place to make the stand against the pirates.

The doctor and his men return to the *Hispaniola* and tell the captain the new plan. Then the men load suppliesfood, medicine, and guns and ammunitioninto several small boats and set their course for the island. Once they land on shore, they carry their crates to the stockade. After several trips, Dr. Livesey returns to the *Hispaniola* and announces that they have completed their plan, and all but a handful of men leave the ship. The small boats they are using for the last trip are overloaded, and the tide is working against them. In their hurry to prepare for a confrontation with the pirates, they have failed to realize until it is too late, that the only men left aboard are Silver's men. When they look back to the *Hispaniola*, the captain suggests that they kill Silver's men. Trelawney takes aim. He misses his intended target but wounds another. At this moment, the little boat in which Captain Smollot's men are rowing suddenly sinks. Since they are in only three feet of water, no one drowns, but some of the guns and half the supplies are lost. They have little time to reclaim anything as the pirates on the *Hispaniola* begin shooting cannon balls at them. The captain's crew barely makes it to the stockade before gunshots are fired and the battle on the ground begins. As the first battle comes to an end, Hawkins returns to the scene.

Hawkins takes over the narration and tells the men about Ben Gunn. They discuss their plans. This section ends with Long John Silver making a surprise visit to the stockade with a white flag in hand. Silver suggests that the captain turn over the treasure map. Then he suggests that the treasure be divided between the two sides. The captain scoffs at these suggestions and tells Silver to have his men come to the stockade and surrender. Silver spits into the fresh water spring in disgust. He leaves and shortly afterward, the next battle begins. In the process, several are killed and the captain is wounded.

**Part 5My Sea Adventure**

Once again, Hawkins decides to leave his group without telling anyone. He grabs some food and a gun and heads east toward the shoreline. He finds Ben Gunn's boat, rows it out to the *Hispaniola*, and frees the anchor, thus setting it adrift. He hears drunken noises from the pirates and climbs aboard to investigate. He finds the men quarreling and quickly returns to his small boat. He is tired, so he lies down and falls asleep. When he awakens, he sees that the waves have increased in size and when he sits up, his boat almost capsizes. In order to stay afloat, he must lie low at the bottom of the boat. He then notices the *Hispaniola* about one-half mile away from him and makes up his mind to board it again.

The only man conscious onboard the *Hispaniola* is Israel Hands. Hawkins acts boldly, taking down the pirates' flag and telling Hands to call him captain. Hands is wounded, so Hawkins brings him food and drink in exchange for Hands helping Hawkins navigate the ship to a safe harbor. Once the boat is all but safe, Hands lunges for Hawkins but is thrown overboard by a sudden twist of the ship. However, before falling off the ship, Hands thrusts his knife into Hawkins' shoulder, thus nailing him to the mast. Hawkins is at first mortified, but then he realizes that it is just a superficial wound and frees himself. He then leaves the ship and runs to find the doctor and the captain. He runs to the stockade but is startled to find Long John Silver and his men there.

**Part 6Captain Silver**

Silver stands up for Hawkins, although some of his men want to kill him. Hawkins admits everything to Silver, telling him that he was the one who overheard their plan to rebel against the captain. Silver tells Hawkins that the doctor gave the treasure map to him, and he has deserted Hawkins. Of course, Hawkins is confused. Silver's men then turn against Silver because they no longer trust him.

Coincidently the doctor shows up to administer to the wounded pirates. He talks in private to Hawkins and reprimands him for running away. The doctor urges Hawkins to run away with him now, but Hawkins has given his word to Silver and tells the doctor he must remain a prisoner to the pirates. Before the doctor leaves, Hawkins tells him about rescuing the *Hispaniola*.

The pirates head out to look for the buried treasure. When they finally figure out the map and follow its directions, they come upon an empty pit. Someone has already dug up the treasure. The pirates believe they have been tricked and decide to kill Silver. But the doctor and Ben Gunn, who have been hiding in the bushes, shoot at the pirates. After the pirates run for their lives, the doctor, Hawkins, Silver, and the others retreat to Ben Gunn's storage cave, where the treasure has been hidden. It appears that Silver has been working with the captain. But Hawkins has seen both sides of Silver and suspects that the old pirate chooses any side from which he will benefit.

A few days later, the *Hispaniola* is set to leave. Silver is in custody, but the captain has guaranteed him a fair trial. They leave food for the three remaining mutineers and sail for the nearest city to get fresh supplies and a new crew. When they anchor in a "Spanish American" city, Silver escapes, and most of the men are relieved. Only five men of the original crew make it back to Bristol, where they share the treasure.

**Characters**

**Mr. Arrow**

Mr. Arrow is the first mate on the *Hispaniola* but not a good one. His weakness is alcohol. He tries to befriend the pirates not so much because he likes them but because he does not know how to separate himself from them and therefore to regulate them. One day, while upon the open seas, he disappears. It is not known if he is thrown overboard or if he falls overboard in a drunken stupor.

**Black Dog**

Black Dog, whose distinguishing mark is two missing fingers on his left hand, is the first pirate to find Billy Bones. Black Dog fights with Bones and is injured but manages to run away. He is later seen with the blind man Pew who wants to find the treasure map. Later in the story, when Jim Hawkins first meets Long John Silver, Black Dog is sitting in the pub. When Hawkins points him out, Silver denies knowing him. This is Stevenson's first hint that Long John Silver might not be as honest as he pretends.

**Billy Bones**

Billy Bones appears in the beginning of this story and is the first pirate Jim Hawkins meets. Bones stays at the Hawkins' inn, the Admiral Benbow, scaring all the villagers with his sea stories and his dictatorial meanness. Bones pays Hawkins to watch for a man with one leg, someone who is obviously searching for Bones. Eventually Bones is discovered by a roving band of pirates, who give him the "black spot," a pirate sentence of death. Although the pirates do not kill him, Bones dies of some unknown cause, which the doctor assumes is related to Bones' alcoholism. After his death, young Hawkins finds a treasure map inside Bones' trunk, a map that sets up the premise of the story.

**Captain Flint**

Captain Flint, a notorious pirate, leaves Ben Gunn on Treasure Island. He never appears in the story but is mentioned by several pirates, who both praise and curse him. Long John Silver also names his parrot Captain Flint.

**Ben Gunn**

Ben Gunn is discovered on Treasure Island by Jim Hawkins. Gunn has been marooned there for three years and is a bit eccentric by the time Hawkins finds him. Despite his peculiarities, Gunn has figured out how to survive on the island and is instrumental in saving Hawkins and the rest of the crew of the *Hispaniola*. Gunn has a store of food that he shares with them and has built a crude rowboat, which Hawkins uses to save the *Hispaniola*. Despite the fact that Gunn has found the buried treasure, what he desires most when rescued is a piece of cheese. In the end, Gunn is given part of the treasure once the ship returns to England, but readers are told that Gunn spends his fortune quickly.

**Israel Hands**

Israel Hands is one of Long John Silver's men. During the mutiny, Hands is left on the ship. When Jim Hawkins returns to the ship and releases the anchor and climbs aboard, it is with Hands that Hawkins must deal. Hands helps Hawkins navigate the *Hispaniola* to a safe harbor. Once the ship is anchored, Hands tries to kill Hawkins but is thrown from the ship and drowns when the current abruptly changes. Before that fatal accident, Hands impales Hawkins with his dagger. Hawkins' wound, however, turns out to be superficial.

