

In the Hands of the Enemy by Robert Sheely takes place in 1621, just months after the Mayflower lands in Plymouth, Massachusetts. It is the story of 14-year-old John Billington Jr., who loses his way in the woods around Plymouth Colony. A young native boy named Amanuitt, out hunting with his cousin, finds John, delirious from lack of food and water. Amanuitt's first inclination is to kill the English boy to avenge his brother's death by the English six years earlier. Instead, Amanuitt's cousin convinces him that they should bring John back to the Nauset village where they live. While John's fate is decided by the Nauset elders, Amanuitt is assigned to help take care of John. In addition to showing John around the village, Amanuitt brings him along on his chores. On one trip to collect water at a nearby pond there is a frightening accident and John saves Amanuitt from drowning. Though the boys do not share a common language, they communicate through pictures and actions. Just before John is returned to his people, they have the opportunity to communicate through an interpreter who knows both their languages—the famous Native American, Tisquantum (Squanto). In a very short time, these two young “enemies” become friends.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading *In the Hands of the Enemy*, discuss with the class what they already know about the Mayflower and the early years in Plymouth. After sharing responses, read the title and tell them the story takes place in 1621, a few months after the landing of the Mayflower.

Some questions for discussion might be:

- This story takes place in 1621. What were the major events happening in England and the colonies during this time? Where does it fit in chronologically with other events you are studying?
- Look at the cover illustration. Describe what you think is happening. Who does the “enemy” refer to? What do you think this story is about?
- Look at the map on the inside of the front cover. Read the Indian names of the places listed. Get out a current map of the area. Are any of the names the same? Have students been to the areas around Plymouth or Cape Cod? What are their impressions of these areas now?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS – Literature • Social Studies • Art • Science • Health

1. After reading all or part of the book, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature that mixes fact and fiction. Some of the people mentioned in the story actually existed and many of the events really occurred. Even those characters that are created by the author probably shared some of the experiences and feelings of real people. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and people mentioned in the story using sources such as the internet, encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, historical documents, newspapers, etc. Have a mini-lesson on how to use these sources and a class “debriefing.” What names and events could they read about in other sources? Which were most likely created by the author?

2. This story exposes children to what life may have been like for one young English boy and one young native boy living in Plymouth in 1621. Encourage your students to learn even more about this time period. Have them dig a little deeper into the past to discover more information:
 - What else can you learn about life in Plymouth, Massachusetts in the early 1600s? If possible, take a field trip to Plimoth Plantation where students can experience the life of a pilgrim first hand. If not, check out their website (www.plimoth.org/) for interesting information and games, and find out why they spell “Plymouth” “Plimoth.” You might also stock your class library with some of the many books about life in America during that time period.
 - Find out more about the actual journey on the Mayflower, mentioned briefly in this story. How long did the trip take? How many people were on board? How many perished on the journey?
 - Several well-known figures from this time period are referred to in the story. Encourage your students to learn more about Captain Miles Standish, Thomas Hunt, and Tisquantum.
3. Using information from the historical postscript and other resources you have collected, make a timeline of events in Plymouth in the 1600s. Encourage students to use a variety of ways to display information. Some students might decide to make a simple chart listing the dates and a brief description of important events; others may choose to use a wide roll of paper with illustrations depicting each event in chronological order. A mini-lesson on timelines with a class brainstorming session on ideas for displaying information as well as which events to include would be a good way to get groups excited for this project.
4. Amanuitt was a keen observer when he traveled through the woods. Reread the passages on pages 10, 13, and 14 that refer to his observations about tracks. Record on chart paper how students can recognize if an animal has visited their house or neighborhood (i.e. raccoons knocking over garbage cans, spiders spinning webs, etc.) Learn about the animals in your local area and study their tracks. Students could make small books or “flash cards” with the name and/or picture of the animal on one side, and a picture of its track on the other. If possible, take a walk to search for signs of these animal tracks . . . a muddy path is a good place to start. Your class could share what they learned with a kindergarten or first grade class, perhaps even helping them record their own footprints using washable paint and paper.
5. On pages 3–5, John talks about feeling like an outsider, a “Stranger” among the “Saints” on the Mayflower. Reread the pages to your class, and have them do a “free-write” about a time they felt excluded or unwanted in a group (your participating and sharing could make a powerful model!) If students are willing, ask them to share these experiences in small groups and discuss what would have made the experience a better one. Remind students to be sensitive and kind during the discussions and respect each other’s feelings throughout the activity.
6. Until Squanto arrived, John and Amanuitt could not communicate through spoken language. Ask students to share experiences when they have needed to communicate

STUDY GUIDE

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with someone who did not speak their language. What did they do to communicate? Ask students to look back through the story to record instances when John and Amanuitt or other villagers communicated without speaking. Make a simple T-chart in a reading journal or on paper. One heading should be “what they did,” the other “what they communicated.” (Note the page number as well.) For example: page 42/John drew stick figures in dirt/taught each other their names. When students finish this assignment, invite them to play games of pictorial and/or charades to give them the chance to communicate using pictures and actions.

7. The homes, boats, and clothing (including shoes and jewelry) of the Native Americans were different from those of the English. Ask students to choose one of these areas to investigate further (rereading passages in this book as well as reading more about their topic in other books), then share what they have learned by making a model or art project. For instance, pages 19 and 20 give a detailed description of what Amanuitt and his cousin wore. Some students might make a life-size tracing of their own bodies, drawing the clothing the native boys wore. Others might focus on the jewelry, making a necklace out of shells and cardboard “bones.” Encourage students to be creative!

STORY EXTENSIONS

Peace Treaties

On page 21, John credits his life to a peace treaty that had been signed by the English and natives just months earlier. Perhaps Amanuitt would have killed John to avenge his brother's death had the peace treaty not been signed. The conflicting feelings of fear and trust between the English and natives is noted throughout the story. Have a discussion with your students about how and why fear developed between the two groups and how a peace treaty may have improved trust between them.

Encourage your class to learn about current peace treaties and the effects they are having on the people involved. Ask them to search on the internet, listen to the news, and read newspapers to see what is happening around the world to establish peace between warring groups and nations.

Use this opportunity to become peace makers in your own classroom and school. As a class, you could seek out training in mediation. Perhaps a program already exists in your school. If so, invite mediators to come in and share their peace-making strategies with your class, and encourage your students to participate. If no such program exists, check out a few different programs. Tribes at www.tribes.com, an educational program that gets children involved in creating positive school and classroom environments, is a good one. Have your students meet with the principal and/or student council to get a peace-making program going at your school.

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