CLASSICS LIBRARY · STORY MAP

Struggling Upward

Horatio Alger Jr. · *1890 · original English text (Porter & Coates, 1890; Project Gutenberg #5417)*

One Saturday afternoon in January, boys gather on a pond in Groveton. A teacher offers a Waterbury watch as a prize for the fastest skate. Luke Larkin, the school janitor, is among them; Randolph Duncan, the banker's son, is already sure of himself. The hosted text is Alger's original English, Project Gutenberg #5417, complete. For grades 5–8.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does honesty cost a poor boy when a rich neighbor is already believed, and how should a school read Alger's luck-and-patron formula without flattening it into a mere success myth?

"One Saturday afternoon in January a lively and animated group of boys were gathered on the western side of a large pond in the village of Groveton."

Chapter I, The Waterbury Watch

Luke Larkin works, tells the truth, and is accused. A tin box is left in his keeping; luck and a patron also arrive, as they often do in Alger. Teach industry and honesty, and also name the formula. The subtitle is Luke Larkin's Luck. Do not treat the watch race as the whole story, and do not treat luck as if it were the same thing as virtue.

KEY CHARACTERS

Luke Larkin
The school janitor, poor, honest, and soon trusted with more than a watch race

Randolph Duncan
The banker's son, sure of himself on the pond and later in the town

Prince Duncan
President of the Groveton Bank, and a prominent town official

Frederic Hooper
The young teacher who offers the Waterbury watch

A JANUARY POND, AND A WATCH

> *"One Saturday afternoon in January a lively and animated group of boys were gathered on the western side of a large pond in the village of Groveton."*
>
> Chapter I, The Waterbury Watch

Grades 5–8
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

A Watch on the Pond

CHAPTER I

A Saturday race is set on the Groveton pond. The prize is a Waterbury watch. Luke is there on old skates; Randolph Duncan is already sure that the janitor cannot win.

- The first sentence is exact, including Groveton and the January pond.
- The teacher is Frederic Hooper, of the Center Grammar School.
- Randolph is the son of Prince Duncan, president of the Groveton Bank.
- Quote the story, not a preface.

> *"One Saturday afternoon in January a lively and animated group of boys were gathered on the western side of a large pond in the village of Groveton."*
>
> Chapter I, The Waterbury Watch

02

The Prize

CHAPTER I

The teacher holds the watch and states the terms: across the pond and back, around a mark, starting together.

- Keep "Waterbury watch" as printed.
- The race is public, and so is the comparison of the boys.
- Luke's skates are old; that fact is already being used against him.
- Winning, or not winning, will not settle Luke's later trouble.

> *"I offer this watch as a prize to the boy who will skate across the pond and back in the least time."*
>
> Chapter I

03

Luke and Randolph

EARLY CHAPTERS

Luke works as janitor and is poor. Randolph lives in a style beyond the neighbors and feels that position. The pond is only the first place where the two are set against each other.

- Prince Duncan is a prominent town official as well as a banker.
- Florence, later, does not share Randolph's scorn.
- Teach the contrast without turning the book into class caricature.
- Alger's poor boy is industrious; the test is whether the town will believe him.

> *"Randolph Duncan, son of Prince Duncan, president of the Groveton Bank, and a prominent town official."*
>
> Chapter I

04

The Tin Box

MID-BOOK

A stranger asks Luke to take a tin box home and keep it. The favor looks simple. It will not stay simple.

- The man asks Luke's name and where he lives before he trusts the box to him.
- Luke answers, in surprise, and agrees to a favor whose cost he does not yet know.
- A kept trust can look like guilt when a rich man wants it to.
- Teach the keeping of the box as a trial of honesty, not as a trick only.

> *"Take this tin box and carry it to your home."*
>
> The tin box

05

Luck, and What Is Not Luck

THE BOOK AS A WHOLE

The subtitle is Luke Larkin's Luck. Work and truth are praised; a patron and a stroke of fortune also come, as they often do in Alger. A school should say both things.

- This is the same formula already named on the Ragged Dick map; name it again here.
- Do not flatten the book into a mere success myth, and do not sneer at the honesty it actually praises.
- For grades 5–8.
- The hosted file is complete, PG #5417.

> *"Take this tin box and carry it to your home."*
>
> The tin box

Honesty under Accusation | Industry | A Trust Kept | Luck and a Patron | A Poor Boy in a Rich Town

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 5–8

1. The story opens on a Groveton pond in January. The prize is a Waterbury watch. Chapter I is "The Waterbury Watch."
2. This is Alger's original English, 1890, PG #5417, complete. Subtitle: Luke Larkin's Luck. For grades 5–8.
3. Teach industry and honesty, and also name Alger's luck-and-patron formula. Do not flatten the book into a mere success myth.
4. A stranger leaves a tin box in Luke's keeping. A kept trust can be made to look like guilt.
5. Randolph Duncan is the son of the bank president. The pond is only the first comparison.

Quotations are verbatim from the original English text (Porter & Coates, 1890; Project Gutenberg #5417), Project Gutenberg #5417, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/struggling-upward/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.