**Jim Hawkins**

Jim Hawkins is the young boy who narrates most of this story. He is observant of events that occur around him and of the people with whom he becomes involved. His observations at times get him into trouble but more often than not also save his life and the lives of his companions. He fortunately happens to be in the right place at the right time. The knowledge he gains through his good fortune is put to good use. Hawkins is both lucky and clever.

Hawkins' youthful curiosity leads him into the adventure of his lifetime after he gains possession of a treasure map. With a crew of less than respectable sea hands and a group of professional men at the helm, Hawkins eventually sails off to search for the buried bounty. It is through this treasure-hunt adventure that Hawkins experiences a rite of passage from adolescent to adult, as he learns to distinguish right from wrong, good from evil, and all shades in between. The story is told mostly through his eyes.

**Mr. Hawkins**

Mr. Hawkins is Jim's father. He is sickly and dies early in the story, leaving Jim the only man available to help his mother run the pub.

**Mrs. Hawkins**

Mrs. Hawkins, mother of Jim Hawkins, is present only in the first chapters of the book, in which Jim helps her run the Admiral Benbow.

**Dr. Livesey**

Dr. Livesey enters the story when Jim Hawkins' father is dying. He appears again at the Admiral Benbow when Billy Bones falls ill. It is to Dr. Livesey that young Hawkins gives the treasure map once he has discovered it in Bones' trunk. Dr. Livesey understands the importance of the map and helps to organize the ocean trip to find the buried treasure.

Livesey is honest and honor-bound. He is the mirror image of Long John Silver in many ways. While Silver pretends to be honest, sincere, and honor bound, Livesey really is. Livesey is also a humanitarian while Silver cares little for anyone but himself. In contrast, Livesey, even in the midst of the mutiny, treats the wounded pirates with as much care as he treats his own friends. Livesey is cool headed and intelligent and plays out the role of a father figure or older brother for young Hawkins.

**Old Man Pew**

Old Man Pew is a blind pirate who comes looking for Billy Bones at the Admiral Benbow. Jim Hawkins must personally deal with Old Man Pew and is frightened by the experience. Pew is strong and threatens Hawkins physically so that Hawkins does what Pew tells him. Pew also frightens Billy Bones. Bones sees him as a bad omen. After Bones dies, Old Man Pew is trampled by horses while citizens try to keep order in their village by chasing the pirates away from the town.

**Old Redruth**

Old Redruth, a friend of the squire's, is loyal to the professional crew on the *Hispaniola* but is the first to be killed when the pirates mutiny.

**Long John Silver**

Long John Silver, hired as the cook for the ship *Hispaniola*, is a chameleon, changing his "colors" depending on the situation. He is working in a pub when first introduced, a place he and his wife own. When Jim Hawkins encounters him, Silver pretends to be a legitimate businessman. In fact, Silver has gained all of his wealth from piracy and, despite the loss of a leg, has a reputation of being a successful pirate. He is an intelligent man and well aware of the psychology of the people around him. Silver uses this knowledge to manipulate the circumstances in which he finds himself, with an intense loyalty to no one but himself.

It is through Silver that the crewmembers, most of whom have histories of piracy, organize a mutiny. They plan to either kill or maroon the legitimate leaders of this expedition and claim the treasure for themselves. Silver, compared to the other pirates, is easily the most conniving. He charms everyone from the lowliest pirate to the captain of the ship. He stresses that all men must display honor and makes a grand show to prove that he is the most respectable of them all. His bright intelligence and quit wit help him turn every situation to his advantage. Given that Stevenson originally wanted the title of this book to be *The Sea Cook*, readers can be assured that Long John Silver, in many ways, was meant to be the main character.

**Captain Smollet**

Captain Smollet, the officer in charge of the *Hispaniola,* is hardworking and understands the power of rank, not for the power but rather for the discipline. He demonstrates his intelligence and understanding of human nature by recognizing Long John Silver's power over the pirates on his ship. He is wounded during a battle on Treasure Island, but Dr. Livesey saves him. Smollet is patriotic and often makes grand statements about his country.

**Squire Trelawney**

Squire Trelawney's strength is organization. He is the one who arranges the ship, the *Hispaniola* and its crew. Trelawney is loyal and hard working, but he does have a couple of faults. First, his judgment of people is in question, since he hires a bunch of ruffians to man the boat. Second, he has trouble keeping a secret. Perhaps Trelawney is the person who let it be known that the people who organized the crew of the *Hispaniola* were sailing in search of treasure.

**Setting**

The story begins sometime in the eighteenth century on a remote stretch of the English coast. A mysterious seaman named Billy Bones appears one day at the Admiral Benbow Inn in Black Hill Cove and asks for lodging. After the death of Billy Bones, the action shifts to Bristol, where Squire Trelawney is outfitting the brig Hispaniola and hiring a crew to journey to Treasure Island. The bulk of the adventure takes place on board the Hispaniola or on Treasure Island itself—presumably a tiny fictional Caribbean island somewhere in the West Indies. After the treasure is recovered and the Hispaniola recaptured by the loyal crew members, the party sails into a West Indies port to reprovision before returning to Bristol.

**Techniques**

The most notable strategy employed by Stevenson in this novel is the use of the "naive narrator" for most of the text. Jim Hawkins is young, impressionable, and human, but he is not stupid. Thus, he tells the story in a lively, relatively simple manner. This effect makes the perhaps excessively dramatic events in the plot more believable. Some of the plot is related by Dr. Livesy (those events which Jim could not witness), and it is to Stevenson's credit that these passages are written in a style befitting an older, more sophisticated speaker.

While the principal appeal of the book has always been its story line, Stevenson's evocation of setting, whether at the Admiral Benbow Inn and its environs, the good ship Hispaniola, or the island itself, is remarkable.

Many readers may be familiar with the fact that the origin of the story was a map that Stevenson had drawn (and colored) for his stepson, Lloyd Osbourne. This may be one reason for the impressive accuracy Stevenson displays when explaining locations and narrating action in them. His grasp of nautical phenomena, founded on his early familiarity with lighthouse locations, is also admirable. The author understood tides, currents, weather, and other such factors related to seafaring activities.

All in all, the impression left with the careful is of a brisk tale told by someone who knows whereof he speaks.

**Thematic Overview**

Stevenson was quite unaware of the importance of his novel until some time after it was published. He regarded it as a "rattling" good tale that would attract young readers for its entertainment value. He had, however, created a morally complex (at least, for an adventure story) work. The fascinating figure of Long John Silver, certainly a villain as to intentions, dominates most of the novel, and his escape (with a bag of coins) at the end still brings some criticism down on Stevenson because the "bad" person (but one who, earlier in the story, saved Jim's life) is not punished.

