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April Morning

by

Howard Fast

1961



MonkeyNotes Study Guide by Ray Mescallado

<http://monkeynote.stores.yahoo.net/>

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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

The story takes place over roughly twenty-four hours in the town of Lexington, Massachusetts and its outskirts at the beginning of the American Revolution. The first chapter takes place late in.....

LIST OF CHARACTERS

Major Characters

Adam Cooper - A fifteen-year-old boy who lives in Lexington, Massachusetts and is present for what becomes the very start of the American Revolutionary War.

Moses Cooper - The father of Adam, a man with strong principles and a leader among the Lexington Committeemen. He is one of the casualties of that first confrontation in Lexington.

Granny Cooper - The mother of Moses Cooper, she is a widow whose other children have all died before the start of the novel.

Levi Cooper - The younger son of Moses and Sarah Cooper, he is more enthused by war as he considers it a game.

Sarah Cooper - The wife of Moses Cooper and the mother to Adam and Levi.

Ruth Simmons - Adam's second cousin once removed and the girl he loves.

Joseph Simmons - The father of Ruth Simmons, often referred to as Cousin Simmons by the Coopers, he is the blacksmith for Lexington and a man of strong moral character.

The Reverend - The spiritual leader of Lexington who has no choice but to engage in battle with the British troops.

Solomon Chandler - A sixty-one-year-old man who saves Adam and leads him to meet other colonial militiamen battling the marching British army.

Minor Characters

Isaiah Peterkin - A deacon at the church who Adam considers wicked and two-faced.

Unnamed Committeeman - Speaking publicly in the Common about how doubt is the highest good, he is quoted by Adam to Granny.

Samuel Adams - A leader among the Committeemen whose atheism is criticized by Granny Cooper.....
Many additional characters are identified in the complete study guide.

CONFLICT

Protagonist - Adam Cooper, a fifteen year old living in Lexington, Massachusetts in April 1775.

Antagonist - The British army, who disrupt the peacefulness of Lexington with an attack on the town's militia as they march towards Concord. On a broader thematic level, Adam is also engaged in a battle with

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Climax - Adam engages the British soldiers in battles throughout the day, eventually.....

Outcome - With his father dead from the initial attack, Adam returns home as the new....

SHORT PLOT SUMMARY (Synopsis)

Adam Cooper is a fifteen-year-old living in colonial Lexington, Massachusetts with his family. He feels oppressed by his father, Moses Cooper, but finds consolation from Granny Cooper, his paternal grandmother. When a meeting of the township Committee is called on the evening of April 18^t, Adam wishes to attend but Moses questions whether or not his son is a man yet and has earned the right to do so. Adam instead visits his neighbor and second cousin Ruth Simmons, whom he loves and sees himself marrying in the distant future. When his father returns home from the meeting, Adam eavesdrop as Moses tells his wife Sarah and Granny Cooper what happened, as the colonial communities prepare for a possible confrontation with the British army. Sometime after midnight, a rider arrives in Lexington, waking up the community with news that the British army is on the march to Concord to take out munitions being stored by colonists for a possible rebellion. A muster is held for the militia, and Adam decides to sign the muster book and commit to fighting for the militia. His father is present when it happens and allows this; later, Moses explains to an upset Sarah that he could tell Adam was determined to do this.

Moses and Adam prepare themselves and a total of seventy militia men wait for the arrival of the British army. Moses argues persuasively that they can not stand up to the thousands of troops they will be greeting, and so it's decided that they will state their case but do no more. When the British finally reach Lexington, the officers are sneeringly dismissive of the colonists and tells them to leave the common. A mysterious shot is fired, then British troops begin firing on the colonists. Adam watches as his father Moses, Jonas Parker, Sam Hodley, and others are killed. He hides in the smokehouse of a neighbor, but is discovered by his brother Levi. Levi tells him about their mother and grandmother bringing home the body of their dead father. Adam cannot go home because of the British troops in town, but assures Levi he will be alright. He is almost discovered by British soldiers, but before they do so are called away to march towards Concord. Adam goes on a.....

THEMES

Major Themes

There are two over-arching themes which encapsulate all the other major and minor themes in the book, sometimes individually and sometimes combined. The first over-arching theme is Coming of Age - that is, the point when an entity matures into a fully-developed state, whether it's a young man or a nation. The second such theme is Order Versus Chaos: the tension created between these two values, and the..... role each plays in life.

From these two themes, other major themes also develop. First, there is the Nature of War, which in this book alternates between the order of strategic planning and the.....

Minor Themes

Masculinity is a minor theme that adds a dimension to the Coming of Age theme for both Adam Cooper and the nascent America. Broad issues are engaged in passing, as this is a.....

