

the door in the wall study guide

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For the novel by
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Synopsis

Ever since he could remember, Robin, son of Sir John de Bureford, had been told that like his father, he, too, would learn the ways of knighthood. But Robin is struck down by an illness that leaves him unable to use his legs. Left alone in plague-ridden London, Robin is taken to the monastery of St. Mark's by a kindly monk named Brother Luke.

Robin is saddened that, without use of his legs, he will be unable to become a knight like his father. "Thou hast only to follow the wall far enough," Brother Luke tells Robin, "and there will be a door in it." Recovering at the monastery, Robin discovers that door. He becomes skilled at woodcarving and swimming, and is taught to use his mind as well as his hands. He is also given a more valuable lesson in patience.

Robin is sent to the castle of Sir Peter de Lindsay where he was to learn the ways of knighthood. Robin wonders what sort of page he can be having to use crutches and without free hands for service, but when the castle comes under attack, it is Robin who must help save the townspeople.

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8. honey cakes for largess
foolishness selfishness generosity
9. The farrier is making the tool.
blacksmith farmer knight
10. passed under the portcullis
drawbridge window gate

Similes and Metaphors:

An author sometimes uses *similes* or *metaphors* to make writing more descriptive. A *simile* is a comparison that shows how two different things are alike. A simile uses words such as *like* or *as* to compare. For example: The lemonade was as refreshing as a spring rain. A *metaphor* is a comparison of two different things without using words such as *like* or *as*. One thing is said to *be* the other thing. For example: The canvas of the evening sky was painted in bright colors.

Each of the following sentences contains a *metaphor* or *simile*. Put an **M** in the space after the sentence if the comparison is a metaphor. Put an **S** if the comparison is a simile. Then write down the two things that are being compared.

Example: Robin's face was drawn into a black cloud of anger. M
 Robin's face is compared to an angry, black cloud

1. They knelt in the woods, as if it had been a cathedral, as indeed it looked to be. _____

_____ is compared to _____

2. He would know what it was like to make his bed on God's earth . . . and instead of brocaded bed curtains, see dark clouds making a canopy over him. _____

_____ is compared to _____

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3. How does Robin help as the attack on the castle begins?

Thinking About the Story:

4. When Robin shivered at the thought of swimming in the icy water, Brother Luke tells him, “It strengthens thy spirit to do a hard thing.” What do you think he means?
5. When Robin is making keys for the harp, John tells him, “Thou canst but try. Anyone can *not* do it.” Explain his meaning.

Dig Deeper:

6. How has Robin changed since the beginning of the book?
7. Do you think he would have changed as much had it not been for his disability? Explain your answer.

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Answer Key

“Robin drew the coverlet . . .” and “May came in . . .”

Vocabulary:

Dictionary definitions: 1. annoyance; 2. faithful, loyal; a feudal lord; 3. decayed, rotten; 4. persuading, cajoling, coaxing; 5. food fit for human consumption; 6. horse; 7. a book containing the hymns, offices and prayers for the canonical hours; 8. a light porous rock used as an abrasive and polish; 9. disrespectful, brash.

Monastery terms: b-chapel, a-refectory, e-choir, g-scriptorium, d-almonry, h-hospice, c-cell, i-cloister, f-postern.

Questions:

1. Robin spent the time in bed listening to the sounds outside and looking at the carvings on the ceiling.
2. Robin’s parents thought he had gone to the castle of Sir Peter de Lindsay. He was to learn the ways of knighthood there.
3. Dame Ellen became ill with the plague.
4. A poor widow from the hospice of St. Mark’s knew that Ellen had become ill and that all the servants had fled, leaving Robin alone.
5. Hundreds of travelers were at the hospice seeking rest and shelter. Many of the poor people of London were at the almonry seeking clothing and food
6. Brother Luke gave Robin a piece of wood to carve. The days seemed to pass more quickly because, unlike while he was lying in his bed at home, Robin was keeping busy by doing something he found interesting.
7. Answers will vary. Should include the idea that if one searches hard enough, one can find an answer to a problem.
8. No. Answers will vary. He may have been used to the idea, and he seemed to be able to keep up with the other boys.
9. Answers will vary. Robin may have rebelled against using crutches if told to do so.
10. Answers will vary. He is alive, he has people who care for him, his family is wealthy and influential, etc.
11. Answers will vary. Robin felt very sad, lonely, and sorry for himself at the beginning. At the monastery his feelings changed to happiness and excitement over finding the ability to carve wood. Developing this skill helped change his feelings.
12. Answers will vary. Robin realized he was capable of doing some things for himself, which helped Robin feel better about himself.
13. Answers will vary.

“As the days grew warmer . . .” and “June passed . . .”

Vocabulary: 1. b; 2. a; 3. c; 4. a; 5. a; 6. c; 7. d; 8. c.

Questions:

1. Robin learned to carve wood, read, write, and swim. He studied history, the stars, and turned the pages of the missal during choir rehearsals.
2. Robin carves a wooden doll for a little girl. He shows the other boys how to make boats.
3. Answers will vary. Brother Luke is drawing a similarity between Robin’s crutches and Jesus’ cross. Robin must endure having to use crutches like Jesus had to endure the cross. “We all have our crosses to bear,” is a saying that means we will all have trials in life. Point out Matthew 16:24.
4. Taking a swim daily helps Robin strengthen his arms. It also helps his disposition in that he is doing what the other boys are doing.
5. Robin is given the duties of turning the pages of the missal during choir rehearsals and helping Brother Matthew in the carpentry shop.
6. Answers will vary. Robin’s mischief shows that he is feeling fine and has practically forgotten about his illness, so it may be that his illness is gone.
7. Answers will vary. Reading is another way that Robin can get beyond his disability. Robin’s disability is like a wall in that he must find a way to not let his disability hold him back from a full life.
8. Answers will vary. Learning to move around on crutches will open up a whole new variety of activities for Robin.
9. Answers will vary. Robin would be proud to use crutches that he made. He then might not show any embarrassment about having to use them. Making and using them also makes it his choice rather than something imposed on him.