For someone who admired courage and daring as much as Stevenson did, though, it is understandable that he would create a character who, while wicked in most of his actions, yet is charming, courageous, and clever. This certainly does not signify that Stevenson endorsed such behavior, but only that he recognized that people are often composed of varied traits. Moreover, for the rest of the characters, the moral is that honesty, bravery, and truthfulness will be rewarded and the lack of these traits punished — as is noted at the close, in regard to most of the mutineers: "Drink and the devil had done for the rest."

**Themes**

**Honor**

There is much made of the concept of honor in Robert Louis Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island*. Whether it is the honor of gentlemen or the honor of thieves and pirates, this concept is interwoven throughout the story. Even though the pirates in this story steal other people's fortunes, killing many sailors and villagers in the process, they have a code of conduct and are expected to obey that code or lose honor among their peers. For example, when Long John Silver protects young Hawkins, Silver's mates grow suspicious of him. They believe Silver might be in cahoots with Dr. Livesey or Captain Smollet. If this is true, then Silver is a traitor and has committed an act that is contrary to the pirates' code. Likewise, there is a bond of honor between Hawkins and Silver. Hawkins gives his word to the old pirate that he will not run away once Silver holds Hawkins hostage. Silver later praises Hawkins for keeping his word. Dr. Livesey is also an honorable man. He is particularly honorable in reference to his vocation. He cares for the wounds of the pirates despite the fact that the pirates have tried to kill him.

**Adventure**

This story was written for one of Stevenson's stepsons. So its targeted audience is young. Stevenson wanted to give the young boy something exciting to read; thus this tale filled with high adventure and thrilling challenges in each chapter was born. Throughout the story, the young narrator bears the threats of seafarers like Billy Bones and Long John Silver. At other times he is sneaking around Billy Bones' bedroom to retrieve the treasure map or going against the orders of the ship's captain and devising daring plans of his own. Hawkins has led a simple life before this story begins. But suddenly he finds himself sailing across an ocean in search of treasure and having to defend himself. He faces mutiny, several gun battles, uncouth pirates who try to kill him, and the constant threat of being marooned on an islandall the right ingredients for keeping young readers reading to find out what happens next.

**Coming of Age**

As the story begins, young Hawkins lives in a small village and works each day in his parents' inn. He is devoted to his parents and at first afraid of the pirate Billy Bones. Hawkins trembles when Bones touches him. Hawkins is also somewhat naïve, trusting other people's interpretations rather than trusting his own. For example, when Hawkins recognizes a pirate in Long John Silver's inn, he believes Silver when he says he has no idea who the man is.

Hawkins' gullibility slowly fades as the adventure progresses and his experiences widen. For instance, when Hawkins climbs into the apple barrel and overhears Silver planning a mutiny, he begins to understand that there is real evil in the world. As the story continues, there are more rites of passage as Hawkins passes through adolescence to adulthood. He sneaks off the ship once it is anchored and takes off on a journey all by himself. He fights in a battle against the pirates and sees many men die. He conjures up a plan to rescue the ship from the pirates. At this point he feels the full strength of his power. He tells the only conscious pirate onboard that he, Hawkins, should be referred to as the captain of the ship. It is as if Hawkins is stating he is a man. He orders the pirate to help him steer the ship through dangerous currents and anchor the boat in a safe harbor. At the end of this scene, Hawkins receives his first wound. It is a superficial cut, but with it Hawkins faces his own mortality.

**Conflict**

The themes of man against man, man against nature, and man against himself help to structure this novel. For example, Hawkins must overcome his fear of the pirates, beginning with Billy Bones and later with Long John Silver. Hawkins must also face nature, especially when he pulls the anchor on the *Hispaniola* and is first thrust about in the ocean waves in the small boat of Ben Gunn's and then later in the great ship itself as he tries to navigate the strong currents in the island's narrow harbors. Moreover, Hawkins faces conflict when he must make very difficult choices, such as when he decides to desert his crew. Through conflict and its consequences Hawkins matures. Furthermore, conflict draws in readers, as they attempt to second-guess the outcome of conflicts and read on to discover them.

**Style**

**Serialized Novel**

Stevenson's novel *Treasure Island* was first published in a serialized form. This means that it was published chapter by chapter in separate small units. Serialization imposed its own form on plot design, dictating chapters that practically stand on their own with inconclusive endings. In other words, each chapter is a mini-adventure but designed to leave the reader wondering what will happen next. In Stevenson's book, the stories are collected in parts, and within each part are separate sections. This arrangement intensifies the tension. The first part of the book, for example, is divided into six sections. At the end of the first section, it is hinted that Dr. Livesey and Billy Bones will meet again, and readers are left to wonder how the next confrontation between them will take place. The second section is called "Black Dog Appears and Disappears," which sums up the action. But again, the reader senses at the end of this section that Black Dog will reappear, and when he does, something catastrophic will probably occur. By the end of the first part of the book, the reader has been introduced to most of the major characters. Readers are primed, much like Hawkins himself, and ready for the next part of the journey. The serialized form helps readers experience the excitement in sequence as Hawkins experiences it.

**Point of View**

The majority of this story is told by young Hawkins, who tells readers in the first few sentences that he has been asked by Dr. Livesey, the squire, and the rest of the professional crew of the *Hispaniola* to write this story with all its details. Readers watch the boy's growth as he develops from a naïve teenager to an experienced man. It is clear what Hawkins is thinking, whether he is making bold decisions or stupid mistakes. Stevenson only changes point of view when Dr. Livesey recounts events that young Hawkins does not participate in. Stevenson uses the doctor, for instance, to tell about what happens on the ship when Hawkins is on shore. This shift gives readers a little advantage because they know more than Hawkins, but this gap is quickly closed. Once the doctor and Hawkins are reunited, Hawkins continues the narration of the story.

**Historical Context**

**Piracy**

Piracy, which can be loosely defined as lawlessness and usually at sea, has a long history, dating as far back as the Phoenicians (1200 to 800 b.c.) Piracy occurred on almost every body of water from the China Sea to the Mediterranean and eventually along New World's Atlantic shores and in the Caribbean. Pirates were both feared and romanticized as heroes. They thrived on the booty (or stolen wealth) they stole from merchant ships and shoreline villages. Their practice lasted well into the nineteenth century when British and U.S. naval forces eventually overwhelmed them. Nonetheless, some piracy continued throughout the twentieth century and into the early 2000s. Beyond crimes committed on the high sea, the term has been applied to many different types of theft, including the illegal downloading of material from the Internet.

One famous pirate is Blackbeard, whose real name was Edward Teach, a British man who scoured the Caribbean and the Atlantic coast of the United States during the eighteenth century. His outpost was on the North Carolina shoreline, where he was eventually hunted down and shot to death in 1718.

Although most stories and movies about pirates feature men, some pirates were female. One of the most notorious female pirates was Anne Bonny, the daughter of a well-to-do lawyer who amassed a fortune in North Carolina. Bonny was disowned by her father when she married a pirate. Bonny grew tired of her husband and eventually slipped away with a more notorious man nicknamed Calico Jack. In 1720, Bonny was caught and imprisoned and after being sentenced to hang, pleaded for her life based on the fact that she was pregnant. She disappeared before her hanging date, and some people believe that her father forgave her and paid handsomely for her release.

