The Broken Blade
Chapters 1 & 2
(An Errant Stroke – Pierre’s Plan)
(pp. 1 – 19)

Vocabulary

1. errant: __________________________
2. kindling: _________________________
3. resound: _________________________
4. madame: _________________________
5. hivernant: _______________________
6. voyageur: ________________________
7. brigade: _________________________
8. portage: _________________________
9. archrival: ________________________
10. wry: ____________________________
11. chortle: _________________________
12. monsieur: _______________________
13. frockcoat: ______________________

VOYAGEURS
1. What is the setting of the story? ____________________________

2. Explain what happened to Pierre’s father? ____________________________

3. Explain Pierre’s reaction to his father’s accident? ____________________________

4. What is Pierre’s plan? ____________________________

5. Why does Pierre feel he must follow through with his plan? ____________________________

6. Describe how Bellegarde looks. What are your impressions of him? ____________________________

7. Why does Pierre lie to Captain McKay? ____________________________

8. How does Charbonneau help Pierre? ____________________________

9. Describe Charbonneau’s looks. ____________________________

10. What are your impressions of him so far? ____________________________
The Broken Blade
Chapters 3 & 4
(Adieu – Departure pp. 20 – 35)

1. scoundrel: _____________________________
2. laggers: _______________________________
3. steersman: ____________________________
4. breechclouts: __________________________
5. gunwales: _____________________________
6. vermillion: _____________________________
7. unison: ________________________________
8. exertion: ______________________________
9. monotony: _____________________________
10. hull: _________________________________
11. stern: ________________________________
12. cascade: ______________________________
13. impulsive: ____________________________
14. catapult: ______________________________
15. adieu: ________________________________
Voyager

- trade silver broach
- tuque
- pipe and tobacco bag
- woven sash
- knee breeches
- woven knee ties
- canoe paddle
- stockings
- center-seam moccasins
The Broken Blade
Chapters 3 & 4

1. What was Pierre’s father’s reaction when seeing Pierre’s engagement papers? ____________________________________________________________________

2. What was his mother’s reaction? ____________________________________________________________________

3. What advise did Pierre’s father give him? ____________________________________________________________________

4. What might be foreshadowed in Pierre’s dream? ____________________________________________________________________

5. Describe the scene on shore as the voyageurs begin their journey. ____________________________________________________________________

6. Who was prized as voyageurs? Why? ____________________________________________________________________

7. What place marked the official beginning of the trip? ____________________________________________________________________
What's in a Fur Trade Canoe

Jon Sage

Visitors often ask what was carried in a birch-bark canoe and how much weight could be transported in a typical fur trade canoe. While the cargos in the canoes varied depending upon the needs and requests of each interior post, an excerpt from the journal of Alexander Henry the Younger in 1800 provides us with a list of goods carried in a North canoe leaving Fort Charlotte on July 20:

... I found every thing in readiness for our departure, and early this morning, gave out to each Canoe their respective loading which consisted of Twenty-Eight packages per Canoe...namely

5 Bales Merchandize – 90 pounds each
1 Bale Canal Tobacco
1 Bale kettles
1 Case Guns
1 Case Iron Works
2 rolls new Twist Tobacco
2 Bags Leaden Balls
1 Bag leaden Shot
1 Bag Flour
1 Keg Sugar
2 Kegs Gunpowder
10 Kegs of High Wines, 9 Gallons each
28 Pieces Total

Equipage for the Voyage: Provisions for 4 Men to Red River,
4 Bags of Corn, 1½ bushels in Each, ½ Keg Grease.

Add to the above, about 4 packages of 90 lbs. Each private property belonging to the men, consisting of Clothing, Tobacco etc., for themselves and families for the year, so that, when all hands are embarked, the Canoes generally are sunk to the Gunnell.

The normal carrying capacity of a North canoe was approximately 3,000 lbs., or 1½ tons of cargo. North canoes were generally 24 to 26 feet long. Additional items may have included a sponge, rope, an oil cloth or piece of canvas, a couple of long poles, and extra sheets of birch bark, pitch, and spruce root which could be used for making repairs.
1. Describe the scene at the evening meal.

Include Biloit’s manner of eating.

2. Describe how the voyageurs enjoyed their evening leisure time.

3. Describe what happened on Massacre Island.

4. What trick did the voyageurs play on Pierre?

5. What advice does Charbonneau give Pierre?

What advice does La Londe give him?

6. What present is given to Pierre?

Why do you think La Londe gave it to him?
The Broken Blade
Chapters 5 – 6 – 7
(Massacre Island – First Light – The long Sault pp. 36 – 62)

1. calloused:

2. lye:

3. leisure:

4. frantic:

5. pummel:

6. dram:

7. sever:

8. tumpline:

9. doffed:

10. flotsam:

11. devoured:

12. sheath:

13. carcass:

14. benefactor:

15. monsieur:
The Broken Blade
Chapter 8 – 9 – 10
(Night of the Kettle Dance – A Long Day’s Paddle – The Confluence of the Mattawa)
(pp. 63 – 91)

1. shoal: ____________________________

2. pork-eaters: ____________________________

3. singe: ____________________________

4. entrails: ____________________________

5. hibernant: ____________________________

6. cavort: ____________________________

7. venison: ____________________________

8. prevail: ____________________________

9. savage: ____________________________

10. tentative: ____________________________

11. confluence: ____________________________

Clay Pipe
The Broken Blade
Chapters 8 – 9 – 10

1. List the ingredients Bellegarde used for “Duck Soup”. 

2. Describe the ‘kettle dance’. 

3. Where does Pierre sleep? Why do you think he sleeps there? 

4. Why did the voyageurs keep their hair long and keep their shirts on throughout the hot journey? 

5. List at least five incidences that show La Londe’s concern for Pierre. 

6. The killing of the deer was described as “... witnessing a murder in a church.” Explain what this means to you. 

The Broken Blade
Chapters 11 – 12 – 13
(The French River – A Broken Blade – La Cloche Rock)
(pp. 83 – 102)

