

The Broken Blade

by William Durbin

Pierre's Journey 1800

1 What would be the names of some of the rivers Pierre might travel on the way to Fort William?

Pierre would travel on the St. Lawrence River, the Ottawa River, and the French River.

2. Why would it be difficult crossing Lake Superior?

It would be difficult to cross Lake Superior because the lake is so big and if a storm

came the canoes would be in danger of capsizing.

(Please turn to the Author's Note concerning fur trading in the 1800's and then fill in the blanks in the following paragraph with words from the word box.)

canoe routes
beaver

New France
mink

voyageur
posts

status
power

Furs were a symbol of **status** and **power** in medieval Europe. Less valuable furs such as **mink** and **beaver** were worn by the middle class. Royalty could wear ermine, sable, and marten. In the 1700's French explorers laid claim to vast tracts of land that became known as **New France**. Later adventures mapped out **canoe routes** and established **posts** along the frontier. Thus began the era of the **fur trade**.

Chapter 1 “An Errant Stroke” pp. 1-5

1. What was Pierre’s father doing when Pierre woke up on this Saturday morning in the spring?

chopping wood

2. Why does Pierre need to run to get Dr. Guilliard?

Pierre’s father cut his thumb badly

3. How does Pierre react when he sees Celeste, Dr. Guilliard’s daughter, in the entrance to the house?

Pierre froze and blushed

4. Why does Pierre feel guilty about his father’s injury, and how does Pierre react to the sight of his father’s bandaged thumb?

He thought he should have been cutting the kindling. He cried when he saw his father’s bandaged thumb.

Define *voyageur* (p. 5) by looking it up online at The Canadian Encyclopedia.

A *voyageur* was an adventurer who journeyed by canoe from Montréal to the interior to trade with Indians for furs. (<http://thecanadianencyclopedia.com>)

Chapter 2 “Pierre’s Plan” pp. 6-19

1. What does Pierre’s father tell him about the accident?

His father said it was his own clumsiness that caused the accident.

2. What is “Pierre’s Plan” instead of going to school?

He decides to sign on as a voyageur.

3. Who speaks up for Pierre so that Commander McKay hires him as a middleman in a brigade of the North West Company?

Charbonneau, who was Pierre’s father’s friend.

4. Name the rival company of the North West Company.

The Hudson’s Bay Company

5. Describe La Petite, the supplies man who Pierre works with for the first day.

He was as big as a giant, with frizzy black hair and deerskin pants and shirt

6. Who is Beloit and how does he treat Pierre?

Beloit is an evil-looking voyageur who mocks Pierre.

7. What is Pierre’s new nickname earned by the end of the first day?

Grandpa

Chapter 3 “Adieu” pp. 20-24

1. Compare how Pierre’s mother and father react to his becoming a voyageur?

Father, Charles La Page:

Pierre’s father is proud of him.

Mother, Mrs. La Page:

Pierre's mother is disappointed and worried.

Chapter 4 "Departure" pp. 25-35

1. Who are the other voyageurs Pierre knows who will travel in his boat?

Charbonneau and Emile Duval from his school

2. Why do you think the voyageurs dress up for departure and make such a big deal of being the fastest canoe?

They are proud to be going off for the summer and they are competitive

3. What takes place at the stone church of St. Anne?

The voyageurs stop to ask a blessing for their trip

4. What do all the men do when they enter the church? Why?

They deposit coins in the box, cross themselves and say a prayer. They would have been Catholic and this is part of their worship as they request God's blessing.

5. What is Pierre's response to Emile when he asks? "Paddling sure beats reciting those Latin poems of Sister's, don't it?"

Pierre preferred learning Latin to paddling. He found paddling much harder.

Chapter 5 "Massacre Island" pp. 36-47

1. How far have they traveled the first day, and what is Charbonneau's comment about the distance?

They travelled 25 miles and Charbonneau called that a holiday.

2. Why does Pierre's crew have to gather firewood for everyone, and why does he feel responsible?

Pierre's crew had to gather firewood because they were the last to the campsite. Pierre

was not able to paddle hard at the end.

3. What do the men do after supper.

Drink brandy, talk at the fire, and some play rough games.

4. How do the voyageurs sleep?

They wrap themselves in their blankets and sleep under canoes.

Chapter 6 “First Light” pp. 48-54

Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1. Although it is still dark, Beloit wakes Pierre late and everyone is ready to carry packs to the canoes. How does Pierre feel and why does he want to carry two packs like everyone else?

