

TREASURE ISLAND

adapted by
Todd Espeland
from
Robert Louis Stevenson



CLASSROOM STUDY GUIDE

Introduction

Treasure Island is a theatrical adaptation of the original novel by Robert Louis Stevenson. The story follows Jim, Long John Silver, and the rest of his scurvy crew for this classic pirate adventure.

Background

This adaptation of *Treasure Island* was written for and premiered at the Fort Wayne Youtheatre in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Playwright Bio

TODD ESPELAND is the executive/artistic director of the Fort Wayne Youtheatre. He is the former artistic director of Commedia Zuppa Mask Company, The Kalamazoo Civic Theatre and a graduate of the world renowned Dell'Arte International. While at Dell'Arte, Todd did extensive post-graduate work in mask, clown, circus techniques, commedia dell'arte, and physical theatre. He holds an MFA in directing from the University of Nevada Las Vegas.

Synopsis

The Admiral Benbow Inn is owned by Mrs. Hawkins, who puts her son Jim to work to help her run things, which takes him away from reading and daydreaming. An old sailor, Billie Bones (who demands to be called Captain Bones) is staying at the inn and entertains Jim with stories about pirating and sailing the world, which few believe. Jim receives a fourpenny piece each month from Bones to look out for "the seafaring man with one leg." The story takes a turn with the arrival of Blind Pew, with an object for Bones: The Black Spot. Bones knows what it means: pirates are coming. They want Bones' chest which holds Flint's treasure map. The shock of the Black Spot kills Bones, but not before she gives Jim the key to the chest. Jim finds the map seconds before the pirates arrive at the inn. But the pirates get nothing, scattering as Dr. Lively, the magistrate, arrives with the police. When Dr. Lively sees the map, it is decided that they will secure a ship, hire a crew, and go off in search of the treasure themselves. The hired ship, the *Hispaniola* is captained by Captain Smollet who is instinctually

unhappy with the crew. It turns out he had good reason to be, for they are Long John Silver, the seafaring man with one leg, and the pirates who raided the inn. But Jim, the Captain, and Dr. Lively don't know this yet. In fact, Jim befriends Silver and doesn't believe him to be a "scurvy buccaneer." Jim spends most of his time on ship in the kitchen with Silver, hearing stories of his voyages. Soon enough the ship nears their destination, Skeleton Island, and Jim overhears Silver talking to the crew. It's clear the plan all along was to behave until they got the treasure back on board. Then they'd mutiny, take over the ship, and kill everyone not on their side. They are pirates, after all. The crew wants to take over now, and Silver must convince them to be patient. Jim runs to the Captain and tells all. Captain Smollet decides they must go on and find the treasure, because otherwise the pirates will revolt against them at once. He also wants Jim to stay by Silver's side while they are on Skeleton Island and be their eyes and ears. Jim is terrified, and when he arrives on the island with Silver and his men, Jim runs away. As Jim roams the island he comes across Benn Gunn, who had been marooned on the island by Silver three years earlier. There is the sound of gunshots, and it becomes clear the pirates are mutineering. They attack and take the captain hostage. Jim finds Dr. Livesely and directs him to where Benn Gunn is hiding. Jim has a plan that takes him back to the Hispaniola: cut the anchor ropes so that the pirates would be stuck on Skeleton Island. He does so and then decides to free the Captain, who is in the stockade, but he is captured by Long John Silver. It turns out that the Captain is no longer captured; Dr. Livesely traded the treasure map for the Captain. Jim tells Silver and the pirates that the ship's anchor ropes have been cut and they have no way home. The pirates want to kill Jim, but Silver refuses to let them do so. The pirates decide they don't want to listen to Silver anymore, and give him The Black Spot. Silver talks his way out of it with Jim's help, and convinces the pirates they should hunt for the treasure. But when they get to the destination, the treasure is gone. Dr. Livesely, the Captain, and Benn Gunn not only have the treasure, they are armed. All the pirates but Silver scatter. When the Captain tells Silver he is to be hanged, Jim steps in. He says that Silver saved his life when all the pirates wanted him dead, and Silver should be spared. In the end, the gold is transferred to the Hispaniola, Benn Gunn is rescued, and Silver escapes with a small boat and a sack of gold.

