Chapter 2: We're Not Afraid to Die... if We Can All Be Together

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Exercise 2.1 — Understanding the text

Q1 List the steps taken by the captain (i) to protect the ship when rough weather began. (ii) to check the flooding of the water in the ship.

SOLUTION

(i) To protect the ship when rough weather began, the captain took several precautions. He and the crew dropped the storm jib to slow the boat down. They lashed a heavy mooring rope in a loop across the stern. Everything on deck was double-lashed. The crew went through their life-raft drill, attached lifelines, and put on oilskins and life jackets. After the great wave struck, when the starboard side was bashed open, the captain stretched canvas and secured waterproof hatch covers across the gaping holes to reduce the water entering the ship. Later, to protect the weakened starboard side from oncoming waves, he decided to heave-to, placing the undamaged port hull to face the seas, using an improvised sea anchor of heavy nylon rope and two 22-litre plastic barrels of paraffin.

(ii) To check the flooding of water in the ship, the captain and crew used every available pump. Larry and Herb pumped continuously while the captain made emergency repairs. When the hand pumps blocked up with debris and the electric pump short-circuited, the captain found another electric pump under the chartroom floor and connected it to an out-pipe. After 36 hours of continuous pumping, they brought the water level down to the last few centimetres, after which they only needed to keep pace with the water still seeping in.

Answer: (i) Dropped storm jib, lashed mooring rope across stern, double-lashed everything, wore life jackets, stretched canvas over gaping holes, used improvised sea anchor. (ii) Used hand pumps and electric pumps; when these failed or blocked, found a spare electric pump under the chartroom floor; pumped for 36 continuous hours.

Q2 Describe the mental condition of the voyagers on 4 and 5 January.

SOLUTION

On January 4, the voyagers were exhausted but cautiously hopeful. After 36 hours of continuous pumping, they had reduced the water level to a manageable point. They managed to eat their first meal in almost two days — corned beef and cracker biscuits — which suggests

a fragile sense of relief. However, their situation remained precarious: the main mast could not carry any sail without risking the damaged hull, and they were navigating towards two small, distant islands that were like pinpricks in the vast ocean.

On January 5, their mental condition deteriorated to one of near despair. By dawn, their situation was again desperate as black clouds, 40-knot winds and high seas had returned overnight. The children's vulnerability became painfully apparent when young Jonathan asked, 'Daddy, are we going to die?' That question, and his brave follow-up — that they were not afraid to die as long as they were all together — moved the captain deeply and gave him renewed determination to fight. By evening on January 5, as more water seeped in through broken planks and the ship groaned under the waves, both Mary and the captain sat holding hands, feeling that the end was very near. It was a moment of profound dread, yet also quiet togetherness.

Answer: On January 4, cautious relief mixed with exhaustion — they had contained the flooding and eaten their first meal in two days. On January 5, near despair as the storm returned; Jon's brave words about not fearing death inspired the captain, but by evening both he and Mary felt the end was close.

Q3 Describe the shifts in the narration of the events as indicated in the three sections of the text. Give a subtitle to each section.

SOLUTION

The text is divided into three broad sections, each with a distinct tone and focus.

Section 1 — 'Into the Storm' (from the start through the first break): This section sets up the voyage and builds to the catastrophe. The narration is measured and factual at first, describing the preparations, the growing weather, and the precautions taken. The pace then accelerates dramatically as the giant wave strikes — the tone becomes urgent and visceral, capturing the chaos of the flooding ship, the captain's injuries, and the desperate emergency repairs. The mood is one of shock and crisis.

Section 2 — 'Between Hope and Despair' (from January 3 through Jon's words on January 5): The narration shifts to a grinding, day-by-day endurance. The tone is more reflective and emotionally charged. The captain assesses the structural damage, navigates towards the distant islands, and the reader is drawn into the family's quiet bravery — especially Sue's stoic concealment of her injuries and Jon's famous declaration that they were not afraid to die if they could be together. The mood oscillates between faint hope and near-surrender.

Section 3 — 'Land!' (from January 6 through the ending): The narration brightens. The captain's navigation calculations, Sue's handmade card, and the final sighting of Ile Amsterdam bring relief and joy. The tone shifts to gratitude and wonder. The final paragraphs pay tribute to each crew member's courage, ending on a note of admiration — especially for the two children whose courage had sustained the adults.

Answer: Section 1 ('Into the Storm'): crisis and emergency repairs. Section 2 ('Between Hope and Despair'): grinding endurance, emotional turning points. Section 3 ('Land!'): relief, navigation triumph, and tribute to the crew's courage.

