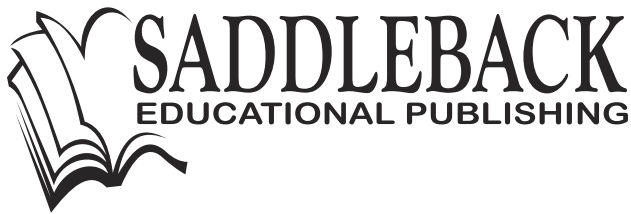


Focus **ON READING**

*My Brother
Sam Is Dead*

LISA FRENCH

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.



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Introduction/Classroom Management

WELCOME TO *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading literature study guides are designed to help all students comprehend and analyze their reading. Many teachers have grappled with the question of how to make quality literature accessible to all students. Students who are already avid readers of quality literature are motivated to read and are familiar with prereading and reading strategies. However, struggling readers frequently lack basic reading skills and are not equipped with the prior knowledge and reading strategies to thoroughly engage in the classroom literature experience.

Focus on Reading is designed to make teachers' and students' lives easier! How? By providing materials that allow all students to take part in reading quality literature. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains activities that focus on vocabulary and comprehension skills that students need to get the most from their reading. In addition, each section within the guide contains a before-reading **Focus Your Reading** page containing tools to ensure success: **Vocabulary Words to Know**, **Things to Know**, and **Questions to Think About**. These study aids will help students who may not have the prior knowledge they need to truly comprehend the reading.

USING *FOCUS ON READING*

Focus on Reading is designed to make it easy for you to meet the individual needs of students who require additional reading skills support. Each *Focus on Reading* study guide contains teacher and student support materials, reproducible student activity sheets, an end-of-book test, and an answer key.

- **Focus on the Book**, a convenient reference page for the teacher, provides a brief overview of the entire book including a synopsis, information about the setting, author data, and historical background.
- **Focus Your Knowledge**, a reference page for students, is a whole-book, prereading activity designed to activate prior knowledge and immerse students in the topic.

The study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable sections to make it easy to plan classroom time. Five activities are devoted to each section of the novel.

Before Reading

- **Focus Your Reading** consists of 3 prereading sections:

Vocabulary Words to Know lists and defines 10 vocabulary words students will encounter in their reading. Students will not have to interrupt their reading to look up, ask for, or spend a lot of time figuring out the meaning of unfamiliar words. These words are later studied in-depth within the lesson.

Things to Know identifies terms or concepts that are integral to the reading but that may not be familiar to today's students. This section is intended to "level the playing field" for those students who may not have much prior knowledge about the time period, culture, or theme of the book. It also gets students involved with the book, increasing interest before they begin reading.

Questions to Think About helps students focus on the main ideas and important details they should be looking for as they read. This activity helps give students a *purpose* for reading. The goal of these guiding questions is to build knowledge, confidence, and comfort with the topics in the reading.

During Reading

- **Build Your Vocabulary** presents the 10 unit focus words in the exact context of the book. Students are then asked to write their own definitions and sentences for the words.
- **Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice** offers 10 multiple-choice, literal comprehension questions for each section.

Check Your Understanding: Short Answer contains 10 short-answer questions based on the reading.

After Reading

- **Deepen Your Understanding** is a writing activity that extends appreciation and analysis of the book. This activity focuses on critical-thinking skills and literary analysis.
- **End-of-Book Test** contains 20 multiple-choice items covering the book. These items ask questions that require students to synthesize the information in the book and make inferences in their answers.

CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

Focus on Reading is very flexible. It can be used by the whole class, by small groups, or by individuals. Each study guide divides the novel into 6 manageable units of study.

This literature comprehension program is simple to use. Just photocopy the lessons and distribute them at the appropriate time as students read the novel.

You may want to reproduce and discuss the **Focus Your Knowledge** page before distributing the paperbacks. This page develops and activates prior knowledge to ensure that students have a grounding in the book before beginning reading. After reading this whole-book prereading page, students are ready to dive into the book.

