

The Broken Blade

by William Durbin

Pierre's Journey 1800

1. What would be the names of some of the rivers Pierre might travel on the way to Fort William?

2. Why would it be difficult crossing Lake Superior?

It would be difficult to cross Lake Superior because

(Please turn to the Author's Note concerning fur trading in the 1800's and then fill in the blanks in the following paragraph with words from the word box.)

canoe routes
beaver

New France
mink

voyageur
posts

status
power

Furs were a symbol of _____ and _____ in medieval Europe. Less valuable furs such as _____ and _____ were worn by the

middle class. Royalty could wear ermine, sable, and marten. In the 1700's French explorers laid claim to vast tracts of land that became known as _____

_____. Later adventures mapped out _____

and established _____ along the frontier. Thus began the era of the

Chapter 1 “An Errant Stroke” pp. 1-5

1. What was Pierre’s father doing when Pierre woke up on this Saturday morning in the spring?

2. Why does Pierre need to run to get Dr. Guilliard?

3. How does Pierre react when he sees Celeste, Dr. Guilliard’s daughter, in the entrance to the house?

4. Why does Pierre feel guilty about his father’s injury, and how does Pierre react to the sight of his father’s bandaged thumb?

Define *voyageur* (p. 5) by looking it up online at The Canadian Encyclopedia.

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Chapter 2 “Pierre’s Plan” pp. 6-19

1. What does Pierre’s father tell him about the accident?

2. What is “Pierre’s Plan” instead of going to school?

3. Who speaks up for Pierre so that Commander McKay hires him as a middleman in a brigade of the North West Company?

4. Name the rival company of the North West Company.

5. Describe La Petite, the supplies man who Pierre works with for the first day.

6. Who is Beloit and how does he treat Pierre?

7. What is Pierre’s new nickname earned by the end of the first day?

Chapter 3 “Adieu” pp. 20-24

1. Compare how Pierre’s mother and father react to his becoming a voyageur?

Father, Charles La Page:

Mother, Mrs. La Page:

Chapter 4 “Departure” pp. 25-35

1. Who are the other voyageurs Pierre knows who will travel in his boat?

2. Why do you think the voyageurs dress up for departure and make such a big deal of being the fastest canoe?

2. What takes place at the stone church of St. Anne?

3. What do all the men do when they enter the church? Why?

4. What is Pierre’s response to Emile when he asks? “Paddling sure beats reciting those Latin poems of Sister’s, don’t it?”

Chapter 5 “Massacre Island” pp. 36-47

1. How far have they traveled the first day, and what is Charbonneau’s comment about the distance?

2. Why does Pierre’s crew have to gather firewood for everyone, and why does he feel responsible?

3. What do the men do after supper.

4. How do the voyageurs sleep?

Chapter 6 “First Light” pp. 48-54

Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1. Although it is still dark, Beloit wakes Pierre late and everyone is ready to carry packs to the canoes. How does Pierre feel and why does he want to carry two packs like everyone else?

2. What had made his single pack so heavy, and what does Pierre realize when he finally completes his carry and collapses on the beach?

Chapter 7 “The Long Sault” pp. 55-63

Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1. What river are they on and how do they “track” a rapids?

2. What advice is Pierre given to help him forget about the pain of paddling, and why is this important as they are about to hit the “big water” ahead?

3. Describe the portage at the base of the rapids. How many crosses are on the hillside?

What gift does La Londe give Pierre for winning the wager?

“Night of the Kettle Dance” pp. 63-73

1. When they eat supper that night, how does Pierre get even with Beloit for all the teasing?

2. What is the “kettle dance” and what do the voyageurs sing about?

Chapter 9 “A Long Day’s Paddle” pp. 74-78

1. What time does the brigade get up to leave, and what trick does La Londe play on Commander McKay?

2. What trick does La Londe show Pierre to help protect his swollen hands?

3. Why do you think La Londe is so kind and helpful to Pierre?

Chapter 10 “The Confluence of Mattawa” pp. 79-82

1. What times does Pierre remember that he spent at home, and with whom does he compare La Londe?

2. How does Pierre react to Beloit’s killing of the deer, and how does his attitude change at supper?

Chapter 11 “The French River” pp. 83-91

1. What do the three red crosses made of broken paddles mean?

2. What does a broken blade mean?

3. How far is the run to Lake Huron, and why will it be an easy run?

4. How does La Londe save the canoe from being hit by McKay?

Chapter 12 “A Broken Blade” pp. 92-96

1. When do they give up trying to find La Londe?

2. What is Pierre’s reaction to the loss?

Chapter 13 “La Cloche Rock” pp. 97-102

1. What advice did Charbonneau give the boys as they mourned La Londe’s death?

2. Who takes over for La Londe as bowman on Pierre’s canoe?

3. How is Beloit's treatment of the men different from La Londe's?

Chapter 14 "Huron's Revenge" pp. 103-108

1. Where does the brigade "lay over" for two days after crossing the Huron, and what is the nickname of this lake?

2. What happened to Pierre as a boy that made him even more afraid of drowning?

3. Who comes back to rescue Pierre's canoe?

Chapter 15 “Degrade” pp. 109-112

1. What does it mean to be “degrade” on a canoe trip?

2. What is surprising about how Beloit acts after the fight at supper?

Chapter 16 “Prettying Up” pp. 113-118

1. What are the men able to do with the oil cloths to help travel across Lake Superior?

2. Why do you think the men clean up and dress up before entering Grand Portage?

3. Why does Beloit begin to tease Pierre at Grand Portage, and how does Pierre react at first?

4. Why does Pierre finally hit Beloit and what is Beloit’s reaction?

5. Why do you think Beloit acted like this instead of going after Pierre?

Chapter 17 “Grand Portage” pp. 119-127

1. What had Pierre’s father told him about the Athabascans?

3. How is Charbonneau’s Ojibwa friend dressed?

4. In what language does Mukwa speak to Charbonneau, and what might that tell you about Mukwa’s past?

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5. Why does Mukwa dress like he does?

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6. What surprised Pierre about how the women viewed Beloit?

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Define the following from the context.

pork eaters p. 119

stave p. 120

Chapter 18 “Mukwa’s Wigwam” pp. 128-135

1. What does McKay tell Pierre to do in case he wants to winter with the group and become a hibernant?

2. Why does the dinner at Mukwa’s Wigwam cause Pierre to think of home?

Chapter 19 Rendezvous” pp. 136-139

1. What kind of meat had they eaten the night before at Mukwa’s?

2. What name does the Ojibwa girl call Lake Superior?

3. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of the word *rendezvous*. Fort William was considered a rendezvous point for voyageurs. What happens in this chapter that causes the author to title the chapter “*Rendezvous*”?

Chapter 20 “Rubbaboo” pp. 140-148

1 What is Pierre’s plan if he returns to Grand Portage?

2. Give two reasons for Pierre’s boat finally being able to win a race to the shore.

3. What is rubbaboo? _____

Chapter 21 “Homeward Bound” pp. 149-152

1. Why are the men in such a hurry to cross Lake Superior and get home?

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2 How did the voyageurs show their respect La Londe?

Chapter 22 “The Last Portage” pp. 153-157

1. Why doesn't Pierre tell young Nolin about the weights in the back pack?

Chapter 23 “The Woodpile” pp. 158-163

1. Where does Pierre stop before going home?

2. What is Pierre's father doing when Pierre returns home, and how is that ironic?

3. When the story ends, Pierre is chopping wood. What is different about this than the beginning of the story. What does Father say happened to Pierre ?