MOOD

The mood of the story is somber, very serious and straightforward in its handling of the events. Certain cues in the book also indicate that the narrator is telling the story from some.....

Howard Fast - BIOGRAPHY

Howard Melvin Fast was born in New York City on November 11, 1914. He was the son of Jewish immigrants

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from different lineages: his mother Ida was a British Jew, while his father Barney Howard Fast was the son of Ukrainian immigrants. Howard Fast's mother died in 1923, and Howard was left to work at an early age. A voracious reader, he took to writing and his first novel, 1933's *Two Valleys* was published when Fast was nineteen; his first work to earn major acclaim, the historical novel *Citizen Tom Paine*, was published ten years later in 1943. Many critics agreed that this work served to rehabilitate the opinion of Thomas Paine. The following year saw *Freedom Road*, a novel set in the Reconstruction-era South about a former slave who becomes a United States Senator; the book was adapted into a television miniseries in 1979 starring boxer Muhammad Ali.

The work Fast is best known for today is 1951's *Spartacus*, which had been adapted into a film in 1960 by actor Kirk Douglas. This famous novel about a revolt by slaves in ancient Rome was.....

LITERARY / HISTORICAL INFORMATION

April Morning is often categorized as a work of historical fiction, a genre for which Howard Fast wrote extensively. The key event of this novel - the Battle of Lexington and Concord - did indeed happen, though Adam Cooper and his family are fictional characters. The blending of.....

CHAPTER SUMMARIES WITH NOTES / ANALYSIS

The Afternoon

Summary

Moses Cooper asks his son Adam if he has finished an unnamed chore, resulting in an exchange that reflects the tension between the two. Moses is very critical of his son, and holds him to lofty standards that Adam considers unfair. Moses then tells Adam to fetch water for his mother; as he does so, Adam's brother Levi catches him reciting a spell to ward off evil spirits from the water. Levi threatens to tell their father about this, as Moses strongly disapproves of any superstition.

Adam enters the house as his mother Sarah is frying donkers for dinner. Sarah warns her son of his brooding, and so he goes upstairs to speak with Granny, who is the mother of Moses. They talk about religious matters as Adam continues being petulant. He argues that if Granny believes in God and God gave people brains, why does using one's brains so often lead to accusations of being sinful? Granny dismisses this, saying that causing doubt in a person's faith is the most sinful thing one can do. When Adam claims that he overheard a Committeeman calling doubt the highest good, Granny counters that he must have been a Sam Adams Committeeman, which meant he was an atheist. As the two head down together for supper, Granny stresses that the Cooper family has a long tradition of education and piety; Adam states that he may well be the exception to this.

Granny, Moses, Sarah, Adam, and Levi Cooper sit down for the supper prepared by Sarah. An empty chair is always left as a sign of hospitality, Moses claims, though Adam suspects it's for the sake of his father having an audience during mealtimes. As Moses says grace before the meal, he berates God for not bringing enough rain to the crops. Granny is upset by this but says nothing. As they eat, Adam thinks about going out to sea with his maternal uncle Captain Ishmael Jamison, though he knows such a choice would anger his father. Moses then lays a trap for his son: he asks if Adam is a man, pointing out he is already a man's size physically. Adam agrees, only to be scolded severely for reciting that spell earlier by the well. Moses goes on at length about how such superstitions are a display of ignorance and an affront to his modern way of thinking. Granny cuts this short, rebuking her son for being ill-tempered and proud.

Before it goes any further, their neighbor and cousin, Joseph Simmons, arrives to sit in the waiting empty chair and join in their meal. Cousin Simmons has been tasked with the committee to write a statement on the rights of

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man, and he proceeds to read a draft to Moses when he's stopped short by Moses' expression. Moses disagrees with the opening statement that the rights of man are derived from God and His will: he believes such a religious approach does not suit the needs of the statement, that it only muddies the issues unnecessarily.

Adam expresses a desire to attend the committee meeting that evening, but Moses questions if he is truly a man yet, and thus deserving of this privilege. Moses and Cousin Simmons leave for the meeting, and Adam asks his mother and Granny why his father hates him so much. Sarah tries to assure Adam that it's just the way Moses is, while Granny Cooper adds that it's Moses' nature to find fault with anyone and anything. Adam leaves the house and sees Levi outside; Levi asks if he's going to get beaten, but Adam simply heaps more threats on him.

Notes

Given the structure of the book and its main action, this first chapter feels more like a prologue than the actual onset of the novel proper. However, it's important because it establishes a strong sense of colonial life as well as focuses squarely on the conflict between Adam and his father Moses. By making Adam's maturity an issue of familial tensions in this chapter and not simply a precursor to some historical event, the novel does a better job of making the Revolutionary War era more accessible to readers, showing that everyday concerns were the same then as they are now. This contributes a great deal to making the history feel truly lived, as well as to better depict the way war can tear through the normal rhythms of everyday life.

