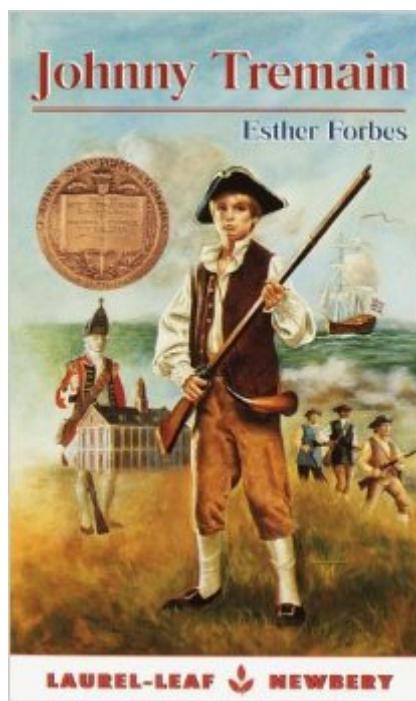


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# Johnny Tremain



## **Synopsis**

Johnny Tremain, A young apprentice silversmith, is caught up in the danger and excitement of 1775 Boston, just before the Revolutionary War. Johnny can't help but be swept along by the powerful currents that will lead to the Boston Tea Party and the Battle of Lexington. But even more gripping than living through the drama of Revolutionary Boston is the important discovery Johnny makes in his own life.

## **Book Information**

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Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars See all reviews (657 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #373,616 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #66 in Books > Teens > Historical Fiction > United States > Colonial & Revolutionary Periods #237 in Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > Colonial #506 in Books > Teens > Literature & Fiction > Classics

Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## **Customer Reviews**

In 1943, with America deeply embedded in the worst of World War II, author Esther Forbes wrote a tale that touched on the founding of America itself. Since its publication, "Johnny Tremain" has remained one of the best known children's books ever written. It won the 1944 Newbery Award and is still read by schoolchildren everywhere. Heck, even Bart Simpson was lured into reading it in a "Simpsons" episode (Marge tells him that it's about a boy with a deformed hand and he's intrigued). Newbery award winners come and go. Sometimes they're remembered (ala "Caddie Woodlawn") and sometimes they're rightfully forgotten (ala "Daniel Boone"). "Johnny Tremain" is different because even reading it today the book remains readable, thoughtful, and interesting. It deserves its praise. Johnny Tremain is an apprenticed silversmith of one Mr. Lapham. Unusually skilled in the trade, Johnny's the star of the household. The other apprentices envy and hate him and the

members of the Lapham family love him. Just the same, Johnny is unaccountably vain. boastful and overflowing with pride, he lords his superior abilities over everyone he meets, even catching the eye of the greatest silversmith in Boston, Paul Revere. Yet when a broken crucible maims Johnny's hand with silver, the life he had planned for himself can never be. Desperate for work, he finally finds a place with the Boston Observer, a Whig news publication. Soon Johnny finds himself rubbing shoulders with the men of the Revolution. His life becomes enmeshed in the spy networks and fighting words that lead up to the American Revolution. In doing so, he becomes a major player in the creation of a new America. I read this book in elementary school and, sadly, remembered very little of it. What I did remember was Johnny's hand. Honestly, I think this book would sell like hotcakes if it was retitled, "Johnny Tremain: The Boy With the Deformed Hand". Not that I'm seriously recommending the change. What really struck me, when reading this book again today, was just how well written the little bugger is. First of all, it begins with an unsympathetic protagonist. Up till now, most Newbery protagonists fell somewhere between saints and perfection incarnate. But Johnny is just the kind of little snot who needs to be taken down a peg to become a better person. This isn't one of those books where the hero gets hurt and suddenly makes a miraculous transformation from bad to good either. As you read the story you see Johnny's progress. He grows and learns from his injury, yes, but he also grows and learns from meeting and speaking with other people. Which brings me to the second remarkable aspect of this book. The English, awful as they are sometimes, are not evil cackling villains. Johnny meets and even, to some extent, befriends British officers. He finds himself pitying the English wounded and sympathizing with their pain. Likewise, not all the American Revolutionaries are perfect gods. John Hancock comes off as a bit of a rich fop, and Sam Adams is seen gleefully rubbing his hands together over the prospect of upcoming destruction. So many stories create villains so ridiculously evil that they haven't a single solitary redeeming characteristic and heroes pious to the point of sainthood. "Johnny Tremain" could easily have fallen into that trap, but it doesn't. Instead, it gives a remarkably thoughtful approach to the nature of enemies, war, and freedom. The book is long, granted. Also, there are numerous spying/battle sections in which I had to continually backtrack through the text to figure out, "Now why is Johnny doing that?". The best way to lure kids today with this book might be to sell it as a Revolutionary spy book. I mean, Johnny really does become a kind of secret agent for the Yankees. He knows how to get information out of people and how to find out important English secrets. Best of all, the story has a naturalistic writing style that's easy to get through once you get going. If you want to give your kids a Newbery award winner that's as memorable and fascinating today as it was the day it was written, I cannot recommend, "Johnny Tremain" enough. Ignore the

