

Historical Fiction: His First Dollar

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After he became President, Lincoln told his Secretary of State the following story of the first dollar he ever had for his own:

Seward, he said, did you ever hear how I earned my first dollar? No, replied Seward. Well, I was about eighteen years of age . . . and had constructed a flatboat. . . . A steamer was going down the river. We have, you know, no wharves on the western streams, and the custom was, if passengers were at any of the landings they had to go out in a boat, the steamer stopping and taking them on board. I was contemplating my new boat, and wondering whether I could make it stronger or improve it in any part, when two men with trunks came down to the shore in carriages, and looking at the different boats, singled out mine, and asked: 'Who owns this?'

I answered modestly, I do.

'Will you,' said one of them, 'take us and our trunks out to the steamer?'

Certainly, said I. I was very glad to have a chance of earning something, and supposed that they would give me a couple of 'bits.' The trunks were put in my boat, the passengers seated themselves on them, and I sculled them out to the steamer. They got on board, and I lifted the trunks and put them on deck. The steamer was moving away when I called out:

You have forgotten to pay me.

Each of them took from his pocket a silver half-dollar and threw it on the bottom of my boat. I could scarcely believe my eyes as I picked up the money. You may think it was a very little thing, and in these days it seems to me like a trifle, but it was a most important incident in my life at that time. I could scarcely credit that I, a poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day—that by honest work I had earned a dollar. I was a more hopeful and thoughtful boy from that time.

CCSSR1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

These are questions you can ask and answer about any story. Write your answers on another page.

1. Sequence: Which event happened first? Which happened last?
2. Character Traits: Name one character. What is one trait you infer that character has? Explain why you think that.
3. Motive: What is something that person does? Why do you think that person does that?
4. Summarize: Summarize the story in four sentences. Tell about the characters and what they do.
5. Main Idea: What do you think is the main idea of the story? Why?