

Crispin: The Cross of Lead

by Avi
2003 Newbery Medal Winner

A Novel Teaching Pack

by Margaret Whisnant



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Chapter Summaries

England. A.D. 1377

1

- The day after my mother dies, the priest and I take her to the village and bury her amongst the paupers' graves. Her name was Asta.
- My mother is shunned by the villagers in death as she was in life, with only the priest for a friend. I feel ashamed, as if I contain an unnamed sin that makes me less than nothing.
- John Aycliffe, the steward of the manor, appears and calls me. He has treated me with contempt, kicks, and sometimes blows. In the absence of Lord Furnival, he is in charge of the manor. He dispenses justice to his liking, from whippings to hangings.
- Aycliffe stares at me for a long while and then commands that I deliver my ox to the manor house the next day as a death tax. I protest that I will not be able to work the fields. Aycliffe is not concerned that I will starve.
- Father Quinel asks me to come to the church and pray, but I run into the forest, stumbling as I go. Deep into the woods, I fall and strike my head on a stone. Stunned, I lie on the earth in the cold rain as daylight fades.

2

- I awaken in the night to a sound. Confused, I do not know where I am, and I cannot see. I recall my mother's death, the cemetery, and my run into the woods.
- In the trees, I see a flickering light. Night is the time for outlaws, wolves, and the Devil, but my curiosity pulls me to investigate. Two men are standing in a clearing. One is John Aycliffe.
- I do not recognize the other man, who is older and dressed like a gentleman. The stranger hands a parchment packet to Aycliffe. He reads the document, makes the sign of the cross, and asks, "When will it happen?"
- The stranger answers that it will come soon and, as her next of kin, Aycliffe should act immediately or face the consequences. It is a great danger to all.
- Aycliffe turns and sees me. He draws his sword and runs in my direction. I am caught in the brambles when I try to run. Aycliffe swings his sword in haste, missing me and cutting the brambles so that I can rip myself free. I run, eventually tumbling over a short cliff.
- I lie still as I see Aycliffe's torch and face above me. When he leaves, I run until I have no more strength.
- The rest of the night I think of my mother's death, how I have turned from the priest, and about the wine I have stolen from the church to ease my mother's pain. I am certain God is punishing me. I pray for forgiveness.

3

- My life begins in 1363, during the reign of England's great warrior king, Edward the Third. My mother and I live in Stromford village with one hundred and fifty other souls.
- My mother calls me "Son," and my common name becomes "Asta's son." My father has died before my birth during a recurrence of the Plague. Without a father, I exist in a shadow. My frail mother rarely mentions him, and she never takes another husband.
- We are poor, and I am often the butt of jokes and relentless hounding. I am convinced that there is some sin embedded in me. Father Quinel suggests that I accept my fate as did the Blessed Christ, but I am filled with caution and suspicion.
- My mother and I are serfs, bound to Furnival, Lord of Stromford Village, who has been off to war for so many years most villagers have never seen him.
- My mother and I, like every other villager, work the fields and survive the winter. My mother is paid—by King Edward's royal decree—a penny a day. My pay is a farthing.
- Our lives never change. Birth and death alone give distinction to the passage of days. The Holy Church tells us that we are fated to Heaven's bliss or the lasting flames of Hell on Judgment Day.

Word Lists with Definitions

Arranged in Story Order

(Some words may appear on more than one page.)