1. impromptu: ____________________________
2. traverse: ____________________________
3. dégradé: ____________________________
4. backpaddle: _________________________
5. backwater: __________________________
6. doomsayer: __________________________
7. squall: ______________________________
8. basalt: ______________________________
9. premonition: _________________________
The Broken Blade
Chapter 11 – 12 – 13

1. What tragedy occurs in chapter 11?

2. What does chapter 12’s title, “The Broken Blade” symbolize?

3. Why do you suppose the author, William Durbin, choose chapter 12’s title for the title of his book?

4. How does the crew react to La Londe’s death?

5. What do you think is meant by this statement from chapter 12 “... The big lakes don’t like to give up their dead.”?

6. How does Pierre react to La Londe’s death?

7. What changes do you see occurring in Pierre?

8. What premonition does Charbonneau make in chapter 13?

9. Why do you think Beloit keeps “picking” on Pierre?
"I could carry, paddle, walk, or sing with any man I ever saw.  
I have been for twenty years a canoeman.  
No portage was ever too tough for me!  
Fifty songs could I sing.  
And I have saved the lives of ten voyageur.  
I've had six wives and twelve running dogs.  
I spent all my money in pleasure,  
But you know, were I young again,  
I should live my life the same way over,  
For there is no life as happy as the life of a voyageur."
1. dire: ____________________________
2. cascade: ________________________
3. shroud: _________________________
4. broaching: ______________________
5. plight: _________________________
6. foundering: _____________________
7. loath: _________________________
8. sprucing: _______________________
9. conscientious: __________________
10. rendezvous: ___________________
The Broken Blade
Chapter 14 – 15 – 16

1. In many of the chapters thus far, Pierre has recurring flashbacks and nightmares. Why do you think they are included in the story? ________________

______________________________

2. What revenge does Lake Superior take? ____________________________

______________________________

3. What does Captain McKay decide to do? ____________________________

______________________________

4. The crew is forced to stay on the island for another day. What effect does this have on the men? ____________________________

______________________________

5. Describe the encounter between Beloit and La Petite. __________________

______________________________

6. How do Beloit and La Petite react to each other after the fight? ______________

______________________________

7. List at least five things the men do to prepare themselves before landing at Grand Portage. ____________________________

______________________________

______________________________

______________________________

8. Explain how Pierre finally gets Beloit to call him by his rightful name. ______________

______________________________

9. Do you think Pierre’s actions were correct? Why or Why not? ______________

______________________________
The Broken Blade
Chapters 17–18–19
(Grand Portage – Mukwa’s Wigwam – Rendezvous)
(pp. 119–139)

1. stockade:
2. legendary:
3. thwarts:
4. gaudy:
5. venison:
6. contentment:
7. prime:
8. dumbfound:
9. hospitality:
10. cascade:
11. cavalier:
12. tether:
13. savor:
1. Explain why there were two camps; one for the pork-eaters and one for the hivernauts. 

2. Describe Mukwa’s style of clothing. 

   Why did he dress so gaudy? 

3. Describe what the Indian women wore. 

4. What was served at the banquet? 

   How did it compare to the meals the voyageurs ate? 

5. How did Charbonneau trick Pierre into dancing? 


7. What is the best time for trapping beaver? Why? 

8. What trade item caused the most trouble? Why? 

9. Explain why Mukwa and Charbonneau are such good friends.
10. What do you think prevented La Londe from shooting the Sioux warrior?

11. What is the Indian name for Lake Superior?

12. What meat did Pierre eat at Mukwa’s feast?
   Why do you think the Indians ate that animal?

13. How does William Durbin portray the Indian?
1. scull: ____________________________
2. biceps: __________________________
3. concoction: _______________________
4. rubbaboo: _________________________
5. pemmican: _________________________
6. rancid: __________________________
7. traverse: _________________________
8. anxiety: __________________________
9. turbulent: _________________________
10. pivot: ___________________________
The Broken Blade
Chapter 20 –21 – 22

1. Who stays on as hivernauts? _______________________________________

What will they do as hivernauts? _______________________________________

2. Who might Pierre wish to see on a return trip? Why? ________________________

3. What plan or idea does Pierre have that might solve his future plans? ______

4. What is meant by this statement? “... cheated his own work by dreaming”.

5. Why, at the end of chapter 20, was Pierre all of a sudden hungry for boiled corn?

6. Explain what the crew did when they approached the French River? ______

7. What happened to many of the rivers and stream since the crew began their voyage in May? ____________________________

8. Why do you think Pierre did not warn Nolin of what he might expect? ______
1. Pierre’s father says, “... you buried my boy and resurrected a man...”
What does he mean?

2. How was Pierre changed from a boy to a man? (List three)

3. The Broken Blade might be referred to as a circle story. Explain why.
Pronunciation Guide for French and Ojibwe Names and Other Words

André Bellegarde  (On – DRAY Bell – GARD)
Jean Beloit        (ZHON Buh – LWA)
Jacques Charbonneau (ZHAK Shar – bo – NO)
Pierre La Page      (Pee – AIR La PAHZH)
Joseph La Petite    (Zho – SEF La Pe – TEET)
hivernant          (ee – ver – NAN)
madame             (mah – DAM)
mademoiselle       (mah – mwa – ZELLE)
monsieur           (muh – see – YUR)
voyageur           (voy a – ZHUR)
Kennawah           (Key – NA – wah)
Mukwa              (Ma – KWA)
Ojibwe             (O – JI – bway)