**Living in Victorian London**

Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island* while living in London. Queen Victoria (1819—1901), for which the age is named, deeply affected the people and culture of this world city with her sense of duty, her belief in moral righteousness, and her patriotismtraits that are mirrored in some of Stevenson's characters. Because Victorian England was involved in the internal affairs of many other countries with its vast empire and the largest navy in the world, the population of London was made up of people from all over the world, and, in the 1880s, London had one of the largest international shipping ports in the world, receiving million of tons of goods each year.

The Houses of Parliament were built between 1840 and 1860, and Big Ben first rang in 1859. Compulsory universal education became law with the passage of the Education Act in 1870 (a secondary school education act passed in 1902). The first underground railway system in London began operation in 1863. However, illness and poverty were rampant. A significant proportion of the population died of tuberculosis each year. (Many people believe that this was the lung disease that Stevenson suffered from.) Child labor was prevalenta condition that inspired Charles Dickens to write his novel *Oliver Twist* (1837).

**Critical Overview**

The publication of *Treasure Island* marked the beginning of Stevenson's reputation as a writer worth reading. By the end of the nineteenth century, Stevenson enjoyed what William B. Jones Jr. refers to in the preface to *Robert Louis Stevenson Reconsidered* as the "heights of near idolatry." However, the public fervor and appreciation of Stevenson's life's work would both rise and fall. His contemporaries and fellow British authors, such as Virginia Woolf, often belittled his work, accusing Stevenson of not challenging himself with serious topics. Despite this, Jones writes, "Stevenson actually never lost his popularity with readers, as the countless editions and numerous film versions of *Treasure Island* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* attest."

Despite many critical statements about the lack of depth of Stevenson's material, Ian Bell, writing in the preface to his book *Dreams of Exile: Robert Louis Stevenson*, states that nonetheless, Stevenson was able to connect with "public taste" at a "deep level" and marvels at the continued popularity of Stevenson's work. "What was it," Bell asks, "he [Stevenson] did in his 'children's stories,' his 'adventure tales,' his 'romances,' that others failedfailto do?" Bell continues, "We can admit that there have been better writers than Stevenson, writers more subtle and ambitious, more tenacious, certainly more profound. Then it is necessary to remind ourselves that many of the names offered have long since faded from the public's memory. Whatever Stevenson had they lacked. The durability and ubiquity of his tales suggest a man touching something basic." As if to bolster Bell's commentary, in a review of a recent edition of Stevenson's novel, Laura Moore, writing in *Urbana*, concludes that *Treasure Island* "is perhaps the best adventure story ever written."

**Critical Essay #1**

*Hart has degrees in English and creative writing and is the author of several books. In this essay, Hart studies the concept of money, how it applies to the story, and how it affects the characters.*

When Robert Louis Stevenson wrote *Treasure Island*, he was still financially dependent on his father. So the pressure of writing a good story, one that had public appeal, was not the only concern on his mind as he progressed through this romantic tale of high adventure. Stevenson was out to prove that he could write well that he could support himself through his own publications. He was thirty-one years old, married, and the stepfather of two children. It was time that he earned his title as head of household. Therefore, whether it was a conscious or subconscious act, it is no wonder that the subject of money is woven through this work. This might be a story of adventure and a tale of a young boy coming of age, but neither of those two elements pushes the story forward. If readers looked closely, they will come to see that the real power that drives this novel is not adventure but money.

No more than five lines into the story, young Jim Hawkins makes reference to money. He has been asked by Squire Trelawney and Dr. Livesey to write from memory the things that occurred on their treasure-hunt adventure. Hawkins is to give all the particular details of their trip except for the "bearings of the island," because "there is still treasure not yet lifted." With this comment, Stevenson sets up his readers to focus on the money. Readers immediately become alert to the idea that there is still treasure to be found. Like the pirates who have buried their loot on some deserted island, Stevenson has buried the idea of money in his readers' minds. And like the characters themselves who push their way across the ocean, readers plod their way through the story, hoping they too discover in the pages of this story some clue regarding the island's location. If they can uncover that secret, maybe they too can set out on their own adventure and claim the remaining treasure. Having set this tone, Stevenson next introduces his characters, each with his own claims and desires for money.

The first to arrive on the scene is the pirate Billy Bones. One of the interesting and mysterious features of this old seaman is the large chest he drags behind him. Since the title of this novel is *Treasure Island* and since, according to old myths, it is said that treasures are often buried in old chests, readers, as well as the characters in this story cannot help but wonder what Bones is hiding in that chest. Bones throws a few coins around, promising to pay Hawkins to keep a lookout for a one-legged man and prepaying Hawkins' father for his keep. Readers as well as the affected characters wonder where those coins come from and if there are more to be found at their source. But Bones' payments soon become a point of contention when he often forgets to give young Hawkins his wages. Bones also forgets, or refuses, to pay Hawkins' father for his extended keep. And these omissions come into play later, after Bones has died. That is when young Hawkins and his mother rationalize their rifling through Bones' mysterious chest in search of what they consider is rightfully owed to them. They find what they want or rather what they have justified is theirs. And they discover even more. Hawkins comes upon the map that will take the story into its further developmentthe search for more money. It is interesting to note, before moving on with the rest of the story, that Hawkins' relationships with Bones and with their fellow villagers, as far as Stevenson portrays it, are all based on money. There is little mention of any emotional involvement either when Bones dies or when Hawkins father dies. The emphasis of the story is on the survival of those left behind, and that survival is based on money. Debts must be paid. The Admiral Benbow Inn must reopen as soon as possible so the flow of money is not interrupted.

The story progresses with Dr. Livesey comprehending the significance of the map that Hawkins shows him. When he concludes that it is a treasure map, plans are immediately made to find the island. Here a medical doctor, upon whom a whole countryside depends, leaves his patients, as does young Hawkins leave his widowed mother, all in the name of gold. It is also in the name of money that the doctor warns his comrades they must be silent. No one must know that the true motivation of their sea journey (like the motivation for writing this story) is money. However, Stevenson knows that the thought of money inspires every man, so he cannot keep it a secret. Money is the driving force; therefore, every character in this story must be energized by it. Thus he must have a character who cannot keep a secret. That character is Squire Trelawney, who spreads the word so far that every man involved in the trip, even before the *Hispaniola* leaves the dock, knows that the purpose behind the journey is the search for gold. It is the thought of riches in the crew's minds, more than the wind that fills the ship's sails, that drives the *Hispaniola* across the ocean.

