

Pre-Reading Preparation**Standards Focus: Authors' Biographies****James Lincoln Collier and Christopher Collier**

"People who use language well have all kinds of advantages in life; it enhances their lives and their relationships with other people. And you don't learn how to use your language by watching television, you learn to use it by reading books!" –James Lincoln Collier

James Lincoln and Christopher Collier, sons of Edmund Collier and Katherine Brown, have collaborated since the early 1970's on historical fiction for adolescents. Generally recognized as masters of the genre, the men come from a family filled with writers and teachers. Their father wrote several biographies of western heroes for young adults, as well as short stories about the Old West. In addition, several of their aunts and uncles were writers. Born in New York City, both brothers gravitated toward their father's interest in history, albeit in different directions.

Christopher, the younger brother, taught social studies in Connecticut junior and senior high schools before earning a Ph.D. from Columbia University. He has taught American history at the college level since 1961. In 1985 he was named Connecticut State Historian. As a professor and historian he writes scholarly articles and books. One of his books about Yankee politics and the American Revolution was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize.

In 1950 James Lincoln graduated from Hamilton College, and has been a prolific writer ever since, with several books and more than 600 published articles to his credit. He has edited a magazine and written articles, adult novels, and nonfiction children's books which were often about music and musicians. His books for young readers range from a photo essay on firehouses to comic novels to books on musical theory. He worked for thirty years as a noted journalist. Meanwhile, he is an accomplished jazz musician who has played the trombone professionally in New York.

Together, James, the writer, and his brother Christopher, the historian, have collaborated to make history vivid and interesting for young readers, allowing adolescents to relate the lessons of the past to life today. The brothers' work process has evolved into a pattern of interaction. Christopher starts the exchange with an idea for teaching a historical period or a concept to the reader. After identifying the event and general setting, Christopher researches every aspect of the time period from the terrain and weather, to the food, clothing, and household utensils. He creates profiles for the characters who might be included, even researching to make certain they use authentic names that were popular for the time period. Then he writes descriptions for the characters, adds details to the setting and makes notes about everything that might be needed to make the story authentic to the time period.

Once Christopher has researched and outlined his story at his home in Connecticut, he sends the outline to James in New York City. As James completes the first draft, he might ask for more facts from Christopher. With a dedication to meticulous facts, the brothers will pass the manuscript back and forth until each is comfortable with both the accuracy of each detail and the excitement in the plot and action. James expects their books to be exciting, while Christopher thinks of their books as teaching vehicles— history lessons for kids.

Look for more of their Revolutionary novels, including The Bloody Country, and the Winter Hero.