

Class 11 English (Hornbill) Notes

WE'RE NOT AFRAID TO DIE

Key Notes and Important Questions with Answers

Chapter-2

We're Not afraid to Die—If We Can All Be Together

by Gordon Cook and Alan East

The story, 'We're Not afraid to Die—if We Can All Be Together' is a story of extreme courage and skill exhibited by Gordon Cook, his family and crewmen in a war with water and waves for survival. In July 1976, the narrator, his wife Mary, son Jonathan and daughter Suzanne set sail from Plymouth, England to duplicate the round-the-world voyage made 200 years earlier by Captain James Cook. They took the voyage in their professionally built ship, the Wavewalker, accompanied by two experienced sailors - Larry Vigil, an American and Herb Seigler, a Swiss, to tackle one of the world's roughest seas - the Southern Indian Ocean.

The first part of the journey, that is, about 105,000 kilometres up to Cape Town passed off very, pleasantly. On second day out of Cape Town, -they began to encounter strong gales. Gales did not worry the narrator. But the size of the waves was alarming - up to 15 metres, as high as the main mast. On 25th December, the writer's ship was in the southern Indian Ocean, 3500 kilometres to the east of Cape Town. The family celebrated their new year on board the ship.

At dawn on January 2, the waves were gigantic. Unfriendly weather and gigantic waves compelled the sailors to slow their speed, drop storm jib and take other precautions. The danger was so obvious that the sailors completed life-raft drill, attached life lines and life jackets.

Suddenly at 6 pm, a tremendous explosion shook the Wavewalker and the author was thrown overboard. The ship was about to capsize when another gigantic wave hit it tossing it upright once again. The author was thrown back onto the deck, his head and ribs smashing against the walls. In spite of his injuries, the narrator took charge of the situation. Somehow he found the wheel, lined up the stern for the next wave and hung on till Mary appeared and took charge of the wheel. Larry and Herb started pumping out water like madmen. The whole starboard side bulged inwards. The narrator managed to cover canvas across the gaps to prevent water from entering the ship. Then came more problems. Their hand pumps stopped working and electric pumps short-circuited. Fortunately, the narrator found a spare electric pump under the chartroom that worked. The entire night was spent in pumping, steering, repairing and sending radio signals. The narrator checked charts and calculated that He Amsterdam, a French scientific base was their only hope.

Sue and Jon were injured but they said that they were not afraid to die if they could all be together. Sue's head was swollen and she had a deep injury. The narrator became more determined seeing his children's courage. Finally they reached Ie Amsterdam, a volcanic island where they were welcomed by 28 inhabitants. Thus, the collective strength and never failing optimism of the sailors made it possible for them to come out of the jaws of death. Though, Jonathan and Suzanne did not do anything to save Wavewalker but their courage, forbearance, faith and optimism gave extra strength and persistence to the narrator and his team. The bravery of the strong-willed children is noteworthy in the story.

Short Answer Questions

Answer the following questions in not more than 30-40 words.

1. What preparations were made by the narrator before their round the world voyage?
2. Comment on the mood of the sea on 2nd January 2010? What plans did the crewmen - the narrator, Larry Vigil & Herb have to face it?
3. List the steps taken by the Captain
 - a) to protect the boat when rough weather set in.
 - b) to check the flooding of Wavewalker.
4. How did the children's presence and behavior during the crisis influence the narrator?
5. What are Mayday calls? Why was the boat getting no replies to its Mayday calls?
6. Why were the electric pumps not working?
7. Describe Larry Vigil and Herb Seigler's role in facing the disaster.
8. Why was Ie Amsterdam, the most beautiful island for the crew of Wavewalker?
9. What do we learn from the story, 'We're not afraid to Die....'?
10. What drove the parents of the children to undertake such a voyage full of dangers?
11. What damage did the gigantic wave cause to the Wavewalker?
12. How did the waves injure the Captain?
13. How badly was Sue injured? Why did she not report the full extent of her injuries to her father?
14. Which words, uttered by Jonathan, left the narrator speechless and why?
15. Describe the efforts made by the captain to protect the ship from sinking.
16. Why was it felt that the Mayday calls would go unanswered?

Long Answer Questions

Answer the following in about 120 words.

1. Highlight the tremendous courage and stoicism shown by the two children during the struggle.
2. Describe the shifts in the narration of the events as indicated in the three sections of the text. { Hint:- Preparation of the journey, enjoying the sail, facing the fury of the nature and averting the disaster.]
3. How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure 'the direst stress'?

Chapter -2

We are not afraid to die

Q.1. What preparations were made by the narrator before their round the world Voyage?

Ans. The writer wanted to go around the world voyage as captain James Cook had done about 200 years earlier. For about 16 years, both he and his wife used to spend all their free time in improving their sailing skills on the British sea. They made a 23 m long boat wave walker, with great skill. They tested it in the roughest weather. Finally, they started their Voyage in July 1976.

Q.2. How did the first leg of the journey pass? What happened to them immediately after they left?

Ans. The first leg of the journey was from Plymouth (England) to Cape Town (Southernmost tip of Africa). It was a journey of 1,05,000 kilometres. It passed quite pleasantly. But after leaving Cape Town, they had to face strong gales.

Q.3. How does the author describe Wave walker?

Ans. Wave walker was the name given to the narrator's boat. It was professionally built. It was a 23-metre long, wooden-hulled 30-ton boat. The narrator spent months fitting it out and testing it in the roughest weather.

Q.4. What did the travellers find at dawn on 2 January and what preparation did they make?

Ans. On this dawn, the waves were gigantic. The ship rose to the top of each wave that came their way. There was fear of shipwreck. So they made all possible preparations to save the ship and themselves as follows :

1. They dropped the storm jib to slow down ship.
2. They secured everything rightly.
3. They attached lifelines to the life-rafts.
4. They put on their oilskins and life-jackets.

Q.5. "We are not afraid to die." Who speaks the words and when?

Ans. The narrator's son Jonathan, 6 years old, made this remark when his father went in to comfort the children. "But Daddy," he went on, "We are not afraid of dying if we can all be together— you and mummy, She and I".

Q.6. How did she make her father laugh when the situation was almost hopeless?

Ans. The situation was hopeless and the parents were still tense. She made a card and drew their caricatures, laugh. The card also thanked them and gave a message of hope.

Long Answer Type Question

Q.7. What did you notice about the difference between the way in which the adults and the children reacted when faced with danger?

Ans. Both the adults and the children stand together when faced with danger. There is not much difference in the way they react. The only difference is that children can't fight the sea like adults. But they don't panic at all. They don't add difficulties of the elders. They show rare courage, as Jon says to his father, "We are not afraid of dying if we can all be together". It adds to the father's determination to fight the sea. Mary, Larry and Herb — all play their role heroically.

Q.8. How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure the direct stress?

Ans. One who is optimistic has no fear of failures. Nothing is too difficult or impossible for him. He goes on and on with the hope that he will succeed. Gordon Cook's story conveys the same idea. It was only his courage and optimism that did not let him give up. He kept fighting the storm with courage he never gave up hope of success. Any other person would have given up in despair and died on the sea. Thus the story proves that optimism helps to endure the direst stress.