In the midst of the trip, Stevenson does a curious thing. He has Long John Silver, the most respected of pirates, hold a discussion with his men on economics. As Hawkins sits hidden in the depths of an apple barrel, the young boy listens as Silver discusses not only the act of mutiny with the other pirates but also the best ways to make one's money work for oneself. It is not wise to take money one finds (or steals) and squander it on rum or on women, but rather, Silver tells the men, one should invest it. That is just what Silver has done, he explains. He has bought the Spyglass Inn, which he runs (when he is not off on an ocean voyage) with his woman. What Silver has not invested in real estate and small business, he has stashed in several banks. "I laid by nine hundred safe, from England, and two thousand after Flint. That ain't bad for a man before the mastall safe in the bank." Then he adds: "It's saving does it, you may lay to that." He continues his lecture by warning the men that most pirates throw their money away and then end up begging for food. His men, misunderstanding Silver's lessons, state that money then "ain't such use, after all." But Silver is already one step ahead of his men, as usual. "T ain't much use for fools," he tells them. Then Silver begins a long monologue on what makes the typical "gentlemen of fortune," pirates who win big but lose it completely. "But that's not the course I lay. I puts it all away, some here, some there, and none too much anywheres, by reason of suspicion." He is not only, Silver assures them, a gentleman of fortune. He is also a "gentleman in earnest." So in the midst of mutiny and adventure, Stevenson sneaks in a lesson on how to find money and how to keep it and invest it so it will grow. As proof that this lesson has been learned, at least in the mind of one of the pirates, Stevenson has a young pirate tell Silver, "Well, I tell you now . . . I didn't half a quarter like the job till I had this talk with you, John; but there's my hand on it now." This youngster has been set straight. One has only to work hard and think of riches to alleviate the pain of the hard labor, and all is set well with the world.

But there is one foolish fellow in this adventure, and that is Ben Gunn. Gunn has been on Treasure Island for three years with more gold than he ever imagined. And yet the one thing he craves even more than money is some English food. Only on Treasure Island is money not worth anything. Gunn could not eat the gold, nor would the treasure help him sail off the island. The true worth of money is as currency, the passing of the gold from one hand to another in exchange for some material that either satisfies one's hunger and thirst or promotes an easier style of living. The cave filled with gold provides none of these for Gunn. His survival depends solely on his own hands and his wit. This man, although his loneliness has made him a bit eccentric, is the only character in the story who is truly independent. For three years, he figures out a way to stay alive without moneythe same thing that drives all the other characters nearly crazy. The other men in the story are willing to leave their families, their homes, their patients, their colleagues and risk their lives for the buried treasure. They are willing to maim and kill for itbut not Gunn. For this difference, Stevenson makes Gunn look like a fool.

As the novel comes to a close, Stevenson paints the portrait of Gunn in ridiculous colors. First Gunn helps Silver escape from the *Hispaniola*, then he allows Silver to take one of the sacks of gold. Thus Silver, the old economics professor, once again finishes in the blackin profit. Then Stevenson writes about how Captain Smollet, because of the found treasure, is able to retire. Another man uses his money to further his education and invest in a ship and then lives happily ever after with a wife and family. But not poor Ben Gunn. The money he is given ("a thousand pounds"), readers find out, Gunn, foolish man that he is, "spent or lost in three weeks." Gunn is reduced to a beggar. Although Stevenson does not dwell on it or praise it, he does write that once again Gunn manages to do fairly well for himself without money. He is given a place to live and becomes "a great favourite, though something of a butt" with the local country people.

In the very last paragraph of the book, young Hawkins reminds the reader that although they brought much treasure back with them, there still lay, somewhere on that Treasure Island, bars of silver, thus enticing the dreams, once again, of all those who believe money will solve their problems and make their lives better. And then, with the final words of the story, Hawkins imagines Captain Flint singing out: "Pieces of eight! pieces of eight!" Or in other words: Money, money, money!

**Source:** Joyce Hart, Critical Essay on *Treasure Island*, in *Novels for Students*, Thomson Gale, 2005.

**Critical Essay #2**

*Holm is a freelance writer as well as a genre novel and short story author. In this essay, Holm discusses tools of the writing craft that Stevenson uses to make this story engaging and suspenseful.*

Stevenson's *Treasure Island* has the characteristics of a successful suspense novel and an entertaining story. There is a lot in this book that serves as a good example of the craft of fine storytelling. Stevenson's adept use of the tools of good storytelling make this story a good read for adults as well as younger audiences.

Immediately apparent in *Treasure Island* is Stevenson's economical use of language. The economy, however, does not sacrifice description, observation, or suspense. Sentences are generally short and peppered with sensory description and keen observations about the human psyche and the characters' motivations. Close to the beginning of the book, Stevenson's protagonist describes the mysterious, somewhat frightening pirate who has become a fixture at Jim's family inn.

He was a very silent man by custom. All day he hung round the cove, or upon the cliffs, with a brass telescope; all evening he sat in a corner of the parlor next to the fire, and drank rum and water very strong. Mostly he would not speak when spoken to; only look up sudden and fierce, and blow through his nose like a foghorn; and we . . . learned to let him be.

In a few short sentences, the reader has learned quite a bit about Billy Bones, including that everyone else is at least slightly leery of the drunken pirate. Blowing a nose "like a foghorn" is a wonderful sensory detail that the reader can easily imagine and will not soon forget. Stevenson's prose is richly loaded with detailthe warmth of a fire, strong rum and water, a brass telescope, cliffs. None of it bogs the reader down, nor interferes with the tight and rapid pace of the story because the details are worked so economically into the narrative.

Throughout the book, there are countless examples of description that do double or triple duty. These descriptions also move the story forward and emphasize a particular clue for the reader, which prepares him for future story twists and turns. Jim describes his dreams of the "seafaring man with one leg," and the reader hears the surf roaring, feels the house shaking, and sees the one-legged man leaping over hedges to pursue the protagonist. The reader hears the drunken pirate singing "yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum" and feels the unease of the boy and the inn patrons. The doctor on the *Hispaniola* discovers Jim missing and captures the moment with a number of sensory details that also hint at danger on Treasure Island and prepare the reader for foreboding.

We ran on deck. The pitch was bubbling in the seams; the nasty stench of the place turned me sick; if ever a man smelled fever and dysentery, it was in that abominable anchorage.

Not only does this give the reader a clear moment of description and foreboding, it also allows the doctor to share knowledge of possible risk for diseaseknowledge that another character would not have.

Stevenson uses foreshadowing throughout Treasure Island as hints to readers to look for certain key characters or situations. Flint's fear of a "seafaring man with one leg" is emphasized by his effort to bribe the boy to watch for such a person. Long John Silver does become quite important in the story later on, and the reader has been prepared. In another example of foreshadowing, Captain Smollett seems to have a superstitious reservation about the voyage for treasure ("all I say is we're not home again, and I don't like this cruise") even though he has taken a "downright fancy" to the ship. Of course, the reader knows that something is going to happen and that it will probably involve struggle or danger otherwise there would not be much of a story. Deft (and not overdone) foreshadowing prepares the observant reader for complications and gives the added mystery of a superstitious hunch. More foreshadowing is used when the characters on the ship first view Treasure Island. Jim says

Perhaps it was thisperhaps it was the look of the island, with its gray, melancholy woods, and wild stone spires, and the surf that we could both see and hear foaming and thundering on the steep beachat least, although the sun shone bring and hot, and the shore birds were fishing and crying all around us . . . my heart sank . . . into my boots; and from that first look onward, I hated the very thought of Treasure Island.

In a paragraph, the reader feels the danger on Treasure Island and again is given rich sensory detail to experience the first view of the island through the eyes of Jim.

