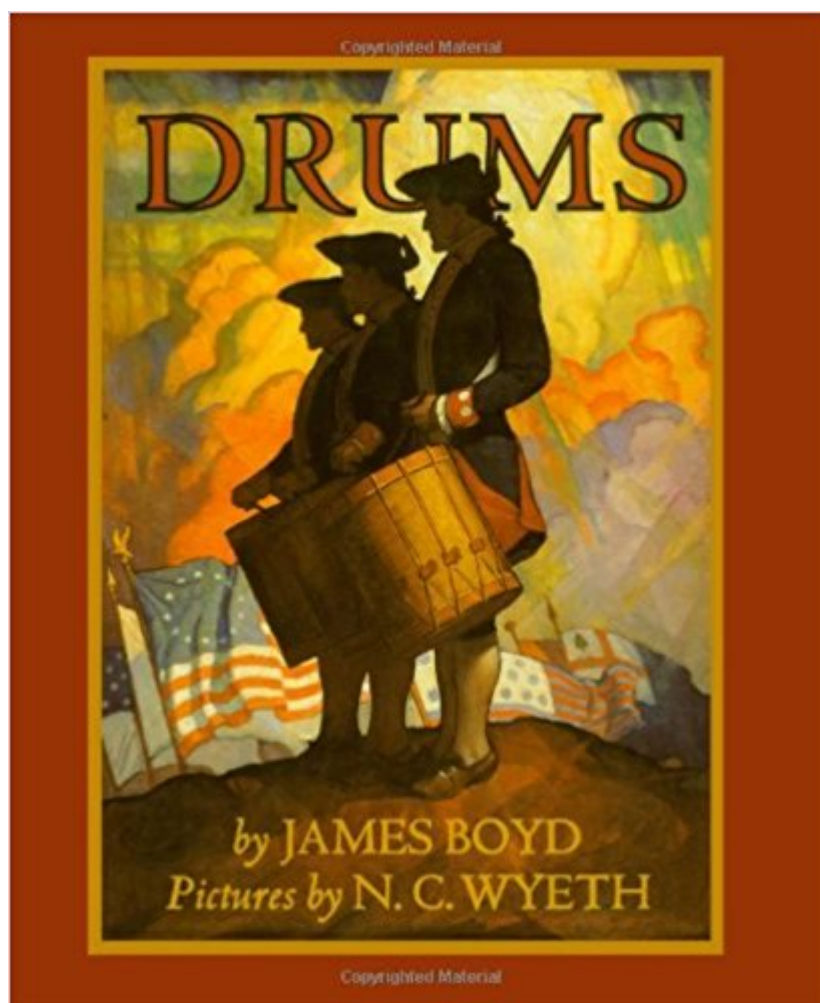


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# Drums (Scribner's Illustrated Classics)



## Synopsis

North Carolina-born Johnny Fraser is torn between his lifelong loyalty to the British Crown and the exciting talk of independence passing among his neighbors, and he joins the fight for freedom aboard the Bonhomme Richard.

## Book Information

Series: Scribner Illustrated Classic

Hardcover: 430 pages

Publisher: Atheneum; 1 edition (October 30, 1995)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0689801769

ISBN-13: 978-0689801761

Product Dimensions: 7.4 x 1.7 x 9.3 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.4 pounds

Average Customer Review: 3.8 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (31 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #639,228 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #103 inÂ Books > Teens >

Historical Fiction > United States > Colonial & Revolutionary Periods #293 inÂ Books > Teens >

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## Customer Reviews

Drums by Boyd has been called the best novel ever written about the Revolutionary War. Narrated from the viewpoint of a North Carolina Tory gentleman's adolescent son, it's unique outlook soon draws the reader into the drama of colonial unrest and the emotional battle men fought within themselves whether to cede from England or not. However, this is no psychological melodrama. Some of the most superb scenes in the novel are the depictions of a local horse race and a John Paul Jones sea battle. So why isn't Drums read more widely? It would seem Boyd's own excellent writing has gotten him into trouble for today's reader. Not only are his fight scenes realistic, but his coolly penetrating description of the early entrenchment of southern slavery, with all crudities of language and social class structure, is too graphic for our modern tastes. In short, he uses the "N" word too liberally. Reading this novel reminded me of reading HUCKLEBERRY FINN. It also reminded me of Olasky's FIGHTING FOR LIBERTY AND VIRTUE. Personally, I think it should be put back on high school reading lists. I think it would help in revealing why slavery was not addressed at the time of the Revolution as well as why it took a war to settle the matter.