Exercise 2.2 — Talking about the text

Q1 What difference did you notice between the reaction of the adults and the children when faced with danger?

SOLUTION

The adults and children reacted to the danger in noticeably different ways, though both showed remarkable courage.

The adults — the captain, Mary, Larry and Herb — responded through action. They focused on practical tasks: pumping water, making repairs, steering the ship, and working the radio. Their fear was real but channelled into survival efforts. The captain described moments of terror (accepting what he thought was his death when washed overboard, holding Mary's hand in the belief that the end was near), but these were balanced by relentless effort. Their anxiety was visible and openly felt.

The children, by contrast, displayed a quiet, selfless bravery that struck the adults as extraordinary. Sue, despite severe head injuries — a large swelling, two black eyes, and a deep cut — deliberately hid her pain so as not to worry her father when he was trying to save them all. Jonathan's words — that they were not afraid to die as long as the family was together — showed an emotional maturity and philosophical calm far beyond his six years. Rather than panicking, the children comforted the adults: Sue told her father he had found the island, and Jon came asking for a hug and calling him the best captain in the world. Their instinct was to protect and reassure, while the adults' instinct was to protect and act.

Answer: Adults responded with practical, urgent action driven by fear and responsibility. The children showed quiet, selfless courage — hiding injuries to spare their father worry, speaking calmly about death, and comforting the adults rather than demanding comfort.

Q2 How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure 'the direst stress'?

SOLUTION

The story consistently demonstrates that optimism — even when not fully felt — was a vital survival tool.

The captain himself acknowledges this indirectly. When he told Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees and predicted they would see the island at about 5 p.m., he added that he spoke 'with a conviction I did not feel.' He projected confidence outwardly to keep the crew going, even as he privately doubted. This deliberate maintenance of hope, even when hollow, helped the group function.

Larry and Herb are described as 'cheerful and optimistic under the direst stress' — the narrator uses that exact phrase. Their positive attitude during the endless pumping and bailing kept morale alive.

The children's optimism was the most powerful. Sue's card — with funny caricatures, laughter, and the words 'let's hope for the best' — lifted the captain's spirits at a moment when he was

recalculating position in despair. Jonathan's brave words ('we aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together') turned the captain's anguish into fierce determination: 'I left the children's cabin determined to fight the sea with everything I had.'

Ultimately, the island was found because the captain refused to surrender to despair and kept working his calculations. The story shows that optimism does not eliminate danger, but it sustains the will to keep trying — and in that persistence lies the possibility of survival.

Answer: Optimism sustained the will to act: the captain projected confidence he did not feel, Larry and Herb stayed cheerful under extreme stress, and the children's courage and Sue's card gave the captain renewed determination. The story shows that optimism keeps people fighting when logic might counsel giving up.

Q3 What lessons do we learn from such hazardous experiences when we are face-to-face with death?

SOLUTION

Facing death strips away the inessential and reveals what truly matters. The account teaches several lessons.

First, thorough preparation is essential. The family had spent 16 years honing their seafaring skills and had the Wavewalker professionally built and rigorously tested. When disaster struck, it was this preparation — knowing how to use pumps, lifelines, sea anchors, and navigation tools — that gave them a fighting chance.

Second, courage is not the absence of fear but the decision to act in spite of it. The captain was swept overboard and accepted death, yet when he surfaced, he found the wheel and steered. Mary, though terrified, took the wheel when asked. Even the children, though frightened, chose to comfort rather than collapse.

Third, the bonds of love and togetherness sustain people through extreme hardship. It was Jonathan's words about not being afraid to die together, and Sue's card expressing love and hope, that strengthened the captain's resolve at his lowest moments.

Fourth, calm, systematic thinking under pressure can mean the difference between survival and death. The captain's patient recalculation of position, accounting for magnetic variation and ocean currents, led them to the island.

Finally, gratitude and humility follow survival. On land, the captain's first thoughts were of his crew's and children's courage, not of his own.

Answer: Key lessons: thorough preparation matters; courage means acting despite fear; love and togetherness sustain people in extremity; calm, systematic thinking saves lives; and survival brings humility and gratitude for those who stood beside you.

Q4 Why do you think people undertake such adventurous expeditions in spite of the risks involved?

SOLUTION

People are drawn to adventurous expeditions for a complex mix of reasons, even when the dangers are obvious.

For the narrator and his wife, the motivation was a long-held dream: to sail in the wake of Captain James Cook, the great explorer who had made the same voyage 200 years earlier. The dream was romantic and historic — a chance to connect with human endeavour across centuries. This kind of aspiration gives life meaning and purpose that cannot be found in routine.