Set One

Chapters 1-11

- shunned** Kept away from a person, place, or object because of dislike, caution, etc.; were careful to avoid; left alone; cast aside. (p. 2)
- taunted** Spoken to in a mocking, insulting, or contemptuous manner; jeered; ridiculed. (p. 2)
- pauper** A very poor person; a person with no means of support, especially one who depends on aid from public welfare funds or charity. (p. 2)
- contempt** Disrespect; scorn; the feeling or attitude of regarding someone or something as inferior, base, or worthless. (p. 3)
- transgression** A violation of a command, a law, or a duty; a sin; the action of going beyond or overstepping some boundary or limit. (p. 4)
- forfeit** Lost or subject to loss; surrendered as punishment for a crime, an offense, error, etc. (p. 4)
- sole** Being the only one; belonging or pertaining to one individual or group to the exclusion of all others; only. (p. 5)
- relentless** Never changing or yielding in severity or harshness; cruel; unstoppable. (p. 13)
- mercenary** A professional soldier hired to serve in a foreign army; working or acting merely for money or other reward; venal; greedy; miserly. (p. 14)
- tolling** The sound made by a bell, especially a large one, when struck; ringing; bonging. (p. 16)
- muted** Silent; not emitting or having sound of any kind; refraining from speech or utterance. (p. 16)
- ascent** An upward climb or movement; movement upward from a lower to a higher state, degree, grade, or status. (p. 19)
- pinnacle** The top; a lofty peak; any towering, pointed part or formation, as of rock; the highest or culminating point, as of success, power, fame., etc. (p. 19)
- meandered** Followed a winding and turning course, as a stream or path; moved aimlessly and idly without fixed direction; rambled; turned. (p. 19)
- impenetrable** Impossible to pierce, break through, pass through, or enter; impervious; incapable of being understood; unfathomable. (p. 20)
- fallow** Land plowed and left unseeded for a season or more; not in use; inactive. (p. 22)
- pealing** The ringing of a set of church bells; a deep prolonged sound, as of thunder or large bells; sounding loudly. (*Homophone*: peeling) p. 24
- rank** Having an offensively strong smell or taste; highly offensive; disgusting; vigorous and tall in growth; utter; absolute. (p. 31)
- devour** To swallow or eat hungrily, voraciously, or ravenously; to destroy, consume, or waste, as by fire; to take in greedily with the senses or the intellect. (p. 34)
- faltering** Speaking hesitantly; stammering; behaving unsteadily in purpose or action, as from loss of courage or confidence; wavering. (p. 36)
- distraught** Deeply agitated, as from emotional conflict; crazed; mad; insane. (p. 36)
- sullenly** In a manner showing irritation or ill humor; gloomily; broodingly. (p. 41)
- scrutinized** Examined in detail, with careful and critical attention; investigated; observed. (p. 41)
- wretched** Very unfortunate in condition or circumstances; miserable; despicable, contemptible, or mean; worthless. (p. 42)
- pondering** Thinking deeply and seriously; contemplating; considering. (p. 44)
- loomed** Came into view as a massive, distorted, or indistinct image; appeared; emerged. (p. 50)
- illuminated** Supplied or brightened with light; made lucid or clear; threw a light on; decorated with lights, as in celebration. (p. 50)
- lumbered** Walked or moved with heavy clumsiness; moved with a rumbling noise; plodded. (p. 51)
- flailed** Moved vigorously or erratically; thrashed about; lashed; pounded; fluttered; flopped. (p. 53)
- tumult** Violent or noisy commotion or disturbance of a crowd or mob; uproar; excitement; racket; pandemonium; hullabaloo. (p. 54)
- imploring** Begging urgently or piteously, as for aid or mercy; beseeching. (p. 56)

Dictionary Digs

Set One Chapters 1-11

Use a dictionary to answer the following questions about some important words from Chapters 1 through 11. Write the **letters** of the correct answers in the blanks to the left.

