

Treason Stops at Oyster Bay, by Anna Leah Sweetzer, is a story set in Long Island, New York during the Revolutionary War. The story opens with the news that George Washington lost Long Island to the British. The heroine, fifteen-year-old Sally Townsend, finds her friend's family fleeing to Connecticut for fear of being labeled Rebels and harmed by the British. Sally's father, too, is a Rebel who took part in the Provincial Congress and supported the Declaration of Independence, signed just one month earlier. When Sally arrives home she finds her father being arrested by British soldiers and taken off to a prison ship. While her family is able to ransom back her father with money from their store, they are unable to prevent British troops from moving into their home. For years, Sally and her family feed and house a group of unruly British soldiers. As Quakers, the Townsends are peaceful, loving people, but these soldiers test their faith and affirm their commitment to a country free from British tyranny. The next group of soldiers who occupy their home, however, are more refined and considerate and one in particular, Colonel Simcoe, wins Sally's heart. She even considers marrying him, until she overhears an important secret—news that Benedict Arnold is a traitor and plans to turn over the fort at West Point to the British. She shares this news with her brother, Robert, a spy for the Rebels, who gets the message to General Washington on time. General Simcoe's best friend, Major Andre, is killed after a meeting with Arnold, and Sally knows her relationship with General Simcoe can never be the same with this secret between them.

PRE-READING ACTIVITY

Before reading *Treason Stops at Oyster Bay*, discuss with the class what they already know about the Revolutionary War. After sharing responses, read the title and tell them the story takes place right after the Declaration of Independence is signed, during the first four years of the war.

Some questions for discussion might be:

- If this story takes place from 1776-1781, where does it fit in chronologically with other events of the Revolution already studied?
- What does the word *treason* mean? What predictions do you have about the story because of this word in the title?
- Show students the map at the beginning of the book. Why might Oyster Bay be an important location?
- Have any students been to this part of Long Island? What are their impressions of the area now?

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Literature • Social Studies • Art • Writing

1. After reading all or part of the book, discuss historical fiction as a type of literature, a mixture of fact and fiction. Some of the characters 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 who lived at the time. Discuss how the reader can distinguish between what is fact and what is fiction. Groups of students might try researching events and characters in the story using sources such as encyclopedias, almanacs, atlases, historical documents, newspapers, etc. Have a mini-lesson about how to use these sources and a class “debriefing” . . . what names and events could they read about in other sources and which were most likely created by the author?

2. This story exposes students to what life may have been like in one town in New York during the Revolutionary War. There is so much more to learn about this time in America's history:

- What was happening in the other colonies during this time? What other battles were being fought? What other towns were occupied by the British?
- Many famous players in the Revolution are mentioned in this story: General Washington, Benedict Arnold, Nathan Hale. . . . What more can you learn about these men?
- The Declaration of Independence was signed one month before this story begins. Who was involved in writing this? What happened after it was published?
- Choose any aspect of the Revolutionary War to investigate further. Brainstorm a list of possible topics as a class.

3. On page 7, Sally recognizes that one of the British soldiers is a captain because of the “gold braid on the shoulders of his coat and the red sash tied around his waist.” Send students to the library to find pictures of soldiers' uniforms, both British and American. Have them also look up the civilian clothing of the time. Have students trace their bodies on large pieces of paper, and “dress” themselves as different soldiers of civilians of the Revolution. Display these life-sized models in a hallway in your school.

4. Many girls made embroidery samplers during this time period to show off how well they sewed (page 21). The samplers included different patterns and stitches. Visit a local fabric store to buy embroidery thread, needles and cloth and encourage students who are interested to check out books to learn different stitches. Better yet, see if a parent or grandparent can teach small groups of children how to embroider. Other students may like to research different proverbs that were sewn on samplers: “Trouble comes to those who are idle,” is one example from this book. Benjamin

Franklin, an author of the Declaration of Independence, is famous for writing many others. Make a class book of proverbs, including those created by your students.

5. On page 59, Sally notes how confusing war is and acknowledges feeling sympathy for the British because of the way she feels about Colonel Simcoe. Both the Rebels and the British felt they were just in fighting this war. To encourage your students to see different points of view, make a t-chart, on one side listing why the Rebels thought they were right, and on the other why the British thought they were just in fighting this war. Students might enjoy debating the two points of view in a mock debate.

6. One of the most upsetting events that happened while the British soldiers occupied the Townsend home was when General Simcoe ordered his soldiers to chop down the Townsend's beloved cherry trees. Ask students to write about a time something they loved was lost or destroyed. Was their reaction similar to Sally's? (page 40) How did they handle their loss?

COOPERATIVE LEARNING ACTIVITY

Game Time!

Students will make games about the Revolutionary War. Before dividing students into small groups, brainstorm a list of different games, and have students describe the rules of each game to the class (i.e. Trivial Pursuit, Jeopardy, Taboo, various board games). Next decide what the focus of the game will be (i.e. the Revolutionary War, or just the events in *Treason Stops at Oyster Bay*). Then split students into groups of four or five to make their games. Provide large cardboard paper for board games, index cards for question cards, markers, etc. Students can design boxes to store their games. Remind each group to write a set of rules to include in their game box. After games are completed, have each group rotate through the series of games, giving feedback and suggestions to the authors. Store the games in the classroom and make them available for students to play during choice time.

TEACHERS GUIDE

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