Adventure also tests and reveals character. It is only in extreme conditions that people discover how resourceful, courageous, and resilient they truly are. Such experiences forge a deeper understanding of oneself and of others — as this story shows, when the crisis revealed the extraordinary courage of two young children.

There is also the lure of the unknown: unexplored oceans, remote islands, and landscapes that few people ever see. The beauty of Ile Amsterdam, described as 'the most beautiful island in the world' despite being a bleak volcanic rock, reflects how extreme hardship transforms perception.

Finally, the togetherness and shared purpose that such expeditions create can be deeply bonding. The narrator's final tribute to each member of his crew and family suggests that the journey, despite its terrors, drew them into a closeness that ordinary life rarely offers.

Answer: People undertake such expeditions to fulfil deep-seated dreams, to test their character under real conditions, to witness what few others see, and to forge bonds of shared purpose and trust. The rewards — in self-knowledge, wonder, and human connection — can outweigh the risks.

Exercise 2.3 — Thinking about language

Q1 We have come across words like 'gale' and 'storm' in the account. Here are two more words for 'storm': typhoon, cyclone. How many words does your language have for 'storm'?

SOLUTION

This question invites you to explore your own regional language. English itself has several words for storm depending on context: gale (a very strong wind), tempest (a violent storm, often with rain), squall (a sudden, short-lived storm), hurricane (a tropical cyclone in the Atlantic), typhoon (a tropical cyclone in the Pacific/Indian Ocean), and cyclone (a large rotating storm system).

In Hindi, words for storm include: aandhi (آندھی — a dust storm or strong wind), toofan (طوفان — a severe storm), jhanjhavaat (झंझावात — a violent storm or whirlwind), and vatavaran (a general atmospheric disturbance). Tamil uses words such as puyal (புயல் — storm/hurricane) and kai thooku katru (strong wind). The richness of a language's storm vocabulary often reflects the weather patterns and maritime history of the region where it developed.

Note: For your actual answer, list the storm-related words from your own language with their specific meanings or contexts.

Answer: English has gale, storm, tempest, squall, hurricane, typhoon, cyclone — each with specific meteorological contexts. Languages spoken in coastal or storm-prone regions tend to have the richest vocabulary for storm types.

Q2 Here are the terms for different kinds of vessels: yacht, boat, canoe, ship, steamer, schooner. Think of similar terms in your language.

SOLUTION

English has a range of vessel names that reflect size, purpose and propulsion: a yacht is a recreational sailing or motor vessel; a boat is a small, general watercraft; a canoe is a narrow paddled craft; a ship is a large ocean-going vessel; a steamer is powered by a steam engine; a schooner is a sailing vessel with two or more masts.

In Hindi and several Indian languages, terms include: naav or nav (नाव — a small boat), jahaz (जहाज़ — a large ship or aircraft), kashti (कश्ती — a small boat or vessel), toni or doni (a flat-bottomed river boat used in South India), machwa (माछवा — a fishing boat), and sampan (a flat-bottomed wooden boat, common in South and Southeast Asia).

Note: List the vessel terms from your own language, noting which types of water (river, sea, ocean) and purpose (fishing, trade, travel) each applies to.

Answer: English vessel terms are size- and purpose-specific (yacht/canoe/schooner/ship). Indian languages have equivalents: naav, kashti, jahaz, doni, machwa, sampan — often tied to specific river or coastal contexts.

Q3 'Catamaran' is a kind of a boat. Do you know which Indian language this word is derived from? Check the dictionary.

SOLUTION

The word 'catamaran' is derived from Tamil. It comes from the Tamil words 'kattumaram' (கட்டுமரம்), meaning 'tied wood' or 'logs bound together' — from 'kattu' (to tie) and 'maram' (tree/wood). Originally, it referred to a simple raft of logs lashed together, used by Tamil fishermen along the Coromandel Coast. The word entered English through contact with the Tamil-speaking maritime communities of South India during the colonial period. Today, 'catamaran' refers to a twin-hulled boat or vessel used for sailing and racing.

Answer: 'Catamaran' is derived from Tamil: 'kattumaram' (katta = tied, maram = wood/tree), meaning logs bound together. It originally described a raft used by Tamil fishermen and entered English through colonial-era maritime contact.

Q4 Have you heard any boatmen's songs? What kind of emotions do these songs usually express?

SOLUTION

Boatmen's songs (or rowing songs) are a widespread folk tradition found across cultures — from the 'Volga Boat Song' of Russian barge-haulers to the 'Malhaar' tradition in parts of India. In Kerala, the Vallam Kali (boat race) is accompanied by chants called Vanchipattu, which are rhythmic rowing songs.