picture of the saintly boy on the cover. This is a book of adventure, pride, and war.

JOHNNY TREMAIN is a magic book for me. It takes me back to 1966 when I was in fifth grade at Stadium School. We had a student teacher named Miss Greenberg who announced to us that she was going to begin reading aloud to us every day after lunch. We were ten and eleven year olds and highly insulted that the teacher wanted to read to us like babies! Then Miss Greenberg started reading JOHNNY TREMAIN. Within a week none of the kids in class could wait to get back from lunch, even the boys who professed that they "hated books." There were two copies of JOHNNY TREMAIN in the school library and after that first week they were reserved for weeks in advance. I begged my mother for a copy for Christmas; she had to go crazy to order one because they were out of print back then. She finally found a teacher's edition that had study questions at the end of the book. I loved the portrait of Boston in the 1770s and although Johnny was a little too arrogant for my taste in the beginning, I grew to like him as he changed in the course of the book. My favorite character has always been Cilla Lapham, but I love Johnny's horse Goblin as well, and Rab and the Lornes and Miss Bessie, the Lytes' cook. They are all welcome friends.

I must have read this book ten? twenty? times as a teenager, and so when I found it recently in the basement I started reading again to see if it was really as good as I remembered it. Better! "Johnny Tremain" is without a doubt one of the best books I have ever read, even as an adult. So imagine my surprise when I noticed that readers rated this only four stars? For starters, this is not a children's book. I see fourth, fifth graders reviewing this book, as part of an assignment - and as a mother myself, this bothers me. This is a great book - but, I think, way over a fifth-grader's head. Maybe \*your\* fifth-grader is brilliant and will absolutely understand everything completely - but for a classroom setting? What are these teachers thinking? But for a teenager - "Johnny Tremain" brings to life the times of the Revolutionary War era as no other book, or history lesson, possibly can. Couple that with a brilliantly portrayed cast of characters - complex, vivid characters - and exceptionally vivid, emotional and fast paced writing - and you have the ingredients for a really good book. Maybe I am prejudiced - I love historicals, and always did, but perhaps it is the other way around - perhaps "Johnny Tremain" influenced me in the way that this book showed me how fascinating history can be. "Johnny Tremain" is the story of a boy - fourteen years old - who is apprenticed to a silversmith, whom he calls his "master". As an exceptionally capable, talented young man - not to mention an exceptional aptitude with silver - he quickly steps into his master's family to find his niche as the head of the household - if not in name, then in actions (beint that his

master is elderly). But how easily are the mighty fallen! For Johnny burns his hand on hot silver and, medicine (or midwifery) being what it was, it never healed properly. A future as a silversmith is out. Overnight, Johnny went from being a capable, bright boy with an exceptional future ahead of him to a nobody. While this is an excellent story about Johnny, it is the times that he lived in that makes this book such riveting reading. Not only do we get to meet all the famous people who populate pre-Revolutionary Boston, we also get an excellent, clear picture of the everyday life of the people of that era. The way they lived, the things they ate, the way they operated - almost everything is touched upon in this extra-ordinary novel. Johnny Tremain somehow gets tangled with the Boston patriots - and is right there in the thick of things just as the Revolutionary War has started. This is the only part of the novel that I found a bit too coincidental - but extremely interesting, nevertheless. "Johnny Tremain" is one of the best books ever written, but would more easily be appreciated and understood by an older student, in my opinion. Happy reading!

...seems as if some disgruntled teenager is getting revenge for having, heaven help us, to read a book! In truth, Johnny Tremain is an excellent book that has been appreciated by several generations of young readers. This book wouldn't still be published (both in hardcover and in ebooks) if people weren't buying it...and people only buy it if it is worth reading. This book is! Try it, you'll like it!

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