The Evening

Summary

Though he doesn't attend the meeting, Adam narrates what he heard took place there: among the topics discussed were the count of weapons being kept in town, the Reverend's decision to quote Maccabees so frequently when those books are considered apocrypha, and whether or not a town newspaper was viable. The topic of a newspaper turned into a debate between the pro-Samuel Adams radicals and anti-Samuel Adams egalitarians, as Adams stressed the importance of such an organ. Moses Cooper spoke in favor of the newspaper, as he imagined himself in the role of editor. The meeting concluded with a discussion of whether or not minutes should be kept, and Moses spoke passionately about the importance of keeping such records - something he recounted in detail to his wife afterwards, even though she disapproved of the denunciations he made in the process.

While the meeting was taking place, Adam walked to the Simmons place to visit Ruth. Cousin Simmons was the town blacksmith and had broke off relations with his brothers when they decided to invest in slavers. Arriving at the Simmons home, Adam is greeted by Mrs. Simmons and her widow sister Susan, who were reading the Book of Job aloud from the Bible; they feed him sweet carrot pie and ask him to read from the Book of Judges, but Ruth came down and told them Adam was there to visit him. The two are permitted to take a walk outside, as Mrs. Simmons feels such a walk is safer when the grass is wet and cold rather than dry during the daytime. Adam had known Ruth since they were children, but only recently have they fallen in love. However, Adam is still vexed when Ruth brings up the topic of marriage, as it's not something he wishes to consider yet.

During their walk, Mrs. Spencer sees them and expresses her disapproval. Adam apologizes to Mrs. Spencer as they pass her, leading to a discussion between himself and Ruth about his father and how he kept Adam from attending the Committee meeting. Ruth asks him to be patient, as he is only fifteen and still needs time to mature. Adam mentions working for Uncle Ishmael Jamison, prompting Ruth to ask if he's the smuggler with a colored wife in Jamaica. Adam grows angry with this, declaring it a false rumor; after the

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OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Adam Cooper - As this story is focused on the experiences of one man over the course of one day, there is little in the way of dramatic character development for anyone but that main character, Adam Cooper. It can be argued that all the characters are severely impacted by the sudden intrusion of violence and death, changing their world forever in an indelible, even historical, manner. But even in that light, there is little time for the reflection as the characters are only beginning to feel the impact of what they've.....

Moses - Moses' character develops in so far as he is able to finally recognize the new maturity in his son, then dies at the hands of the British. This is crucial in that Adam needs this validation in.....

Solomon Chandler - As with Moses Cooper in death, Solomon Chandler's character does not change but Adam's perception of him shifts over the course of the novel's day. At first he seems like a helpful guide and fount of wisdom for Adam, who is still traumatized by his father's death and

Additional characters are analyzed in the complete study guide.

PLOT STRUCTURE ANALYSIS

The most obvious structure is the twenty-four hour time frame of the novel and how chapters are broken down to different times of day. Specific times are not given as chapter headings (for example, "Midnight to 4 AM") and there is often confusion about what is the exact time during certain events. This creates a more organic sense of time and its passing, which helps reinforce the notion of a simpler age that was more in touch with the natural rhythms of the world.

One can also posit that the memoir aspect of the narration - clear indications that Adam is telling his story a considerable time after they occurred - is behind this structural decision. That is, Adam the narrator is focusing on what's important to him in his own present day, and in doing so the sense of.....

THEMES – THEME ANALYSIS

The arching theme of Coming of Age is almost self-explanatory as the novel is based on Adam's struggle with maturity and the sudden imposition of adult responsibilities due to the start of the Revolutionary War. As the character analysis shows, Adam begins the novel as a teenager who wishes to be seen as more mature by his parents but is unable to prove himself. The historical and the personal are woven closely together for Adam's story, as his own maturation corresponds to the awakening of America's national identity. As a stand-in for the nascent American identity, Adam must fight for the principle of inalienable human rights while still maintaining a strong moral standard - to be willing to fight for nationhood and all its stands for, but not become bloodthirsty in that pursuit. Adam succeeds personally in the end, though at the cost of his innocence. Adam is sharply aware of this loss at the end, but knows there is no turning back.

Perhaps what's most interesting about this theme is how much it is centered on Adam's development but no one other character's. Part of this may be attributed to Adam being the narrator, another part to the limited time frame. Still, the profound change in Adam's outlook can be starkly contrasted to the way others continue on very much in the same manner as before. The adults deal with death and loss in their own manner, but there is no Coming of Age for them, of course. Despite having witnessed war up-close, Levi is.....