Such songs typically express a range of emotions. The rhythm of the song is practical — it coordinates the strokes of the oarsmen, so there is always an element of collective effort and unity. Emotionally, boatmen's songs often express longing (for home, a lover, or dry land), the hardship of labour on the water, spiritual faith (asking for safe passage), and sometimes a defiant joy in the face of the river's power.

They also reflect the relationship between the boatman and nature — the river is often personified as a force to be appeased, respected, or celebrated.

Note: If you have heard a specific boatmen's song in your region, describe it and the emotions it conveys.

Answer: Boatmen's songs are rhythmic folk compositions that coordinate collective effort and express longing, hardship, faith, and joy. Examples include Vanchipattu from Kerala and the Volga Boat Song. They often personify the river and reflect the boatman's deep relationship with water.

Exercise 2.4 — Working with words

Q1 The following words used in the text as ship terminology are also commonly used in another sense. In what contexts would you use the other meaning? knot | stern | boom | hatch | anchor

SOLUTION

knot — In sailing, a knot is a unit of speed (one nautical mile per hour). In everyday use, a knot is a fastening made by tying a piece of rope or string. Example (non-nautical): 'She tied her hair in a tight knot before the race.'

stern — On a ship, the stern is the rear end of the vessel. In general use, 'stern' is an adjective meaning severe, strict, or uncompromising. Example: 'The judge gave the accused a stern warning.'

boom — On a ship, the boom is the horizontal pole that extends the foot of the mainsail. In general use, 'boom' can mean a sudden increase or prosperity (an economic boom), or a loud deep sound. Example: 'The town experienced a real estate boom after the new highway was built.'

hatch — On a ship, a hatch is an opening in the deck with a cover. In general use, 'to hatch' means to cause a plan or idea to emerge, or for a chick to break out of an egg. Example: 'The siblings hatched a plan to surprise their parents on their anniversary.'

anchor — On a ship, the anchor is the heavy device dropped to the sea bed to hold the vessel in place. In general use, 'anchor' means something that provides stability or security, or the main presenter of a news programme. Example: 'She was the anchor of the family, keeping everyone calm during the crisis.' / 'He is the news anchor on the evening bulletin.'

Answer: knot: unit of speed (nautical) / fastening made with rope (general). stern: rear of ship (nautical) / strict and severe (adjective). boom: horizontal mast pole (nautical) / sudden economic growth or a loud sound (general). hatch: opening in ship's deck (nautical) / to devise a plan or for eggs to open (general). anchor: weight to moor a ship (nautical) / source of stability or a news presenter (general).

Q2 The following three compound words end in -ship. What does each of them mean? airship | flagship | lightship

SOLUTION

airship — A large, powered aircraft that is lighter than air, typically cigar-shaped and filled with gas (such as hydrogen or helium) to provide lift. It is steered and propelled by engines. Example: the Hindenburg was a famous German airship.

flagship — The ship in a fleet that carries the commanding admiral and flies the admiral's flag. More broadly, 'flagship' means the most important or leading product, service, or establishment of an organisation. Example: 'The company's flagship smartphone was launched last month.'

lightship — A moored vessel equipped with a bright light and other signals, used to warn ships of dangers such as rocks or shoals in areas where a lighthouse cannot be built. It serves the

same purpose as a lighthouse but floats at a fixed position at sea.

Answer: airship: a large gas-filled aircraft. flagship: the lead ship of a fleet carrying the commander; also used figuratively for the most important product or outlet of an organisation. lightship: a moored vessel with a warning light, functioning as a floating lighthouse.

Q3 The following are the meanings listed in the dictionary against the phrase 'take on'. In which meaning is it used in the third paragraph of the account?

SOLUTION

The third paragraph of the account reads: 'There, before heading east, we took on two crewmen — American Larry Vigil and Swiss Herb Seigler — to help us tackle one of the world's roughest seas, the southern Indian Ocean.'

Here, 'took on' is used in the meaning: 'take sb on: to employ sb; to engage sb.' The captain hired or engaged Larry and Herb as crew members for the next stage of the voyage. The phrase signals that two new people were brought aboard in a professional capacity.

It does not mean 'to accept as an opponent' (they are allies, not rivals) or 'to begin to have a quality' (no quality is being assumed) or 'to allow sth/sb to enter a bus/plane' (they are crew, not passengers).

Answer: In the third paragraph, 'took on' means 'to employ sb; to engage sb' — the captain hired Larry Vigil and Herb Seigler as crewmen for the voyage through the southern Indian Ocean.