Characters

OLDER JIM HAWKINS: Male, adult Jim who recounts the tale

JIM HAWKINS: Male, young and unsure of himself

BILLIE BONES: Female, bold, brash, and hiding a secret

MRS. HAWKINS: Female, Jim's mother, a tough, no-nonsense woman who runs the Benbow Inn

DR. LIVESEY: Male, honorable and honest

SQUIRE TRELAWNEY: Male, impulsive sidekick to Dr. Livesey

BLIND PEW: Female, bitter and angry

LONG JOHN SILVER: Male, friendly and warm but with a harsh dark side

CAPTAIN SMOLLETT: Female, Captain of the Hispaniola, sharp and dry personality

BENN GUNN: Female, marooned on Skeleton Island for three years, a little crazy from all the time alone

JOHNNY: Female pirate in Long John Silver's crew

BLACK DOG: Male pirate in Long John Silver's crew

DIRK: Female pirate in Long John Silver's crew

BILGE: Female pirate in Long John Silver's crew

DUNGBEE: Male pirate in Long John Silver's crew

SCUTTLE: Male pirate in Long John Silver's crew

ISRAEL HANDS: Male pirate in Long John Silver's crew

DICK: Male crew member of the Hispaniola who is convinced to join Silver's crew

TOM: Male crew member of the Hispaniola

HUNTER: Male crew member of the Hispaniola

Note

Character gender has been broken up to give everyone a chance to play good roles in *Treasure Island*. However, it should be noted that historically there were female pirates. Anne Bonney, an Irish pirate operating in the Caribbean, was one of the most famous female pirates of all time. The little that is known of her life comes largely from Captain Charles Johnson's *A General History of the Pirates*. In the original production at Fort Wayne Youththeatre, the role of Long John Silver was played by a woman because she proved herself to be the actor most capable of taking on the role. We did have discussions about her playing Silver as a man or a woman. We reached the decision for her to play Silver as a man, mostly because she wanted to take on that challenge. With the exception of Mrs. Hawkins, you are encouraged to play with the genders of the characters if it works for you and your pool of actors. This is theatre, after all. Please remember to adjust the pronouns if you do cast against gender.

Themes

Quests, search for adventure, growing up, self-discovery, role models, relationships, trust

Pre-Read Questions

- ★ What is your ideal adventure?
- ★ Do you consider yourself an adventurous person? Why or why not?
- ★ What do you know about the history of pirates?
- ★ What is your definition of a role model?
- ★ Do you have people in your life that you trust? What's your criteria for trusting someone?
- ★ Have you ever been disappointed by a role model?
- ★ Have you ever been disappointed by someone you trust?

Pre- Read Activities

Adaptation Exercise

- ★ Divide students into groups. Give each group a poem as their source material, something short. The point is for students to work quickly.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ The goal of the exercise is to have students adapt the poem into a scene. They don't have to specifically use the words of the poem, but the scene does have to be connected to the poem. Remind students that they are making something suitable for a new purpose. That means the scene must have characters and a conflict, and take place in a specific location.
 - » What characters can be derived from the poem?
 - » What location can the scene take place in, as indicated by the poem?
 - » What conflict can be derived from the poem?
- ★ The scene should be less than one minute. Give groups time to discuss, create, rehearse, and present.
- ★ Afterward, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Treasure Island Adaptation Exercise

- ★ As a class, read a section from the original *Treasure Island*. It is suggested that you read a section from Chapter 3, “The Black Spot,” that starts with, “I never saw in my life a more dreadful-looking figure,” as there is a direct connection between the original text and a scene that happens in the theatrical adaptation when Blind Pew delivers the Black Spot to Bones.
- ★ Discuss the definition of adaptation, and adaptations that students may know.
 - » Adaptation definition: to make something suitable for a new purpose, to modify, to alter
- ★ Divide students into groups. Each group will have a copy of the original section. Their first task is to identify characters, locations, and possible lines of dialogue.
- ★ Next, groups will discuss, decide, rehearse, and come up with a one-minute section of a scene. This is an exploration, rather than an assessed assignment. How do you adapt? What are the challenges?
- ★ After groups present, discuss the similarities and differences in the scenes. Hopefully there will be differences! This will show students that there is not just one way to adapt material.
- ★ Also, discuss the process. What were the challenges? How did they modify and alter for a new purpose?

Research Project: Author

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the author of the original novel, Robert Louis Stevenson.
 - » Who is Robert Louis Stevenson?
 - » What is his background?
 - » When did he write *Treasure Island*?
 - » Did he write any other novels?
 - » Was he a “successful” writer?

- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they've learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? Will you create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they've learned.

Research Project: Pirates

- ★ Divide students into groups and give them a limited amount of time to research the history of pirates.
 - » Who was the first pirate?
 - » Where does the word come from?
 - » Who are the most well-known pirates?
 - » What are the most common characteristics of pirates?
 - » What is something surprising you can share about pirates?
- ★ Decide how students will share their knowledge. Will they create a scene based on what they've learned? An oral presentation with a visual component? Will you create a quiz? Give students a way to demonstrate what they've learned.