Another method of sustaining suspense in an adventure story is to end a chapter at a crucial moment, which is generally known as a cliffhanger. Stevenson uses a number of these in *Treasure Island*. The point of such endings is to make the reader want to read further, at any cost. When Jim climbs into the ship's apple barrel and inadvertently hears Long John Silver's first dozen words, he understands "that the lives of all the honest men aboard depended upon me alone." Suddenly the stakes have been raised tremendously. Jim is hiding, is in possible danger of discovery, and most of all, is just becoming aware of a huge personal responsibility for the "honest men" on the ship.

There are many cliffhangers in *Treasure Island* and they all incorporate good storytelling techniques. At the end of Chapter 32, Silver (with Jim in tow as prisoner) and his band of pirates finally locate the site of the treasure, only to discover that the cache is already missing and all that is left is a hole that has been empty for some time. Up until that point, the reader had no clue about the outcome; no foreshadowing had been provided about the location of the treasure. But that is almost secondary; the reader assumes that the treasure will eventually be found. What is more important is that the missing treasure will create an explosive situation among the band of pirates. The reader has been prepared for this possibility through the protagonist's keen observations of Long John Silver's mercurial and untrustworthy nature. Stevenson does not let the reader down. The face-off between the men gets going right away in the next chapter.

Not every chapter in *Treasure Island* ends with a cliffhanger, but the ending of chapters can also serve as a powerful place to emphasize a particular character nuance, or important story information. Such is the case when Jim reboards the *Hispaniola* and takes command. At the end of this chapter, Jim notices the "odd smile" on Hands's face, a "haggard, old man's smile; but there was, besides that, a grain of derision, a shadow of treachery in his expression as he craftily watched, and watched, and watched me at my work." Again, the reader is being prepared for possible danger from Hands, and the point is given particular emphasis because the author places it at the end of a chapter.

Stevenson also times the revelation of information to the reader, and to the characters, to help create suspense in *Treasure Island*. This is similar to foreshadowing, but foreshadowing may rely more on implied symbolism or the ambiguous, seemingly illogical statement of a character (a gray island, or the unease of a superstitious captain). The timing of how information is revealed in storytelling is an important consideration in a suspense story. A good example of this in *Treasure Island* takes place when Hands and Jim are alone on the ship, and Hands asks Jim to go fetch a bottle of wine. There is something strange about the way Hands words his request that clues the reader into feeling that something is not quite right.

I'll take it kind if you'd step down into that there cabin and get me awell, ashiver my timbers! I can't hit the name on't; well, you get me a bottle of wine, Jimthis here brandy's too strong for my head.

An astute reader might immediately notice that something seems slightly unnatural about Hands's manner of speaking. Suddenly, he seems to be hesitating too much, or trying a little too hard. This is confirmed in the next paragraph when Jim has the same suspicions. However, the reader figured this out first and is then free to enjoy watching Jim come to the same realization. It is a well-timed revelation because the reader is prepared for what's coming.

Although *Treasure Island* is a suspenseful adventure story, it contains wonderful observations about various aspects of the human psyche. These are presented economically and enhance the story rather than bogging it down. Often, these observations give the reader insight into the protagonist. A reader might, for example, be impressed with Jim's ability to notice that Black Dog tries to sound "bold and big." Jim has a number of observations about the lack of help he and his mother get when they seek assistance in defending their inn. "Cowardice is infectious," remarks Jim, noting that none of the neighbors would return to the inn and would only promise ready horses or loaded pistols. This is realistic, which adds to the believability of the story, but it also advances the plot because it raises the stakes for the main characters. If neighbors had gladly come to defend the inn, a real opportunity for excitement and danger would have been lost, and Jim may never have ended up on the voyage to Treasure Island.

Jim gets more chances to comment on human nature when he describes the band of pirates that return to ransack the inn. They have "half an eye to their own danger all the time, while the rest stood irresolute on the road." It is a good observation by the protagonist, and it also sets the reader's expectation about the pirates' actions later in the story.

By the time the pirates discover that the treasure is missing, Jim already has a good understanding of Silver's unethical, changeable character. Still, this does not diminish the power of Jim's observation of Silver at that moment. Stevenson also uses the moment as an opportunity to slip in a little dialogue: "His looks were now quite friendly; and I was so revolted at these constant changes that I could not forbear whispering, 'So you've changed sides again.'"

There are other techniques that Stevenson uses to make this story enjoyable, suspenseful, and tightly plotted. The author makes extensive use of lively dialogue, which brings the reader close to the characters and gives the reader the experience of "hearing" pirates and other characters. Stevenson also disposes of characters when they are no longer needed. Billy Bones is killed because he has served his purposehe has brought his trunk and treasure map to the inn where it will fall into Jim's hands. Pew is killed off after Jim has heard enough to learn what type of danger he may be heading into. Long John Silver lives through the entire book because he is a critical character and is crucial to the plot until the treasure is located. Stevenson uses a number of methods, including rich description, foreshadowing and timing, tight plotting, and economical prose to make *Treasure Island* an enjoyable adventure story for all ages.

# Treasure Island Summary

The setting of this story is described by young [Jim Hawkins](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#jim-hawkins) as the book begins: "[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 the rest of these gentlemen having asked me to write down the whole particulars about [Treasure Island](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island), from the beginning to the end, keeping nothing back but the bearings of the island, and that only because there is 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 lodging under our roof." Gravely ill, [Billy Bones](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#billy-bones) resides at the Admiral Benbow for "many months." The brown old seaman' strikes fear into patrons' hearts as he consumes dangerous quantities of rum and sings an old sea song: "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." Bones warns Jim to keep his weather-eye open for a seafaring man with one leg' and relates tales of piracy and other foul deeds while he was pirate.

One evening, while he is guzzling rum, he is reprimanded by Dr. Livesey, who has arrived to examine Jim's dying father. A short time later, [Black Dog](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#black-dog), a mysterious "tallowy creature," frightens Jim into revealing the whereabouts of Bones. Following a brief sword duel with the "Dog," Blind [Pew](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#pew) visits the old seaman, another of his old shipmates, who delivers the "black spot," a death summons used by pirates. Soon after, Bones succumbs to a stroke and Jim and his mother run to a nearby village, where the inhabitants refuse to help them. Just before the pirates reach the inn, Jim removes a key from the corpse and grabs an oilskin packet from the captain's old sea chest. While the pirates frantically sack Bones' belongings in the inn, Jim and his mother hide under a nearby bridge. Unable to find "Flint's fist,' the pirates escape, leaving Pew behind to be fatally trampled by horsemen from the village, who have finally decided to come to Jim and his mother's aid.

At the home of Squire Trelawney, Jim delivers the packet to Dr. Livesey. "This is the black-hearted hound's account book," the squire observes after the oilskin is removed. [Passing](https://www.gradesaver.com/passing)over figures and course headings, the men turn to a second enclosure, a map of Captain John Flint's treasure island. Trelaweny experiences an uncontrollable fit of excitement, vows to secure the best ship in England, and commands Livesey and Jim to accompany him on a treasure-hunting voyage. Several weeks later, Trelawney hires Long John silver, a one-legged seaman and cook, and a salty band of other sailors. At Bristol, the crew weighs anchor and the Hispanolia begins its journey. Becoming acquainted with the charismatic sea cook, who totes a pet parrot named "Captain Flint," Jim is surprised when, hiding in an apple barrel on deck, he overhears Silver conspiring with crewmates [Israel Hands](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#israel-hands) and the young Dick to take the ship once the treasure is aboard.