Additional themes are thoroughly analyzed in the complete study guide.

AUTHOR'S STYLE

The writing has the nature of a personal memoir more than a distanced, objective historical narration. The narrative voice is intriguing in that certain clues make clear that the story is being told by Adam Cooper long

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after the even. Because of the insights this older Adam provides, we are better able to believe that Adam is maturing over the course of this fateful day - that is, "becoming a man" in.....

IMPORTANT QUOTATIONS – QUOTES AND ANALYSIS

The novel begins in an intriguing fashion:

When I turned back to the house, my father called after me and asked me did I figure that I was finished. "I figure so," I said, and then my father said, in that way he has of saying something that cuts you down to half of your size or less:

"Slow to start and quick to finish."

He said it plain and quiet, but it was of a piece and it reminded me that I couldn't think of a time when he had said something pleasing or gentle with love or concern; and I replied to him, but not aloud - for which I didn't have the guts at all - "If just once in all my born days you'd say a good thing to me, then maybe I'd show good to you, and be able to do what you want me to do, and maybe read your mind or your soul." (7)

The opening phrase "When I turned back to the house" - and further, the sentence closes with a reference to something which is not explained. This is a technique known as *in media res*, where the reader starts in the middle of the action, not given any expository information or context beyond the immediate moment. Ironically, the action here isn't some great battle or dramatic turning point, but a chore being questioned by a father. We are never told what the task is exactly, from which Adam is turning back to the house and his father questions Adam's ability in completing. As a result, what is placed firmly in the reader's mind isn't a mundane chore of any sort but a vivid sense of the tension between father and son and the dissatisfaction each feels for the other.

By starting the novel with such a scene, several things are achieved. First, history is made livelier: a casual reader may fear that a historical novel will be dryly factual in its accounts, that the dead past will remain dead on the pages of a book. The style and chosen focus of Fast's novel work against such a staid approach, dramatizing not just the historical events but the life of the fictitious protagonist in a manner that is recognizable to most readers. Further, since this novel is being narrated by Adam at some later date after the events described, it also creates the sense of jumping into the middle of a conversation Adam, again adding to the sense of immediacy.

Although there were only five of us in the immediate family, our table was always set with places for six, Mother at one end, Father at the other, Granny facing the two boys. The empty chair was next to Granny. My father claimed that the empty chair was, as he put it, a manifesto

Many additional quotations are analyzed in the complete study guide.

SYMBOLISM / MOTIFS / METAPHORS / IMAGERY / SYMBOLS

Adam's name itself is symbolic, as it immediately brings to mind the Biblical Adam. This focuses the primacy of his experience: he may not be the first young man to mature at a time of war, but for each person there is an immediacy to such an event which feels unique. In contrast, the name of his father Moses ends up having its own allusions: like the Biblical figure, Moses Cooper seeks to lead his people - the citizens of Lexington, and indeed of all the English colonies - to a promised land free from oppression by the British crown. (However, that did not mean breaking off from the Empire, as his statements clearly made.) And like the Biblical Moses, Moses Cooper dies before reaching this goal.

One motif in the book is the elasticity of time: the way events mold and distort the way time is perceived, sometimes slowing it down and other times speeding it up. This.....

IMPORTANT / KEY FACTS SUMMARY

- **Title:** *April Morning*.
- **Author:** Howard Fast.
- **Date Published:** 1961.
- **Meaning of Title:** April 19, 1775, the day of The Battle at Lexington and Concord, which is considered the start of the American Revolutionary War.
- **Setting:** The Massachusetts towns of Lexington and Concord, and the environs surrounding them.
- **Genre:** Historical fiction.
- **Protagonist:** Adam Cooper.
- **Antagonist:** The British army.....

STUDY QUESTIONS – MULTIPLE CHOICE QUIZ

1. What does Levi catch Adam doing at the well?
 - a. Reciting a spell to ward off spirits.
 - b. Drinking the water before boiling it.
 - c. Kissing Ruth Simmons.
 - d. None of the above.
2. Who died in the massacre at the Lexington Commons?
 - a. Jonas Parker.
 - b. Moses Cooper.
 - c. Samuel Hodley.
 - d. All of the above.....

ANSWER KEY

1.) a 2.) d 3.) b 4.) c 5.) d 6.) b 7.) c 8.) c 9.) a 10.) a 11.) b 12.) a 13.) d 14.) d 15.) c

ESSAY TOPICS – BOOK REPORT IDEAS

- 1.) How effective is the one-day structure of *April Morning* both dramatically and thematically? What is lost, and what in turn is gained? Give specific examples. How would the story change if its scope was expanded by another day, or a whole week, or even a month or year?
- 2.) What aspects of colonial life seem alien to us today? What aspects remain the.....

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