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The Life of Samuel Johnson

James Boswell · *1791 · original English text*

Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709. The hosted text is Charles Grosvenor Osgood's abridgement of Boswell, not the complete 1791 Life. It still runs from the birth at Lichfield to the death in December, and it must be taught as an abridgement.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What is worth keeping, in an abridged Life, of a man who talked for a living memory, and can a shortened Boswell still show the mind and the friendship?

"Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709;"

The opening of the life, in this abridgement

The hosted text is Boswell's Life as abridged and edited by Charles Grosvenor Osgood (PG #1564), with an introduction that states the omissions: most of Boswell's criticisms and notes, legal opinions, most letters, and parts of the conversation. It is not the complete 1791 Life. The abridgement still includes the birth at Lichfield and the death in December (the 13th of December is in both witnesses). Map this edition; flag the abridgement clearly; do not quote Osgood's preface as Boswell. A conversation-rich biography, for a wide older band, of a Christian moralist and his friend.

KEY CHARACTERS

Samuel Johnson
The subject, born at Lichfield in 1709, whose talk and faith the Life remembers.

James Boswell
The friend and recorder, whose complete book is here abridged.

the Club, and the friends
The circle in which so much of the talk was kept.

Charles Grosvenor Osgood
The modern editor of this abridgement; his preface is not Boswell.

BORN AT LICHFIELD

> *"Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709;"*
>
> The opening of the life

Grades 11–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Born at Lichfield

THE OPENING OF THE LIFE

Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709, and his baptism was not delayed. The life begins in a market town and a parish church.

- The birth sentence is exact in this abridgement, in both witnesses.
- N. S. is this text's wording for the New Style date.
- This is Osgood's abridgement, not the complete 1791 Life.

> *"Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709;"*
>
> The opening of the life

02

School, Oxford, and a Hard Start

THE EARLY YEARS

A mind already large, a body already afflicted, and years of poverty before the Dictionary and the public fame.

- The early struggle is not cut out of this abridgement.
- Teach the afflictions with respect, not as comedy only.
- Cite this page, not a modernized Boswell.

03

A Friend Comes to London

THE MEETING WITH BOSWELL

The Life becomes, in its famous middle, a record of talk. Even in an abridgement, the conversations are the treasure, and also the test of what was cut.

- Flag what Osgood says he omitted: notes, most letters, parts of the talk.
- The friendship is the method, not a decoration.
- Do not quote the editor's preface as Boswell.

04

Club, Dictionary, and a Public Mind

THE YEARS OF FAME

Work, talk, a club, and a moral authority that was never only literary. Johnson's Christianity is on the page.

- Do not secularize the Life; the faith is part of the man recorded.
- The talk should be read as talk, not as a string of maxims only.
- A wide older band can read this abridgement with help.

05

A Death in December

THE CLOSE

The abridgement includes the last illness and the date in December. It is a complete birth-to-death shape, and still not the full 1791 book. Stop where this file stops, and say what it is.

- The 13th of December is in both witnesses.
- Map this edition; flag the abridgement clearly.
- Osgood / PG #1564; not the complete Boswell.

Friendship · Talk as Memory · A Christian Moralist · A Hard Start · An Abridged Life

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 11–12

1. The hosted text is Boswell's Life as abridged and edited by Charles Grosvenor Osgood (Project Gutenberg #1564), not the complete 1791 Life. Osgood's preface states the omissions (most criticisms and notes, legal opinions, most letters, and parts of the conversation). The abridgement still runs from the birth at Lichfield to the death in December. Map this edition; flag the abridgement clearly; do not quote Osgood's preface as Boswell.
2. The birth sentence is exact: "Samuel Johnson was born at Lichfield, in Staffordshire, on the 18th of September, N. S., 1709;" A conversation-rich biography, for a wide older band, of a Christian moralist and his friend.
3. Quote stretches that appear in both the Gutenberg text and the site EPUB, from Boswell's narrative in this abridgement.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text, Project Gutenberg #1564, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/boswell-life-of-johnson/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.