

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Adam of the Road

by

### Elizabeth Janet Gray

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### Book Information

Elizabeth Janet Gray, Adam of the Road  
Quiz Number: 1  
Puffin, 1987  
ISBN 0-14-032464-X; LCCN  
317 Pages  
Book Level: 6.5  
Interest Level: MG

This book describes the adventures of eleven-year-old Adam as he travels the open roads of thirteenth-century England searching for his missing father, a minstrel, and his stolen red spaniel, Nick.

**Award:** Newbery Medal

**Topics:** Adventure, Travel; Countries/Regions, England; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

### Main Characters

Adam Quartermayne the young son of a traveling minstrel

Dame Malkin a woman who kept Nick for Adam while he was in school

Jankin a traveling minstrel who takes Adam's dog

Nick Adam's trained red spaniel dog

Perkin a school friend of Adam's

Roger Quartermayne Adam's father, a very successful traveling minstrel

### Vocabulary

**fabliaux** a medieval verse tale marked by comic, ribald treatment of worldly themes

**lanneret** a male lanner, or falcon, smaller than the female used in falconry

**postern** a back door or gate

**villein** a serf of a class gradually changing its status to that of a free peasant

### Synopsis

Adam Quartermayne is the young son of a traveling minstrel. While his father, Roger, is attending a minstrel school in France, Adam attends a school

run by monks in the Abbey of St. Alban. While there, Adam befriends a scholarly boy, Perkin. Adam and Perkin have great fun together, especially when they visit Adam's dog, Nick, who is being kept at the home of a local woman, Dame Malkin. Adam teaches Nick many entertaining tricks and treasures the dog.

When Adam's father returns from France, Adam heads out on the road with Roger, Nick, and their new war horse, Bayard. Roger has become the minstrel for the de Lisle family, so Adam and Roger spend a good deal of time at the de Lisles' until the de Lisles' daughter, Emilie, is married. After the wedding, Roger celebrates through the night by playing dice games with other minstrels. In the course of the evening, he loses all his pennies and his new war horse. One morning Adam wakes to find his dog missing. He was taken by a minstrel named Jankin who left the war horse in exchange.

Soon after Adam and Roger set off to retrieve Nick from Jankin, the boy becomes separated from his father. The rest of the novel details Adam's adventures on his own, as he tries to find Nick and Roger. Traveling the roads of England, Adam comes into contact with a kindly ferryman, a good merchant, robbers, a family of bad minstrels, and a parish vicar. They all variously comfort or hinder him. Each contact helps further elaborate the role of a minstrel in medieval times.

When Adam returns to the de Lisles' castle, he is disappointed to learn that Roger has gone with Sir Edmund to the war in Wales. Adam spends a bleak Christmas in the castle, and then sets off again, after a chance encounter with Jankin reveals Nick's whereabouts. Eventually, he finds Nick with his friend, Perkin, at Oxford. Shortly after that happy reunion, Adam finds his father. The novel ends with Adam choosing the life of a minstrel over returning to school.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

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#### Initial Understanding

When Adam was looking for his father in Winchester, he realized he was looking in the wrong spots. Where should he have been looking and why?

*He should have looked at the inns, because Roger was a good minstrel and would have been able to get a free evening at nearly any inn for his work.*

#### Literary Analysis

What one event, if deleted, would have changed the entire storyline of this book?

*If Jankin had not taken Nick, Adam would have been with his father and would not have experienced the robbers, swimming the Wey, falling on his head, etc.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

A few times after Adam's minstrel surcoat was thrown out and he was given a new one by Master Walter, Adam felt he looked more like a parish clerk than a minstrel. What was the difference between the way a clerk and a minstrel would dress?

*A minstrel's clothes were colorful and lively to add to the entertaining effect of what he did. A parish clerk would wear very dark, plain clothes that fit a serious, pious disposition.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Throughout the story, Adam remembered his father saying, "A minstrel's first duty is to suit his listeners." What did he mean by this?

*He meant that a minstrel should adjust his act based on who his audience is. That might mean telling stories in a different language or with a certain theme, or it could mean doing visual tricks or singing songs rather than telling stories.*

Adam's sense of history is not so fine in the novel as his flair for songs and stories, and the historical importance of the old gaffer's reference will be missed by younger readers. As a lecture or a research project, the events surrounding King John's signing and the importance of the document could be amplified. Once students have a basic understanding of the Magna Carta's place in history, you may want to ask them to think about how changes it brought to English society are visible elsewhere in the book.

**Understanding the Author's Craft** Songs that the minstrels (especially Adam and Roger) sang are written in the story. Review the songs and have the class understand what form and pattern the songs followed. Assign the students to write a song about their own lives or an event from their own lives as Adam did.

**Comparing and Contrasting** Most students are familiar with Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer. Have students recall scenes from *Adam of the Road* and imagine how Tom or Huck would have handled them. How would they have found money and/or food? What would they have done when the robbers came? Where would they have gone to find Roger and Nick?

**Understanding Sequence** In the front of the book, there is a map showing the area where Adam traveled in the story. Have the students retell the story using the map as their guide. Help your students compare the book's map to a contemporary one of England.

## Teachable Skills

**Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors** An "old gaffer" tells Adam a true-life tale of King John signing a document he called "the Great Charter," but which history knows as "the Magna Carta."