Pierre is embarrassed to wake so late and he wants to prove to Beloit and the others that he is able to do the same work as them.

2. What had made his single pack so heavy, and what does Pierre realize when he finally completes his carry and collapses on the beach?

Someone had stuffed Pierre’s pack with lead balls which were very heavy. He realizes that the men have all had bets on how well he would do and he actually did very well.

Chapter 7 “The Long Sault” pp. 55-63

Answer these questions in complete sentences.

1. What river are they on and how do they “track” a rapids?

They are on the Ottawa River. They “track” a rapids by pulling the canoe up with ropes.

2. What advice is Pierre given to help him forget about the pain of paddling, and why is this important as they are about to hit the “big water” ahead?

Pierre is told to forget that he is paddling and to tell the blisters that they don't hurt.

When they hit the “big water” they will be paddling 15 hours a day and Pierre must be strong in his mind.

3. Describe the portage at the base of the rapids. How many crosses are on the hillside?

The crosses are in memory of voyageurs who have died. There are nineteen crosses.

What gift does La Londe give Pierre for winning the wager.

La Londe gives Pierre a knife.

Chapter 8 “Night of the Kettle Dance” pp. 63-73

1. When they eat supper that night, how does Pierre get even with Beloit for all the teasing?

He served Beloit a duck foot.

2. What is the “kettle dance” and what do the voyageurs sing about?

The men sing about their bravery and overcoming the hardship they will face.

Chapter 9 “A Long Day’s Paddle” pp. 74-78

1. What time does the brigade get up to leave, and what trick does La Londe play on Commander McKay?

The brigade gets up at 4 am. La Londe makes the tent collapse on McKay.

2. What trick does La Londe show Pierre to help protect his swollen hands?

La Londe wrapped deerskin around Pierre’s paddle handle.

3. Why do you think La Londe is so kind and helpful to Pierre?

La Londe remembers when he was Pierre’s age and how hard it was when he started.

Chapter 10 “The Confluence of Mattawa” pp. 79-82

1. What times does Pierre remember that he spent at home, and with whom does he compare La Londe?

Pierre remembers Christmas at home and times he spent with his father. La Londe reminds him of his father.

2. How does Pierre react to Beloit’s killing of the deer, and how does his attitude change at supper?

Beloit’s evil character makes the killing of the deer seem to violent and rude but by supertime Pierre is glad for the meat.

Chapter 11 “The French River” pp. 83-91

1. What do the three red crosses made of broken paddles mean?

The crosses signify that three men have died there.

2. What does a broken blade mean?

The broken blade means the voyageur has died and will not paddle again.

3. How far is the run to Lake Huron, and why will it be an easy run?

The 70 mile run on the French River is downhill all the way.

4. How does La Londe save the canoe from being hit by McKay?

La Londe lept over the side and heaved the canoe out of the way.

Chapter 12 “A Broken Blade” pp. 92-96

1. When do they give up trying to find La Londe?

Just before sundown when they find the 2nd piece of La Londe’s paddle.

2. What is Pierre’s reaction to the loss?

Pierre is very sad and feels incredibly tired. He wishes it had been Beloit instead of La

Londe who had died.

Chapter 13 “La Cloche Rock” pp. 97-102

1. What advice did Charbonneau give the boys as they mourned La Londe’s death?

Don’t let the sadness touch you too deeply because you can’t loose your edge or you

too might die.

2. Who takes over for La Londe as bowman on Pierre’s canoe?

Benoit

3. How is Beloit's treatment of the men different from La Londe's?

Instead of encouraging them, he screams insults at them.

Chapter 14 "Huron's Revenge" pp. 103-108

1. Where does the brigade "lay over" for two days after crossing the Huron. Find it on the map.

Sault Sainte Marie

2. What happened to Pierre as a boy that made him even more afraid of drowning?

When they were swimming, a large boy held him under the water until he almost drowned.

3. Who comes back to rescue Pierre's canoe?

La Petite, the cook.

Chapter 15 “Degrade” pp. 109-112

1. What does it mean to be “degrade” on a canoe trip?

They were grounded until the weather changed.

2. What is surprising about how Beloit acts after the fight at supper?

He is not angry, but congratulates La Petite for beating him.

Chapter 16 “Prettying Up” pp. 113-118

1. What are the men able to do with the oil cloths to help travel across Lake Superior?

They make sails to take advantage of the wind.