- _____ 1. Another word besides **tolling** connected to the sound of ringing bells is (A) **peeling**, (B) **pealing**, (C) **pinnacle**.
- _____ 2. A **mercenary** is a professional soldier who fights for (A) his/her native country, (B) a foreign country for pay, (C) any country struggling to gain its independence.
- _____ 3. **Scrutinized** is a *verb* that means (A) broken into smaller pieces, (B) followed with strict adherence to the rules, (C) examined with careful and critical attention.
- _____ 4. What happens when a team is forced to **forfeit** a game? The team, as a penalty for some infraction, (A) loses the game to their opponents, (B) must play a rematch, (C) relinquishes a certain number of points even if it means losing the game.
- _____ 5. Which word can be substituted for **flailed** in the following sentence without changing its meaning? *The goldfish **flailed** about on the floor, making it difficult to catch.*
(A) thrashed, (B) stunned, (C) snooped
- _____ 6. An *antonym* of **ascent** is (A) recent, (B) descent, (C) percent.
- _____ 7. Which of the following phrases does **not** illustrate the correct use of the word **pinnacle**?
(A) the **pinnacle** of success, (B) the church **pinnacle** looming in the distance, (C) in a **pinnacle** of indecision.
- _____ 8. The path that **meandered** *down the mountainside* (A) was extremely steep, (B) followed a winding and turning course, (C) was often blocked and made impassable by slides.
- _____ 9. A *synonym* for **pondering** is (A) recalling, (B) contemplating, (C) disregarding.
- _____ 10. The *most likely* object to be **impenetrable** is (A) a bank vault, (B) a locked car door, (C) a stained glass window.
- _____ 11. Which word can be substituted for **taunted** in the following sentence so that it is changed to an *opposite* meaning. *Several members of the audience **taunted** the speaker.*
(A) applauded, (B) ridiculed, (C) heckled
- _____ 12. Which of the following cartoons *best* illustrates someone behaving **sullenly**?

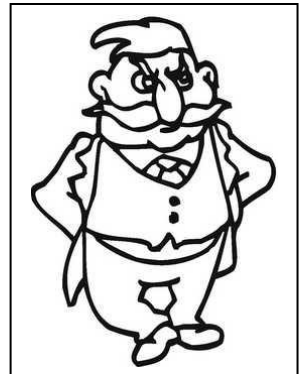
(A)



(B)



(C)



- _____ 13. A **pauper** is a (A) stranger, (B) very poor person, (C) person who prefers to wander rather than living in one place.
- _____ 14. Which of the following is **not** a correct definition of the word **rank**? (A) having a bad smell, (B) a particular position, station, or class, (C) a gardening tool.

Short Answer Questions

England. A.D. 1377

1-2

1. How had the villagers treated Asta and her son?
2. Who had been Asta's only friend?
3. As steward of the manor, how did John Aycliffe treat the peasants?
4. What payment did Aycliffe demand as a death tax?
5. What incident stopped the boy's flight into the woods?
6. Describe the stranger whom the boy saw in the forest clearing with John Aycliffe.
7. What object did the stranger take from his cape and hand to John Aycliffe?
8. What advice did the stranger give John Aycliffe?
9. How was Asta's son able to escape the blow from Aycliffe's sword?
10. What did the boy believe about the things that were happening to him?

3-4

1. What had Asta told her son about his father?
2. Why did Asta's son become convinced that there was some sin embedded in him?
3. Why didn't Lord Furnival live in Stromford Village even though he owned the land?
4. During the spring, summer, and fall what kind of work was required of Asta, her son, and every other Stromford villager?
5. What events gave distinction to the lives of the inhabitants of Stromford Village?
6. Why did Asta's son believe it would be safe for him to return to the village though Aycliffe had attempted to kill him?
7. What happened to the one-room dwelling that had been the boy's home?
8. How old was Asta's son?
9. What objects marked the western boundaries of Stromford Village?
10. What two things did the serfs gain by being under the total control of Lord Furnival and his steward?

1-2
Pages 1-11

Write either **True** or **False** in the blank before each statement.