The **Focus Your Reading** prereading activities are the keystone of this program. They prepare students for what they are going to read, providing focus for the complex task of reading. These pages should be distributed before students actually begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. There are no questions to be answered on these pages; these are for reference and support during reading. Students may choose to take notes on these pages as they read. This will also give students a study tool for review before the **End-of-Book Test**.

The **Focus Your Reading** pages also provide an excellent bridge to home. Parents, mentors, tutors, or

other involved adults can review vocabulary words with students, offer their own insights about the historical and cultural background outlined, and become familiar with the ideas students will be reading about. This can help families talk to students in a meaningful way about their reading, and it gives the adults something concrete to ask about to be sure that students are reading and understanding.

The **Build Your Vocabulary and Check Your Understanding: Multiple Choice and Short Answer** activities should be distributed when students begin reading the corresponding section of the novel. These literature guide pages are intended to help students comprehend and retain what they read; they should be available for students to refer to at any time during the reading.

Deepen Your Understanding is an optional extension activity that goes beyond literal questions about the book, asking students for their own ideas and opinions—and the reasons behind them. These postreading activities generally focus on literary analysis.

As reflected in its title, the **End-of-Book Test** is a postreading comprehension test to be completed after the entire novel has been read.

For your convenience, a clear **Answer Key** simplifies the scoring process.

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Focus on the Book

Synopsis

Ten-year-old Tim Meeker is the son of tavern owners in Redding Ridge, Connecticut. He has always worshiped his older brother, Sam, admiring especially his intelligence and bold ways. One evening in April 1775, Sam suddenly returns home from his college studies at Yale, announcing that he has enlisted as a Patriot to fight for his country's independence from England. The Meeker family's distress over their sixteen-year-old son's enlistment is made worse by the fact that they are a Loyalist family, with strong ties to King George III and the British Parliament. As Tim narrates the series of family conflicts that follow, major events from the first half of the American Revolution are interwoven with the daily events and challenges that the Meekers and their neighbors face. The four years chronicled by Tim reflect not only America's early steps toward independence, but also Tim's own dramatic, sometimes painful, journey to young adulthood. During this journey, he questions the morality of war and the high price paid by ordinary men and women caught in extraordinary situations.

About the Authors

James Lincoln Collier (born in 1928) and Christopher Collier (born in 1930) are members of an old New England family with a rich literary tradition. Both brothers have written prolifically and have won distinguished awards for their work.

James Collier began his professional career as a magazine editor; he has since written hundreds of articles for nationally known publications. In addition, he has written and published twenty-three children's books. Five in collaboration with his brother, Christopher. James Collier is also a professional trombonist who writes both fiction and nonfiction works about music.

Christopher Collier has spent much of his professional life as a history teacher and college professor. His experiences with traditional school textbooks led him to believe that "there must be a better way to teach American History." Thus began Christopher Collier's collaboration with his brother James. Christopher explains, "I research all the historical material and give [James] a true story with all the detail. Then we make up some fictional characters, and he

writes the true story about those fictional characters. In that way we are able to write books that tell about the real historical past and at the same time are very exciting stories full of interesting characters."

The brothers' collaborations are generally about New England during the American Revolution, in which Christopher specializes. The primary setting in their young-adult novel *My Brother Sam Is Dead* is western Connecticut, where the Colliers grew up. The book, first published in 1974, was a Newbery Honor Book in 1975. It was also nominated for a National Book Award and was chosen as a Notable Book by the American Library Association.

Historical Background

The American Revolution is often thought of as beginning with "the shot heard 'round the world"—the first shot fired on April 19, 1775, in Lexington, Massachusetts. Who actually fired remains a mystery to this day, but there is certainly no doubt about the ramifications of that act. The eight years of war that followed brought turmoil and hardship to the American colonies, caused divided loyalties among family members and their friends and neighbors, and ultimately gave birth to the democratic republic of the United States of America.

My Brother Sam Is Dead reflects that tumultuous time in U.S. history leading up to and including the first half of the war. In the first pages of the book, there is a reference to the Boston Tea Party, which had occurred about sixteen months earlier (December 16, 1773). On that moonlit night, fifty or sixty colonists disguised as American Indians threw three shiploads of tea into Boston Harbor to protest the British tea taxes. This angered the already impatient British government, leading it to impose a series of restrictive colonial laws that were collectively known as the Intolerable Acts. The colonists reacted by assembling the First Continental Congress in 1774. The key resolutions passed by this congress included the boycotting of all British goods and the call for each colony to establish and train its own militia. Local branches of the Connecticut militia are mentioned frequently in the novel.

