The Young Patriots

by Margaret S. Gentile

In 1776, nine-year-old Samuel Whiting and his eleven-year-old sister, Sarah, lived in a small town in southern New Jersey with their father. British soldiers had invaded the town and taken over the homes of the people living there. In the Whiting's own house, the family spent their nights in the rafters while soldiers slept in two bedrooms downstairs. Living so closely to the soldiers, the family often overheard British plans and secrets. They wanted to share this information with the Continental Army. So the father prepared his children for a dangerous mission. Their lives would be in jeopardy, but if successful, they would be helping General George Washington and his embattled army.

One winter night Samuel and Sarah, bundled in heavy woolen coats, walked to where the British sentries guarded the town's entrance, searching all travelers. Sarah approached the guards, carrying a small covered basket. It was full of hot corn bread and a flask of hot cider. She softly said, "Sir, I have been sent by the officers with this nourishment for you against the cold. My brother, Samuel, has been ordered to deliver his basket to the sentry a half mile down the road." Greedily the guards looked into the basket, sent Samuel down the road, and gobbled the delicious hot food. Sarah retreated home. Half the plan was complete.

As soon as Samuel was out of sight of the sentries, he started running down the road for his real assignment. He had to reach the Matthews' cornfield and run to the farmhouse three miles away. As he ran, the bitter air beat against his chest. Hot and cold burned his lungs and throat. His head was spinning, but his boots carried his fears and his precious treasure. In the bottom of his shoes, under worn leather inserts, were two messages, carefully hidden. They contained details of British numbers and plans for attack. If Samuel could safely reach the farmhouse, a courier on horseback would then ride to General Washington. The silver moon lit the field as Samuel made his way, fighting his fears and exhaustion. In under an hour, he made it safely, and a horseman soon galloped away. Samuel would return to town the next day on the hay wagon of the farmer who found the lost boy.

His father quietly welcomed Samuel home. Sarah tended to his blistered feet and hacking cough. In Pennsylvania, Washington studied the important information, making his courageous decision to cross the Delaware with a surprise attack on Trenton on December 25 and 26, 1776. This victory eventually led to the defeat of the British in 1782.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

Questions

1. Who are the characters?

2. Where and when does the story take place?

3. Why is this reading a historical fiction reading? Explain with 4 characteristics.

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