- _____ 1. The boy's mother had been shunned in life, and he felt as if he contained an unnamed sin that made him less than nothing in the villager's eyes.
- _____ 2. Other than the priest, the boy's mother had no friends, and the villagers often taunted her.
- _____ 3. The priest and the boy buried his mother among the paupers' graves behind the church.
- _____ 4. In the absence of Lord Furnival, John Aycliffe was in charge of the manor.
- _____ 5. John Aycliffe was known for his kindness in his dealings with the villagers and in his manner of enforcing the law.
- _____ 6. After her burial, Aycliffe stared at Asta's son for a long while as if in search of something.
- _____ 7. Aycliffe ordered Asta's son to deliver his ox to the manor house to serve as his mother's death tax.
- _____ 8. Both Father Quinel and John Aycliffe promised Asta's son that he would not starve and that he would always have a home with the church.
- _____ 9. The boy's flight into the woods came to a halt when he fell and struck his head on a stone.
- _____ 10. When Asta's son discovered them in the dark woods, John Aycliffe and the stranger were arguing loudly over what appeared to be a large sum of money.
- _____ 11. The stranger with John Aycliffe was older, dressed like a gentlemen, and had a fine horse.
- _____ 12. The parchment that the stranger took from his cape was affixed with red wax seals.
- _____ 13. When he read the document, Aycliffe was consumed with a fit of laughter.
- _____ 14. The stranger in the clearing asked Aycliffe, "Are you not her kin?"
- _____ 15. The two men agreed that Aycliffe must act immediately or face dangerous consequences.
- _____ 16. Aycliffe saw the boy and recognized him as Asta's son.
- _____ 17. Asta's son was able to defend himself from Aycliffe's sword by slipping under a large, fallen tree.
- _____ 18. Aycliffe ended his pursuit when Asta's son tumbled over a cliff.
- _____ 19. The boy imagined that God was punishing him for turning from the priest, breaking curfew, and stealing wine from the church to ease his mother's pain.
- _____ 20. As he waited for God's next blow, Asta's son prayed for forgiveness for his sinful life.



Think, Write, Create

Chapter Activities

Chapters 1-2

Authors have ways of enticing the reader to join the main character in unraveling mysteries and solving problems. Look at the following field of clues that Avi cleverly planted in the first two chapters of the story:

. . . people. . . shunned my mother in life, so they shunned her now. . . She was often taunted by the villagers. (p. 2)

. . . I felt, ashamed. . . as if I contained an unnamed sin that made me less than nothing. . . (p. 2)

Other than the priest, my mother had no friends. (p. 2)

Aycliffe stared at me for a long while as if in search for something. (p. 4)

“When will it happen? . . . And am I to act immediately?” (Aycliffe speaking) (p. 9)

“Are you not her kin?” the stranger said. “Do you not see the consequences if you don’t?” (p. 9)

“A great danger to us all.” (Aycliffe speaking) (P. 9)

All the while Aycliffe was drawing closer, his face filled with hate. When he drew near he lifted his sword and swung it down. (p. 10)

Though at this point in the story it is impossible for the reader to know the exact meaning of the author’s words, it is possible to begin speculating as to how the events will eventually grow and entwine into the story.

- Sharpen your interpretive powers by writing answers to the following questions:
 1. What are some possible reasons that Asta and her son were forced to live as outcasts in the year 1377?
 2. How might the boy’s feeling of shame and sin be connected to his mother’s plight?
 3. Why was the priest Asta’s friend when everyone else shunned her? Does he know the reason for her low social status? By his kindness, was he putting himself in danger?
 4. What secret could lead Aycliffe to stare upon the face of Asta’s son? What is a possible explanation for his interest in the boy’s physical features?
 5. How do you interpret the wealthy stranger’s words. . . “Are you not her kin? . . . Do you not see the consequences if you don’t?” Who might Aycliffe’s kin be? With such power, what consequences might he fear?
 6. How might Asta and her son be a threat to Aycliffe?
 7. What impending event do you suppose led Aycliffe to believe he must act quickly or suffer dire consequences?
 8. What could be a possible motive for Aycliffe’s hatred for Asta’s son and his desire to kill him?

- For each of the above questions, identify the event or conversation in the story that led you to your conclusion.
- Compare your answers with those of your classmates.
- As you read further into the story, amend your predictions.