(continued)

Focus on the Book (continued)

During the fighting at Lexington and Concord, a small group of Rebels managed to drive about seven hundred British Redcoats back to Boston, with very few American lives lost. This event signaled that a peaceful settlement of the quarrel between Britain and the American colonies was unlikely. Just one month later, Ethan Allen of Vermont and his Green Mountain Boys captured Fort Ticonderoga from the British. Although the Second Continental Congress met in Philadelphia just afterward, and its delegates decided to give a peaceful settlement one last chance by sending the Olive Branch Petition to King George III, that same congress also set up the Continental Army, with George Washington as its commander. Events soon escalated from there, especially when the colonists learned that George III would not respond directly to their petition—and was, in fact, enraged by it.

The Battle of Bunker Hill took place on June 16, 1775. This was the first major battle of the Revolutionary War, and, although the British officially won, they suffered very heavy losses and were shocked by the spirit and resistance of the Patriot force. This resistance continued—so successfully that, less than one year later, British General Howe removed his troops from Boston to relocate in Halifax, Canada. In the summer of 1776, Howe would attack once more, but this time farther south—in New York. The Battle of Long Island, which took place in August, was a major

defeat for General George Washington and his troops. They began a series of retreats that led them first to Manhattan, then over the Hudson River to New Jersey, and finally over the Delaware River into Pennsylvania.

The fall and winter of 1776 were extremely difficult for the underclothed, underfed Continental Army. Even General Washington feared that they would soon succumb. However, in a brilliant surprise attack on the day after Christmas, Washington led his men to a major victory at the Battle of Trenton, shortly followed by another win in Princeton.

The British responded by attempting to cut off New England from the rest of the colonies through control of the Hudson River. Over the next year, the British recaptured Fort Ticonderoga but later suffered a serious defeat at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777. This was one of the most significant battles of the war, since this Patriot victory persuaded the French that the Americans would ultimately win the war. In February 1778, France signed a treaty with the United States, agreeing to give the new nation military support.

Unfortunately, help from France did not come soon enough for the Continental Army, which endured the terrible winter of 1777–1778 at Valley Forge. In fact, the tide did not really turn in favor of the Patriots until 1780—after the story told by Tim in *My Brother Sam Is Dead* is over.

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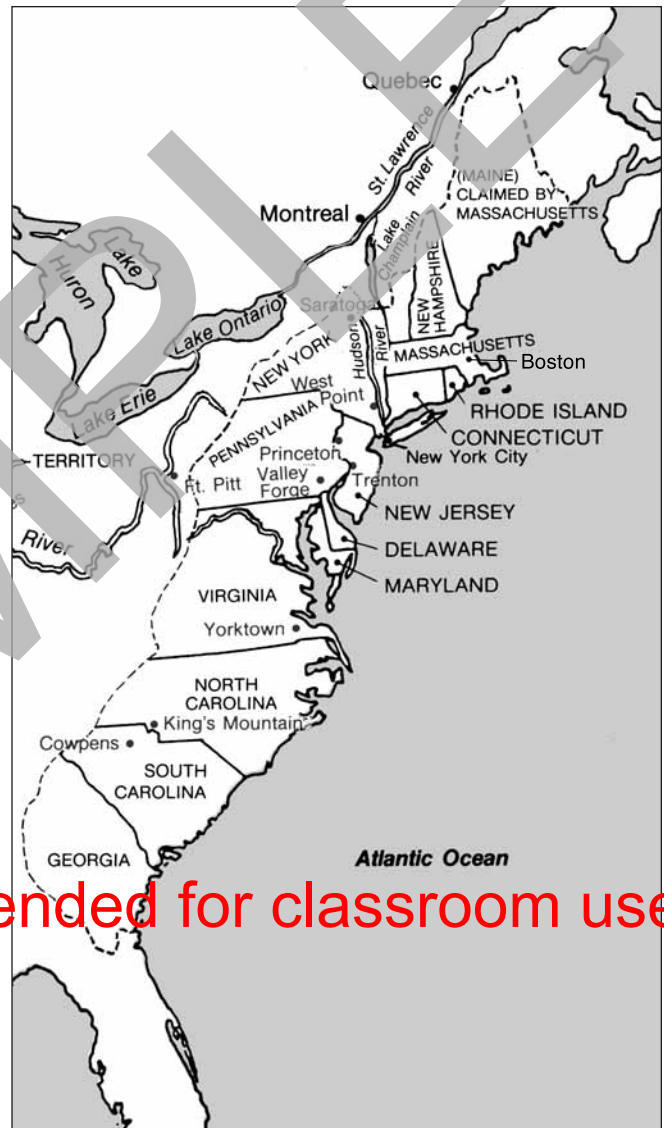
SAMPLE