2. Why do you think the men clean up and dress up before entering Grand Portage?

They want to celebrate completing the trip. (Answers may vary)

3. Why does Beloit begin to tease Pierre at Grand Portage, and how does Pierre react at first?

Beloit thought they came in last because Pierre was a weak paddler. Pierre was so discouraged he wanted to cry.

4. Why does Pierre finally hit Beloit and what is Beloit’s reaction?

When Beloit tripped Pierre, he gets so angry he punches him. Beloit treats him with respect finally.

5. Why do you think Beloit acted like this instead of going after Pierre?

Pierre finally showed he was tough and strong. That is what the men respect. It was important for Pierre to stand up for himself. (Answers will vary).

Chapter 17 “Grand Portage” pp. 119-127

1. What had Pierre’s father told him about the Athabascans?

They were legendary in strength and endurance. They carried packs of 110 pounds, were hired for 5 year terms, bragged constantly and picked fights with the voyageurs to prove their toughness.

3. How is Charbonneau’s Ojibwa friend dressed?

He has a wide-brimmed hat with a sash and ostrich feathers. A silk handkerchief around his neck with a red checkered shirt and blue coat. The coat had lace on the shoulders and sleeves. He had burgundy breeches with one gray sock and one red sock held up by garters. He had no shoes.

4. In what language does Mukwa speak to Charbonneau, and what might that tell you about Mukwa’s past?

He speaks French and has likely lived or travelled with the French for a long time.

5. Why does Mukwa dress like he does?

Bright colours are a sign of wealth and he trades furs for lace and decorations

6. What surprised Pierre about how the women viewed Beloit?

They thought his scars were badges of honour instead of thinking he was ugly.

Define the following.

pork eaters p. 119 men who headed back to Montreal before autumn

hivernants p. 119 men who wintered in company outposts

Chapter 18 “Mukwa’s Wigwam” pp. 128-135

1. What does McKay tell Pierre to do in case he wants to winter with the group and become a hibernant?

To tend to his studies so he can become a clerk with the company.

2. Why does the dinner at Mukwa’s Wigwam cause Pierre to think of home?

The chief’s daughter, Kennewah, reminds him of Celeste. There was a baby the same age as his sister, Claire.

Chapter 19 Rendezvous” pp. 136-139

1. What kind of meat had they eaten the night before at Mukwa’s?

They ate the meat of a dog.

2. What name does the Ojibwa girl call Lake Superior?

Gitchegammi

3. Use a dictionary to find the meaning of the word *rendezvous*. Fort William was considered a rendezvous point for voyageurs. What happens in this chapter that causes the author to title the chapter “*Rendezvous*”?

Pierre has an unexpected rendezvous (meeting) with Kennewah.

Chapter 20 “Rubbaboo” pp. 140-148

1 What is Pierre’s plan if he returns to Grand Portage?

To get his schooling and secure a place as an officer of the company

2. Give two reasons for Pierre’s boat finally being able to win a race to the shore.

The new canoe was faster

They had paddled a boat boat on the way to Fort William which had caused them to build big muscles.

3. What is rubbaboo? a stew made from pemmican, flour and sugar

Chapter 21 “Homeward Bound” pp. 149-152

1. Why are the men in such a hurry to cross Lake Superior and get home?

The weather was good and they wanted to hurry before it turned bad.

2 How did the voyageurs show their respect La Londe?

When they passed his marker that shipped their oars, took off their caps and offered prayers.

Chapter 22 “The Last Portage” pp. 153-157

1. Why doesn't Pierre tell young Nolin about the weights in the back pack?

He realizes this is the way the boy earns a place as part of the team of voyageurs.

Chapter 23 “The Woodpile” pp. 158-163

1. Where does Pierre stop before going home?

He stops by at Celeste's house.

2. What is Pierre's father doing when Pierre returns home, and how is that ironic?

His father is chopping wood. That was how the story started and why Pierre went on this

journey in the first place. (Answers will vary)

3. When the story ends, Pierre is chopping wood. What is different about this than the beginning of the story. What does Father say happened to Pierre ?

Pierre should have been doing the chopping at the beginning of the story and now he is

taking his responsible place in the family. Father said that somewhere along the trail the

boy was buried and a man came to life instead. Pierre grew up all in one summer.

Source: <http://www.williamdurbin.com/resources.htm>