Pirate Characteristics

- ★ Share with students the names of the pirate characters in the play. For example, Long John Silver, Black Dog, Bilge, Dungbee, Scuttle, Blind Pew, and Billie Bones.
- ★ Based only on the names of the pirates and student inference, have students create physicalities and characters for them.
- ★ For example, ask students to think of a character with the name Black Dog. What comes to mind when they think of this character? What is their physicality? How do they move? How does their movement suggest personality traits? Have students create their own versions of the character and interact with each other.

Pirate Scene

- ★ In small groups, students will create a one-minute scene in which all the characters are pirates. Have the characters act as pirates, but put the characters in an ordinary, modern situation. For example:
 - » Ordering at a restaurant
 - » Doing the laundry
 - » Decorating a Christmas tree
- ★ How will pirate characters take on these situations?

Technical Problem Solve

- ★ One of the characters, Long John Silver, not only has one leg, he has a peg leg.
- ★ Divide the class into groups and have them brainstorm ideas for how to show this on stage. How would they solve this technical issue?
- ★ Have each group share their findings.

Technical Problem Solve

- ★ This story has a lot of different locations: an inn, the docks, a ship, and three different places on an island. How would you stage a play with these locations?
- ★ Divide students into groups and have them brainstorm set ideas for a play that includes all of the above locations. How will they change locations? How will they suggest locations? How could light and sound help suggest locations?

Role Model Reflection

- ★ Write a reflection about role models in your life. Consider the following questions:
 - » Is it important to have someone to look up to? Why or why not?
 - » Who are your role models?
 - » What makes a good role model?

Trust Reflection

- ★ Write a reflection about trust. Consider the following questions:
 - » What makes a person trustworthy? What makes them untrustworthy?
 - » Do you think you are a trustworthy person?
 - » Do you have anyone in your life that you don't trust? Why?

Close Reading Analysis Questions

Close reading is an analysis tool. Students read a text multiple times for in-depth comprehension, striving to understand not only **what** is being said but **how** it's being said and **why**. Close reading takes a student from story and character to drawing conclusions on author intention. Close reading prompts students to flex their thinking skills by:

- ★ Teaching students to engage with a text.
- ★ Teaching students to be selective. We can't highlight everything in the text, only the most important elements.
- ★ Teaching students to make educated decisions. All conclusions and opinions must be backed up with a text example.

Have students analyze *Treasure Island*, individually or in groups, using the following text-dependent questions:

Read One: What is happening?

1. What is your first impression of the play?
2. What is one thing you do with an angry sailor?
3. Who is the magistrate?
4. What does Blind Pew deliver to Bones?
5. What's one of the directions on the map?

6. How does Long John Silver say he lost his leg?
7. Why does the Captain say, "I don't like this job; I don't like these sailors; I don't like information being kept from me"?
8. What does the parrot, Captain Flint, always say?
9. What is Long John's response to, "When are we going to take the ship?"
10. Who does Jim meet on Skeleton Island?
11. Who knocks out Black Dog?
12. What was Jim's plan with the Hispaniola?
13. Who saves Jim's life from the pirates?
14. What happens when the pirates dig for the treasure?
15. What is the key idea of the play?

Read Two: How does it happen?

1. In the introduction, the author states, "In the original production, the role of Long John Silver was played by a woman because she proved herself to be the actor most capable of taking on the role." Reflect on gender when it comes to playing roles in theatre in the 21st century.
2. The author has chosen to have two Jims in the play: Older Jim telling the story and Young Jim living the story. In your opinion, why has the author chosen to do this?
3. The Squire is described as "impulsive." How does his language demonstrate these character traits?
4. Billie Bones is described as "bold, brash, and hiding a secret." How would you physicalize this character?
5. How would you costume Blind Pew?

6. Compare and contrast the way the pirates talk to Dr. Lively and Captain Smollett.
7. What is the significance of the line, "Now, treasure is ticklish work; I don't like treasure
8. voyages on any account"?
9. What is the significance of the line, "But this time it's serious. I give my vote ... (pause) ...death"?
10. What is the significance of the line, "Ah, you and me might have done a power of good together"?
11. What is the main conflict in the play?

Read Three: Why does it happen?