After land is sighted, a battle ensues between [Captain Smollett](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#captain-smollett)'s royal forces and Silver's swarthy pirates. Jim escapes ashore and falls in with [Ben Gunn](https://www.gradesaver.com/treasure-island/study-guide/character-list#ben-gunn), an unfortunate seaman who was marooned by Captain Flint three years earlier. Treading the boundary between the opposing camps, Jim wins the confidence of Gunn (who leads Dr. Livesy to the treasure, which the marooned sailor has transferred to his secret cave) and recaptures the Hispaniola after cutting her hawser and sending Israel Hands to his death at the bottom of the sea. Following a near-fatal experience with the surviving pirates (who arrogantly tip their leader the black spot and then rescind it once they realize that he has the treasure map), Jim accompanies Silver on the treasure hunt. When the angry rogues discover that the treasure has been removed, Silver Shoots George Merry (the rebellious rascal who had deposed him the previous evening). Firing musket balls form the surrounding trees, Dr. Livesey, Squire Trelawney, and Ben Gunn force the remaining freebooters into the interior of the island.

Trelawney and his crew stow the treasure safely in the Hispanolia's hold and leave provisions for the marooned pirates before setting sail for England. During a brief stop at a South American port, Silver, who faces trial and execution, steals a sack of coins and escapes over the rail. Jim Hawkins concludes: "Of Silver we have heard no more. That formidable seafaring man with one leg has at last gone clean out of my life; but I dare say he met his old Negress, and perhaps still lives in comfort with her and Capitan Flint. It is to be hoped so, I suppose, for his chances of comfort in another world are very small. 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 I ever 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!"

The protagonist of *Treasure Island*, [**Jim Hawkins**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/jim-hawkins), has been asked by his acquaintances Doctor Livesey and [**Squire Trelawney**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/squire-trelawney) to write down his recollections. He begins by discussing the “Admiral Benbow” inn that his family owned when he was a boy, not far from the English port of Bristol. One day a strange, ragged-looking, and intimidating man arrives: he asks only to be called [**captain**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/billy-bones-the-captain), and asks Jim to keep a lookout for a man with only one leg. The captain spends much of the time drunk on [**rum**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/rum), and after a pirate named [**Black Dog**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) comes to see him, he is so nervous that he has a fainting fit. Afterwards, he tells Jim that Black Dog was after something in his sea chest: if he ever dies, he tells Jim, the boy should find what’s in it and follow the instructions inside.

Soon [**Jim’s father**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters) falls ill and dies. The very day after the funeral, a blind man (Pew) arrives and gives the captain the [**black spot**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/the-black-spot), which deposes him from power among the other pirates. Shocked, the captain falls down dead. Since he hasn’t paid his rent for months, Jim and his mother decide to break into his sea chest chest and seize what they’re owed, even though they’re now afraid of being alone at the inn, given the various people who have pursued the captain. But they succeed in opening the chest: Jim’s mother counts out some of the gold, while Jim grabs a small oil-cloth packet. Hearing voices, they rush out of the house and hide by the road: it’s a group of pirates who seem to be looking for what Jim has seized. Later, Jim makes his way to the squire and doctor, who help him open the oil-cloth bag: there’s a [**map**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/symbols/the-map-of-treasure) of an island with a place marked on it that holds treasure. The squire and Dr. Livesey are thrilled: they decide to get a ship together and travel to the island in order to find the treasure, enlisting Jim as the cabin boy.

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The squire is responsible for discreetly hiring a responsible, loyal crew, though he’s been unable to keep quiet about the purpose of the ship’s journey. Still, he’s optimistic about the crew and especially about the ship cook, [**Long John Silver**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/long-john-silver). Jim is initially suspicious when he hears that Silver has only one leg. But once he meets the man, Silver’s clean-cut appearance and kindly demeanor reassures him that Silver can’t have anything to do with the other pirates. He much prefers Silver to [**Captain Smollett**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-smollett), who is strict and rule-abiding—the squire, too, is displeased with the captain. Nonetheless, after the ship, called the *Hispaniola*, embarks on its voyage, little goes wrong initially—other than that the mate, [**Mr. Arrow**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), proves useless, and eventually drinks so much that he falls overboard.

Jim enjoys being included on the voyage, and especially appreciates the welcoming attitude of Long John Silver, who often invites Jim into his cabin to sit with him and his parrot, named [**Captain Flint**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/captain-flint) (after an infamous pirate). But one evening, Jim manages to overhear Silver talking with the other crewmen about a plan to mutiny: Silver will lead other members of the crew—many of whom, it turns out, are pirates—in taking over the ship and obtaining the treasure for themselves. As soon as he can, Jim tells the squire, doctor, and captain about these plans. When the ship soon arrives at Treasure Island, the captain decides to allow a few of the pirates to go to shore in order to gain time for them to plan a defense. Jim, too, sneaks off to the island, where in the midst of exploring he meets a former pirate named [**Ben Gunn**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters/ben-gunn), who has been marooned there for three years.

The crewmen loyal to the captain manage to sneak off the *Hispaniola*and make it to an old log house, which they make into their fort—while the pirates have secured the ship, even though there’s not one of them who can satisfactorily steer it. Long John Silver comes to the log house to propose that the captain surrender and allow the pirates to get the treasure, but the captain staunchly refuses. Silver angrily retreats, and the first battle takes place not long after—while the captain’s group kills more pirates than vice versa, they are still at a disadvantage in terms of numbers.

The doctor goes off to meet Ben Gunn, and Jim begins to grow restless. Although he acknowledges that he is acting immaturely, Jim decides to sneak off and attempt to find the small white boat that Gunn had mentioned to him. He does find it, and once he sees the lights of the *Hispaniola*, now captain-less and rocking side to side, he paddles out to it. Finding aboard a pirate, [**Israel Hands**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), who is wounded and has killed his mate, [**O’Brien**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), in a drunken rage. Jim and Israel initially work together in order to navigate the ship back to shore, but the pirate soon begins to plot to kill Jim too. After a fight, Jim manages to shoot Hands dead and get the ship ashore, where he docks it, hidden in an out-of-the-way part of the island. When he arrives back to the log house, it turns out that the pirates have taken it over, and he’s taken prisoner. But after Jim declares his lack of fear, Long John Silver seems to take a greater liking to Jim, and defends him from the other pirates. It also becomes clear that the pirates are growing dissatisfied with Silver as their leader, and now debate giving him the black spot. At the same time, the pirates continue to allow the doctor to stop in periodically in order to tend to their wounds. The doctor gives Jim and Silver an enigmatic message about the treasure. He’s finally given the treasure map to the pirates, though Jim and Silver can’t imagine why.

The pirates, though, are not concerned about this, and—dragging Jim by a rope—they march across the island. After hearing a voice mentioning Darby (one of Captain Flint’s pirates) they’re almost too scared to go on, until Silver cries that it’s the voice of Ben Gunn. Finally the pirates reach the x-marks-the-spot on the map—but there’s only a hole with no treasure. Quickly recognizing his own peril, Silver immediately begins to back away with Jim at his side, and when one of the pirates, [**George Merry**](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/treasure-island/characters), starts to declare mutiny against Silver, Silver shoots him and another. The other pirates race away through the trees, just as the doctor and Ben Gunn emerge themselves.

