



The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood

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The Work

The legend of the thirteenth century English outlaw Robin Hood developed during the following century in England's Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire, and Lancashire counties. Although scholars disagree on whether such a person actually existed, various versions of the legend have long appealed to young people with their exciting tales of a populist outlaw band that struggled against repressive authority in the persons of the Sheriff of Nottingham, Sir Guy of Gisbourne, King John, and King Edward II.

The Robin Hood legend crossed the Atlantic Ocean early in the British settlement of the American colonies, and it received perhaps its definitive schoolyard edition in Howard Pyle's *The Merry Adventures of Robin Hood*, which retold twenty tales and included wood-cut illustrations. Pyle's text stayed in print throughout the twentieth century. In 1953, Mrs. Thomas White of Indianapolis, a Republican member of Indiana's state textbook commission, demanded that references to Robin Hood be removed from textbooks because the legend promoted the communist doctrine of redistributing income by robbing from the rich in order to give to the poor. At the same time White also inveighed against Quakers because she noted that they do not believe in fighting wars. (It is unclear whether White knew that Howard Pyle was, in fact, a Quaker.)

In response to White's statement, Indiana's state superintendent of education, Wilbur Young, agreed to reread *Robin Hood* in order to consider the merit of the charge. However, the Indianapolis school superintendent, H. L. Shibler, refused to ban textbook references to Robin Hood, claiming that he saw nothing subversive about the Robin Hood stories. On November 14, 1953, *The New York Times* printed a response from the current sheriff of Nottingham, who unequivocally stated that "Robin Hood was no Communist."

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