

Treasure island essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

'Treasure Island' with its tale of adventure on the high seas has long been a well-read and well-loved classic. There is not one who in some way or another has not been made aware of the existence of characters such as young Jim Hawkins, blind Pew or especially Long John Silver. The fact that even those who have not enjoyed the swashbuckling adventures of the crew are likely to recognise the name of the dreaded pirate and the significance of the cross which marks the spot of buried treasure is testament to the piece's continuing charm.

The book starts humbly, setting the scene of a rundown seaside tavern by the name of 'The Admiral Benbow', run by the Hawkins family, parents and young son Jim. At this stage it is difficult to imagine the book being written for young children, with its traditional language it's confusing and when first read difficult to understand. However, persistence is rewarded as the text changes from near-gobbledegook to clear expressive, gripping story-telling.

The main characters are Jim Hawkins, a young lad, and Long John Silver, a buccaneer.

Jim is the main narrator of the story. He meets Billy Bones, 'The Captain', when he comes to stay at the inn. The captain is a rich character, who drinks too much rum and is generally a bully of a man who soon recruits Jim to look out for a 'one legged seafaring man'. He is an old sea shanty, constantly singing, 'Fifteen men on the dead man's chest, yo-ho-ho, and a bottle of rum!' much to everyone's displeasure. Jim is a very young gentle boy, eager to please and has nightmares about the one legged sailor. Jim very soon is

introduced to wicked old sailors who come by to have heated and threatening conversations with the captain; Black Dog and old, blind Pew.

When tragedy strikes in the form of Jim's father and the old captain dying, the reader does not grieve too much as these events are written as an aside to the main story.

Jim's bravery starts to emerge when he returns to the 'Admiral Benbow' to observe six or seven sailors who are rummaging through the dead captain's chest in search of 'something'. Luckily Jim had already removed an oilskin package which we later learn contains the map of 'Treasure Island'.

The reader is already rooting for Jim to 'win through' whatever project he embarks upon – he is emerging as a hero. He shows good judgement by taking the oilskin package to the physician who treated both his father and the captain, Dr. Liversey, and as he was at the Manor house at the time, Dr. Liversey's friend, the squire John Trelawney, also became involved.

Stevenson easily portrays Dr. Liversey as a trustworthy man of good judgement and the Squire as an honest, bluff, happy if indiscreet man.

Once discovering the oilskin package contained the treasure map the three embarked on a sea voyage to find the treasure and Jim was to be cabin boy. When Jim first read in John Trelawney's letter to Dr. Liversey that he had recruited a one-legged sailor called Long John Silver, he was worried that he was the one-legged seafaring man of his nightmares back at the Admiral Benbow. However, such were the charms of Silver, Jim's fears were dispelled on their first meeting, 'I had seen the captain, and Black dog and the blind

man Pew, and I thought I know what a buccaneer was like – a very different creature from this clean and pleasant tempered landlord’.

Jim and Silver went on to have a good relationship aboard the ‘ Hispaniola’ and had many cosy chats; Long John would talk about previous voyages that he and his parrot, cap’n Flint, had undertaken. Silver went out of his way to make a friend of Jim and Jim enjoyed his company and liked him.

One of the most vivid and spine chilling chapters in the book is titled ‘ What I Heard in the Apple Barrel’ (Jim is narrating). The reader can feel Jim’s stifled anger and constriction as Long John addresses a young seaman in exactly the same way as he had spoken to him, using identical words and the same flattering phrases.

Jim heard Silver relate to the young seaman and the coxswain, who had by then joined them, how they were going to revolt and decide whether they were going to kill or abandon the Doctor, squire and the ship’s captain and make off with the treasure.

Jim was able to forewarn the captain, Dr. Liversey and the squire, once again showing his leadership qualities. His bravery and the ability to think on his feet were evident when he, on the spur of the moment, joined a landing party when they arrived at the Island. He managed to escape from Silver and his cronies to explore the Island. This is when he meets a legendary marooned pirate, Ben Gunn.

Lastly, Jim single handed and injured, recaptured the ‘ Hispaniola’ and sailed it back to a safe landing point in readiness to collect the treasures.

Jim Hawkins is an ingenious young hero and as soon as the action commences we quickly root for him to outwit his elders. This is not a romantic tale – we have action all the way. Jim develops from a frightened young boy to our worthy hero as the plot unfolds and, as in all the best adventure stories, good succeeds over evil and Jim receives his rewards.

John Silver is certainly more charming, treacherous and evil than we had ever expected him to be. He engineers a meeting with the squire in Bristol, ingratiating himself on the squire, telling false tales of his past and how he received his injuries until the squire falls for it hook line and sinker, employing him as the ship's cook. He then proceeds to influence the squire's choice of the rest of the crew. His influence is illustrated when John Trelawney writes to Liversey, ' Long John even got rid of two out of the six or seven I had already engaged'.

Long John Silver earned everyone's respect early on during the voyage, ' He had a way of talking to each'. He carried out his duties efficiently, keeping the galley clean and orderly. He had a line rigged up on deck which he used to get from one place to another on the ship despite his disability. The men respected him and were also very friendly towards him, nick-naming him ' barbecue', but they also obeyed him. He was also a very confident person, confident of his ability to control, '..... I'm not a boasting man.... but when I was quartermaster, lambs wasn't the word for Flints old buccaneers.....'

Silver was happy to take on a lesser role on the voyage and be everyone's friend and was also a very good planner. All along we were willing Jim to outwit Silver but at the same time not wanting Silver's demise to be too

terrible! We are grateful then, when Jim stands up to Silver, ‘..... here you are in a bad way; ship lost, treasure lost, men lost; your whole business gone to wreck; and if you want to know who did it – it was I!’

Long John stops Tom Morgan from stabbing Jim, and such is his authority over his men he protects him. We should like to believe that Silver liked Jim Hawkins and his heart may have prevented his murder, but it may also have been that he wanted Jim and the others to put a ‘good word’ in for him in Bristol, knowing he had failed.

When Silver jumped ship in South America instead of facing the consequences of his piracy in Bristol we were glad and gladder still to learn he had taken a sack of coins; it was a fitting end for the rogue. The reader may imagine him ending his days, in comfort, with his wife on a beach in Mexico!

Stevenson manages to transport us to a believable world where death is a hairs breath away; we can almost taste the salt in the air and believe in the characters. Jim is reliable from start to finish, while Silver is more complex, as villains invariably are.