As they walk back to their hiding place, they tell Jim that, in fact, Ben Gunn had found this treasure during his time on the island, and had hidden it elsewhere—which is why the doctor had given the treasure map to the pirates. After the crew loads up the *Hispaniola*(thanks to Jim’s ability to hide it out of sight), they sail away, leaving the remaining pirates ashore. While Jim feels more positively about Long John Silver, the others continue to be suspicious of him, and none of them is surprised when Silver slips away at the first port where they stop. The rest of the crew makes it back to Bristol unscathed, where each spends his part of the fortune according to his own character. Jim vows never to return to Treasure Island.

## Summary

### Part 1: The Old Buccaneer

It is the mid-1700s, and [Jim Hawkins](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Jim_Hawkins) is the son of the Admiral Benbow's innkeeper. The inn occupies a remote spot along the southwest coast of England. It is the perfect location for an aging pirate to hide out from his former shipmates.

As narrator of the tale as well as key participant, Jim recalls the ragged and scarred buccaneer's arrival. Billy, who likes to be called "captain," plods up the road to the inn door, loudly singing a chorus of "Fifteen men on a dead man's chest." He likes the isolation of the Admiral Benbow, takes a room, and pays Jim to keep watch for a seafaring man with one leg. Over the next few months, Billy spends much of his time drunk on rum.

One day a seaman named Black Dog shows up at the inn. Though he has two legs, his appearance frightens Billy, who has a stroke. Taking Jim into his confidence, Billy says Black Dog was sent by his old shipmates who want to get their hands on his sea chest. Soon after, Billy is visited by a blind man named Pew, has another stroke, and dies.

Jim and his mother search Billy's sea chest and take some coins and an oilskin packet to cover the dead man's debt to the inn. The packet contains a journal and a map that Jim shares with the local physician, [Dr. Livesey](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Dr._Livesey), and the district squire, Trelawney. Realizing that the map reveals the island location of a cache of pirate gold, they decide it will be a great adventure to buy a ship and go after it.

### Part 2: The Sea Cook

In the port town of Bristol, [Squire Trelawney](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Squire_Trelawney) purchases the schooner Hispaniola and hires her crew with the help of a one-legged tavern keeper—Long John Silver. Silver joins as ship's cook. The squire sends for Jim and Dr. Livesey, and the cruise gets underway—but not before the ship's captain, Smollett, makes it clear that he distrusts the crew, dislikes treasure voyages, and expects there will be trouble.

The voyage goes smoothly until the schooner nears Treasure Island. Then Jim overhears Silver and two other seamen plotting mutiny once the treasure is found. Jim discovers that Silver and most of the crew are pirates who once sailed with notorious buccaneer Captain Flint. Flint is dead, and the gold everyone is after was his.

Jim warns the doctor, squire, and captain of the plot. Figuring there are only seven honest men among them (against 19 pirates), they can see their odds in a fight are not good. Nevertheless, they have the map, so time is on their side: The pirates will not make their move before the treasure is unearthed.

### Part 3: My Shore Adventure

Tension builds aboard the ship. Wisely, [Captain Smollett](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/Treasure-Island/character-analysis/#Captain_Smollett) allows the crew a day to go ashore. On impulse, Jim sneaks ashore in a rowboat and later sees Silver murder a man who refuses to join the mutiny. He also hears the distant death cry of another. Fearing for his life, Jim runs away. By good fortune, he encounters Ben Gunn, a half-crazed Englishman marooned for three years on the island. He promises to help Jim and his friends fight the mutineers. In exchange, he asks for protection from Silver and safe passage back to England. To help seal the deal, Gunn confides to Jim that he is very rich.

### Part 4: The Stockade

Long ago, pirate Flint built a stockade on the island. While Jim is engaged in his shore adventure, Captain Smollett, Livesey, Trelawney, his three servants, and honest sailor Abraham Gray abandon the Hispaniola and take refuge in the stockade. A brief skirmish with the mutineers leaves a pirate and one of Trelawney's servants dead. In defiance, the captain raises the British flag, the Union Jack, above the fortifications, while on the ship the mutineers run up the Jolly Roger, the traditional pirate flag featuring a skull and crossbones. Later, Jim finds his way to the stockade and sneaks in under cover of darkness.

The next morning Silver visits the stockade, waving a flag of truce. He offers terms to Captain Smollett, which include surrender of the map in exchange for his party's lives. Silver is infuriated when the captain rejects his offer and sends him away. Soon after, the mutineers launch a violent attack.

### Part 5: My Sea Adventure

In the assault, Trelawney's two remaining servants are killed, and Captain Smollett is badly wounded. Among the pirates, six men are dead. Sure that fighting is done for the day, Dr. Livesey leaves to meet with Benn Gunn. Not long after, Jim sneaks out and heads down to the coast, finds Gunn's handmade boat, and hatches a plan: After dark, he will pilot the craft out to the Hispaniola and cut her loose from her anchor.

The two pirates still onboard are Israel Hands and a seaman named O'Brien. Drunk and quarreling, they don't notice that the ship is adrift until she is heading out to sea. Jim's boat follows helplessly in the ship's wake. By the next morning, an ocean current is dragging the little craft along the rocky west coast of the island. But luck is still with Jim. Spotting the Hispaniola, he paddles to reach her, climbs aboard, and discovers Israel Hands lying wounded on the deck. Nearby, O'Brien is sprawled out, dead. Hands agrees to help Jim get the ship safely beached, yet Jim knows that the pirate intends to kill him afterward. In their final confrontation, Jim shoots Hands and then secures the ship and goes ashore. In the dark, he reenters the stockade—and finds himself in the midst of the mutineers who have taken over since he left.

### Part 6: Captain Silver

The pirates mean to kill Jim, but Silver argues against it, claiming Jim could be a valuable bargaining tool. For the moment, Jim is safe. He learns that Dr. Livesey, upon discovering the ship gone, agreed to give up the stockade and hand over the map to Silver.

The next morning, the doctor shows up to care for the sick and injured pirates. With Silver's permission, he speaks privately with Jim and learns about the death of Israel Hands and the rescue of the ship. Before leaving, the doctor warns Silver to be alert for trouble at the site of the buried gold.

Soon after, in high spirits, the pirates commence their treasure hunt. At last, they reach the spot marked with an X on the map—and find an empty hole where the gold should have been.

Enraged, the pirates accuse Silver of double-crossing them. They prepare to attack, but they are ambushed by Dr. Livesey, Ben Gunn, and Abraham Gray. Silver and Jim are saved, and the three remaining pirates scatter.

It seems that Gunn had found the treasure some time ago and moved it to a cave. Over the next few days, the treasure is loaded onto the Hispaniola. When the ship departs, the last three mutineers are left behind. Though Silver is aboard, he jumps ship before reaching England. The others arrive safely and take their allotted share of the gold. Though unclaimed treasure remains buried on the island, Jim closes his narrative by stating that nothing could drag him back to that accursed place.