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Focus Your Knowledge

The American Revolutionary War (1775–1783) was an eight-year conflict. When it was over, the thirteen former colonies had separated from their mother country, England, and had created the republic of the United States of America. This was a long, hard struggle, during which many thousands of people—from both England and the colonies—were killed or wounded.

- Look at a map of the United States. Find the thirteen states that comprised the original thirteen colonies: Massachusetts (which included Maine), Connecticut, Rhode Island, New Hampshire, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. What do you notice about their locations? What do you know about why these colonies were established? Who were their first settlers?
- Now look at the map of the colonies. Find Boston. Why do you think that Boston was one of the most important cities in colonial America?
- Now focus on New York. Where is the city of New York located? Why do you think that this was another very important city in colonial America?



This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

- Find the Hudson River. What do you notice about its location in relation to the former New England colonies? Where does the Hudson River begin and end? Why did the colonists find this river so useful?
- Now think about the American colonists who lived during the Revolutionary War. From what country did most of these colonists—or their parents or their grandparents—come? How do you think this would have affected their feelings, their loyalties, and their actions during the war?

Focus Your Reading

Vocabulary Words to Know

Study the following words and definitions. You will meet these words in your reading. Be sure to jot down in your word journal any other unknown words from the reading.

ammunitions—explosives, bullets, and other materials used by the military

massacred—killed; slaughtered

prevail—to be successful through persistent effort

constitutes—forms; composes; makes up

vicious—fierce; savage; cruel

civil—polite; courteous

triumphant—proud of a victory or conquest

inscription—something specially written or engraved, often to autograph or dedicate something

subversion—working secretly to overthrow a government

cordial—warm; gracious

Things to Know

Here is some background information about this section of the book.

Captain (later General) Benedict Arnold was a skilled and daring Patriot leader in the early years of the Revolutionary War. In 1780, however, he betrayed his country, offering to hand the fort at West Point over to the British.

Lexington and **Concord** were the two Massachusetts towns near Boston where the first fighting of the Revolutionary War occurred on April 19, 1775.

Minutemen were the first volunteer soldiers in Massachusetts who met and trained regularly to fight for independence from Britain. They got their name from always having their muskets near at hand, so that they were ready to fight with just a minutes' notice.

Lobsterbacks was a slang term for British soldiers. They got this name because of the long, bright red coats they wore as their uniform.

Tories, or **Loyalists**, were American colonists who supported King George III and the British Parliament.

Patriots, or **Rebels**, were American colonists who wanted independence from the British throne.

Yale University is one of the oldest private universities in the United States, established in New Haven, Connecticut, in 1718. This is the university that Sam Meeker attends.

Focus Your Reading

Questions to Think About

The following questions will help you understand the meaning of what you read. You do not have to write out the answers to these questions. Instead, look at them before you begin reading, and think about them while you are reading.

1. How does Sam's arrival change the atmosphere in the tavern?
2. What are the narrator's feelings about his brother, Sam? How does the author show these feelings to the reader?
3. What sort of relationship do Sam and his father seem to have?
4. What role does religion play in the life of the narrator and his community as a whole?
5. What is the importance of the Brown Bess to different members of the family?