Note to Teachers: Display individual student answers to the above questions on a bulletin board and require updates as reading progresses. Add other story clues to the mix as well. Changing predictions and interpretations can be used as springboards for class discussions.

Think, Write, Create

Whole Book Activities

Lord Furnival is like a ghost lurking in the story's background. The only *personal contacts* the author allows us to have with the illusive lord are glimpses of his funeral trappings, his tapestry image, and his widow. Yet, as we grasp the *effects* of his power and personality over the lives of so many, the phantom takes form. Character opinions and observations complete his portrait. Thus, we know the true nature of the apparition who was Crispin's father.

From the list below, choose *three* words that you think *best* describe Lord Furnival's character. Cite the words' definition, evidence from the story, and its source (the author, Bear, Widow Daventry, etc.) to support your choices.

<i>admirable</i>	<i>adventuresome</i>	<i>courageous</i>	<i>disrespectful</i>
<i>insensitive</i>	<i>intimidating</i>	<i>cruel</i>	<i>inspiring</i>
<i>ruthless</i>	<i>unscrupulous</i>	<i>avaricious</i>	<i>greedy</i>
<i>generous</i>	<i>humble</i>	<i>devious</i>	<i>ambitious</i>
<i>dependable</i>	<i>callous</i>	<i>merciless</i>	<i>barbaric</i>

Use your notes to write a composition about **Lord Furnival, the Phantom**. (See **Graphic Organizer # 9**.)

The author wrote "*Some claim he (Father Quinel) was the unwanted son of the previous Lord Furnival, who had provided him with the church living when Quinel was still a boy.*"

If this statement were true, then

- what kinship did Father Quinel share with the Lord Furnival who was Crispin's father?
- how did Father Quinel's circumstances play a part in Crispin's mother being imprisoned in Stromford Village?
- why did Father Quinel feel free to show kindness to Asta and agree to keep the secret of her son's ancestry?
- how was Father Quinel related to Crispin?
- how was Father Quinel a **double** threat to Lady Furnival?
- why was Father Quinel willing to risk his own life in order to help Crispin escape?
- what is the probable **full story** behind Father Quinel's murder?

It is an established fact that John Aycliffe was kin to Lady Furnival, but the actual nature of their relation was never revealed. What is your interpretation of this story component? Was John Aycliffe Lady Furnival's brother, brother-in-law, her nephew, her son? State your answer and then explain how you reached your conclusion.

Crispin's isolated existence in Stromford Village prevented him from knowing his own identity and kept him ignorant of life outside his own limited existence. Bear's experiences as a priest, a mummer, a soldier, and a juggler, on the other hand, had given him an accurate understanding of the world in which he lived.

- Do you think most people of 14th century England were more like Bear or more like Crispin? Explain the thinking behind your answer. Research to find some facts to back it up.
- Do you suppose that even today there are people who live in extreme isolation from the rest of the world? Do some research to prove or disprove your supposition.
- Explain how the *free exchange of information* makes our way of live remarkably different from the way people lived in 1377 England.

Orson Hrothgar—the Bear

Bear warned Crispin early on that he was like a bear—sweet and gentle, but he could turn into a brute when he was irritated. The big man soon proved the truth of his words and went on to reveal other aspects of his equally large personality.

From the list below, choose **four** words that you think describe the *most dominant* parts of Bear's character. Cite events from the story to support each of your choices. Include the words' definitions in your explanations as well.

intimidating
adventuresome
sympathetic
athletic
rebellious

intelligent
empathetic
friendly
independent
nurturing

humorous
forgiving
stalwart
confident
unselfish

energetic
loyal
self-reliant
charismatic
resourceful

devious
patient
optimistic
bold
sullen

Organize your thoughts below. Use the ideas you gathered to write a composition about **Orson Hrothgar—the Bear**.

Character Traits

Definition(s)

Supporting Story Events







