William Tell

Friedrich von Schiller

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Summary

Two Swiss men go see the Austrian Governor Gessler to complain about how the Austrians are mistreating the Swiss and putting up their taxes. The Governor is not interested in their problems and sends them away. Later, Konrad Baumgarten, who has killed one of the Governor's taxmen because the man had attacked his wife, is taken across a dangerous river by William Tell. Tell and his son, Walther, prepare to set off to Altdorf. Hedwig, Tell's wife, tries unsuccessfully to stop him, saying that Governor Gessler is in the town. In the town, Gessler tells a soldier to put his hat on a tree and orders the people to stop at the hat everyday and send their love to him and the Emperor. Tell and his son enter the town and are stopped by two soldiers. As they are taking him to prison, the Governor arrives. Walther informs the Governor that his father can hit an apple with his crossbow from a hundred feet, so Gessler orders an apple to be placed on the head of Tell's son. Tell hits the apple. However, the Governor takes him to prison because he discovers Tell had intended to kill him if the arrow had killed his son. In a boat on the way to the prison Tell kills the Governor. Then the Emperor is killed by his fellow Austrians and William Tell is proclaimed a hero and Switzerland is free.

Background and themes

Scenery: Tell and his friends live in a beautiful country with mountains and fast flowing rivers. They are rural people, poor but proud.

Independence: The book represents the struggle the Swiss endured under their oppressive Austrian rulers and the successful liberation of their country.

Discussion activities

Scenes 1–3

While reading (p. 3, after 'It's going to rain.')

1 **Write:** Put the students in pairs and ask them to write down all the names of types of weather they know in English. Put their suggestions on the board and add some of your own.

After reading

2 **Write and guess:** On the board, write *There is a short, thin tree near the Governor's office.* Elicit which word is wrong from the students (tall not short). Now students choose a sentence from Scenes 1–3 and rewrite it changing one word. Students walk around the classroom, reading out their sentences and the other students have to identify and correct the mistake.

Scenes 4–6

While reading (p. 8, after 'They're playing a game.')

3 **Discuss:** Put the students in groups and ask them to discuss the following questions: *Do you like playing games? What games do you play? Do you play computer games? Is your country good at games?*

After reading

4 **Game:** Put the students in pairs and tell them there are ten words in Scenes 4–6 that can be used to describe a person. The pair which find the words the quickest, wins.

Scenes 7–9

While reading (p. 15, after 'Don't play this man's games.')

5 **Role play:** Put the students in groups of three and tell them to act out a conversation between Walther, Stauffacher and Tell. Stauffacher tries to convince Tell not to fire the arrow, Walther wants him to do it and Tell has to make up his mind.

After reading

6 **Quote quiz:** Put the students in small groups and tell them they have to write down the names of the people who said the following:
- a 'My time is important and you are not.' (Gessler.)
- b 'Look at the river it's dangerous. I want to help but I can't.' (Ruodi, the boatman.)
- c 'My wife came to me for help.' (Baumgarten.)
- d 'He doesn't like you. Stay at home and go tomorrow.' (Hedwig.)
- e 'I want to see the town and the people.'(Walther.)
- f 'This man and his son didn't stop for your hat.' (Soldier.)
- g It was for you – a dead Governor for a dead son.' (Tell.)
- h 'Listen! The Emperor is dead!' (Stauffacher.)

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