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Build Your Vocabulary

Read the sentences below. On the line, write your definition of the word in bold type. Then, on another sheet of paper, use that word in a new sentence of your own.

1. “Some of the Massachusetts Minutemen tried to stop them there in the square, but there were too many British, and they got through and went on up to Concord looking for **ammunitions** stores.”

ammunitions: _____

2. “And then when they [the Lobsterbacks] turned around and went back, the Minutemen hid in the fields along the roads and **massacred** them all the way back to Boston.”

massacred: _____

3. “I think men of common sense will **prevail**. Nobody wants rebellion except fools and hotheads.”

prevail: _____

4. “In my house *I* will decide what **constitutes** treason.”

constitutes: _____

5. “We’ve had these things before—that **vicious** nonsense of those madmen dressing up like Indians and throwing tea into Boston Harbor, . . .”

vicious: _____

6. “My mother hated it when Father hit Sam for speaking out, but . . . she believed that Father was right, children ought to keep a **civil** tongue in their heads.”

civil: _____

7. “Sam was a **triumphant** sort of a person. He always had some victories to tell about whenever he came home from college.”

triumphant: _____

8. “And I guess most of his boasts were true: he was always bringing home some book in Latin or Greek with an **inscription** saying he had won it for some telling point he had scored.”

inscription: _____

9. “I will not have **subversion**, I will not have treason in my house.”

subversion: _____

10. “They wanted to keep up with the news, and Father always spent some time with them—it was good business, Father said, to be **cordial** with people.”

cordial: _____

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Check Your Understanding

Multiple Choice

Circle the letter of the best answer to each question.

1. When Sam arrives home at the beginning of the book, his family has not seen him since when?
 - a. his last birthday
 - b. Christmas
 - c. Easter
2. What does Sam say that the Minutemen have done?
 - a. They have beaten the British.
 - b. They have been beaten by the British.
 - c. They marched out of Boston the day before.
3. What does Mother do after Sam enters the tavern?
 - a. She begins to cry.
 - b. She serves him some dinner.
 - c. She asks him who fired the first shot.
4. What does Father call the Lobsterbacks?
 - a. the Governor's Foot Guard
 - b. Patriots
 - c. the soldiers of the King
5. Who does Father say is speaking treason in his house?
 - a. Mr. Beach
 - b. one of the farmers in the tavern
 - c. Sam
6. How old is Sam at the beginning of the story?
 - a. 14
 - b. 16
 - c. 18
7. What is the Brown Bess?
 - a. the family's best milking cow
 - b. the wagon that Father drives
 - c. the family's gun
8. What strange sound does the narrator hear after Father tells Sam to leave the house?
 - a. Father cleaning the gun
 - b. Father pounding the table
 - c. Father crying
9. What side are most of the people in Redding Ridge on when the story begins?
 - a. the Tory side
 - b. the Papist side
 - c. the Patriot side
10. Where does Tim tell his father he is going after church?
 - a. to become a soldier
 - b. to Tom Warrups's hut
 - c. to help Jerry Sanford

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Check Your Understanding

Short Answer

Write a short answer for each question.

1. How do the authors use physical description to show the way Sam enters the tavern at the start of the story?
2. How does the narrator feel when he sees Sam in his new uniform?
3. How does Sam appear to be feeling about himself that evening when he gets home?
4. Why does Father act irritated with Sam at the dinner table?
5. What does Sam say about the people in Redding versus the people in New Haven and other towns?
6. How does Father often punish Sam for speaking out?
7. Why does the narrator say that Sam can't boast about his successes?
8. Where has Sam run away to in the past, and why?
9. What sort of business does the narrator's family own and run?
10. When, and how, does the reader find out what the narrator's name is? What is his name?

This is a sample not intended for classroom use.

Deepen Your Understanding

Setting is the time and place in which a story happens. An author can show the setting of a story in many different ways: by giving physical descriptions of objects in the environment, by mentioning real events from history that are supposed to be happening at the time of the story, and even by describing the atmosphere or “feeling” of a place and time.

How do the authors of *My Brother Sam Is Dead* reveal the setting? Consider all the different ways in which they have placed the story in time and space, giving specific examples from the text.

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