1. In your opinion, why is the play (and the original book) called *Treasure Island* rather than *Skeleton Island*?
2. What is the playwright trying to say about role models? Cite the text to support your answer.
3. What is going to happen next to Jim? To Long John Silver?
4. Compare and contrast your own personal experience with role models with what happens in the play.
5. How does the playwright want you to respond to this play?

Post-Read Questions

- ★ What is one question that you still have about the play?
- ★ Which character resonated with you the most and why?
- ★ Do you recognize yourself in any of the characters?
- ★ How have the characters changed by the end of the play?

Post-Read Activities

Adaptation Compare and Contrast

- ★ In the pre-read section, you adapted a section of the original text into an original scene. Now, compare and contrast your adaptation to how the playwright adapted the same moment.
 - » What are the similarities and differences?
 - » Infer why the playwright made some of the choices he did with his version of the scene.

Modern Adaption

- ★ Divide the class into groups. Each group will make a modern version of a moment in the play.
- ★ How would they adapt the situation, the characters, and the outcome for the 21st century? What is the modern version of a pirate? What would a modern version of the treasure be? How would the pirates talk?

Character Costume Design

- ★ Choose a character and design their costume.
- ★ Based on their personality, what would they wear? What pieces of clothing define them? What colours and textures would they choose?
- ★ Draw a colour costume rendering.

Staged Scenes

- ★ Divide students into small groups and assign each group a scene from the play, or a short moment within a scene.
- ★ Give students time to rehearse.
- ★ Each group will present their moment.
- ★ Discuss the scenes afterward.

- » How did seeing the scenes acted out differ from reading them?
- » Why is it important to act a scene as well as read it?
- » Did any of the presentations offer a different interpretation of the characters than yours?

Character Physical Action

- ★ As a class, discuss the personality traits of each character. Create a list of traits for each.
- ★ Ask students: How do we physicalize personality? Use one character as a model.
- ★ For example, the Squire is described as impulsive. How do impulsive people stand? How do they move? How do they gesture?
- ★ Divide students into groups and give each group a character, without letting the other groups know.
- ★ Each group, using the personality trait list for their character, must discuss and decide upon a stance, a walk, and a gesture for them.
- ★ Each group will present. Each person in the group will enter the space with their walk, take a stance, gesture, and then walk off.
- ★ Those watching must guess the character by looking at the physical action.
- ★ Ask students: Why do we need to give characters a specific physical action?

Playwright Process

Playwright Todd Espeland talks about his process of writing and adapting Treasure Island. Have students read and then discuss/reflect on how their perception of the writing process compares to the playwright's.

1. Why did you choose to adapt this novel?

This project was thrust upon me. I had just been hired as the Executive/Artistic Director of the Fort Wayne Youtheatre in April and my first season of plays was already chosen. I also found out that Youtheatre did a number of adaptations (for budget reasons) and Treasure Island was selected to be one of their adaptations. So, I got a copy of the novel and eagerly dug in to the adaptation process.

2. What challenges did you encounter during the writing process?

The biggest issue was who to have do the narration and how to keep the narration active in the show. Originally all the narration was done by Young Jim, and thanks to some great feedback by our Director of Marketing, I switched the narration to Older Jim. This was in keeping with the novel. Originally I changed the narration to Young Jim because I wanted his journey to be front and center in the story. It was less confusing to have Older Jim do the narration, plus it gave us that character to weave into the scenes. Older Jim orchestrates the story. He not only helps set the scenes with text but that character can be there to physically set the stage and interact with props, etc. as the main storyteller/creator.

3. What changes, if any, were made during rehearsals?

The biggest change came just prior to rehearsals. The best actor who auditioned was female. She commanded the stage with strength and power. It became clear to me that she should play Long John Silver. This opened up all the characters to have the possibility to be played by women as well as men. Ultimately we cast women in several "male" roles. This gave us a chance in rehearsal to deeply discuss characterization and behavior. It also gave great roles to some great women.

4. What was it like to see the play performed?

Great! It was especially gratifying to see all the changes and adaptations we did to the story and presentation “work” in front of a live audience.

5. Which is harder for you, first drafts or rewrites?

First drafts. You are faced with a blank page. That is daunting. Once you get the choices on the page it is so much easier to play with them, adapt them, and find what works. But you can't do that part without the raw material.

6. What is your writing process like?

In an adaptation, I like to read the original story first and outline all the major plot points that need to be hit in order to tell the story. Then I like to get it on the page. Once it is on the page I can then play around with making theatrical adaptations to the story, like who is the main narrator, is there a main narrator, and narrative order.

7. What engages you about playwriting?

Telling the story and finding new ways to engage an audience so they can be open to experiencing the story.