I had never heard of James Boyd or his 1925 novel *Drums* until listening to historian David McCullough's speech, *The Course of Human Events*, wherein McCullough cited *Drums* as a historical novel he'd read as a child and helped inspire him to become a historian. That was enough for me to give it a look myself. *Drums* starts out set in North Carolina and features Johnny Fraser as the main character. Johnny is the son of a well-to-do Scottish immigrant with expectations of becoming a gentleman and dreams of adventure. The story begins when Johnny is a boy, and depicts his growth into a young man during the time of the American Revolution. While I was expecting the protagonist of a novel about the Revolutionary war to sign up for the Continental Army the moment shots are fired at Lexington, this turns out not to be the case in *Drums*. Instead, what we see is Johnny's struggle to determine the right course of action, torn between loyalty to the King and pride in his country. Meanwhile, we also get to see how Johnny's family, friends, and neighbors respond to the choice before them between loyalty and patriotism. This conflict is actually the central struggle of the drama. While there is action and we do eventually get to see some of the war, the focus is definitely on the civilian side of things, and the look at how civilians lived, and how they fared and the choices they had to make is very interesting. Since a large portion of the book is set in Revolutionary North Carolina, slavery is very present. Boyd doesn't shy away from the ugliness of the situation. It's presented much as it must have been, and as a simple fact that none question. While I certainly didn't enjoy reading those parts, per se, I appreciated Boyd's willingness to depict things honestly. There's no overt condemnation of slavery or the treatment of African-Americans, but in this case, showing things as they were and how even our protagonist doesn't give it a thought can in itself be powerful. One aspect that was a pleasant surprise was a historical connection between *Drums* and Robert Louis Stevenson's 1886 novel, *Kidnapped*. *Kidnapped* is set in Scotland of the 1750's, and given that Johnny's father is a Scottish immigrant, some of the major historical events of that time affect each novel. I'll say no more to avoid spoiling either book. I read an edition of *Drums* illustrated by N.C. Wyeth. Wyeth is a favorite of mine, having illustrated many young men's adventure stories of the era. His work here is again excellent. Wyeth contributes nine full color, full page illustration, as well as a small black and white drawing at the opening of each of the 47 chapters. Overall, I would have liked a novel about the Revolutionary War to have a bit more action, but *Drums* does an excellent job of depicting the rest of the Revolution, which often gets less attention, and the action it does include is quite good. If you're a fan of the American Revolution or historical fiction, *Drums* will probably appeal to you.

This is a story of a young man's coming of age prior to & during the American Revolution. It is

incredibly well written with terrific character development. This alone rates it 5 stars. What, for me, puts it into a realm beyond is the fact that the protagonist is flawed. Although he is depicted as participating in wondrous events, his motivations & actions are not always laudable. So, at the end of each chapter the reader is reminded that the author was aiming towards some element of realism in his novel rather than unrealistic (& easy) heroicism. When I finished this book I went searching for more of Mr. Boyd's books. Still looking...

I first saw the Scribner Illustrated Classics series in a Museum in Chicago. I believe Treasure Island was the first that I purchased. The Wyeth paintings were reproduced for this book and many others. The artwork is fabulous. I visited the Brandywine River Museum in Chadds Ford, PA to see many of the original Wyeth illustrations. The titles in this series are still classics and every bit as riveting as when I first read them. I have read some to children and they are great fun for all. I have collected the whole series, they will be passed on to children and grandchildren.

This was a slog of a read about a foppish young man trying to figure out how to comport himself during the American Revolution,,,,,that is when he was not perseverating on his clothes and status. This uninspiring character's story is told in the language and grammar of that time, making the read all the more tedious. That said, you do get a glimpse at the split within the populace in the south during the early days of the revolution which was interesting.

Kind of "old school" writing. Unique and very descriptive but well done. Not a "tour de force" but decent and good esp. if you are into the period and setting it takes place in. A decent story but lacks the punch of a great novel. I hope I don't damn it with faint praise because I have read far worse...

I haven't reread it yet, but I recall having enjoyed it years ago when I was in high school. The copy I received appeared to be new, with all the wonderful N.C. Wyeth illustrations that drew me to the book as a teen-ager. I had been expecting a used copy, so I was delighted with the book I received though I am not yet in a position to actually review it.

Very difficult to read. Too much effort was applied to printing correct sounding accent. The historical account was lost for me the unrealistic actions of the main character. He seems to be able to live in foreign countries without income. I doubt I will read another by this author.

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