We Are Not Afraid to Die

1. Notice these expressions in the text. Infer their meaning from the context.
   a. honing our seafaring skills
   b. ominous silence
   c. Mayday calls
   d. pinpricks in the vast ocean
   e. a tousled head

Answer

a. Honing our seafaring skills: this refers to the efforts made by the author and his wife, to perfect or sharpen their seafaring skills. They were engaged in extensive training before taking such a voyage.

b. ominous silence: The silence here refers to an impending danger. The narrator and the cabin crew team had suspected an approaching threat at about 6 p.m. on 2nd January. The wind stopped and the sky was overcast with dark clouds.

c. Mayday calls: Mayday calls are radio-telephonic words which signal aircrafts or ships stuck in a disastrous situation. The narrator desperately sent Mayday calls in hope of any help but they remained unanswered.

d. Pinpricks in the vast ocean: This phrase expresses the search for two small islands in the vast ocean. They are so small that they appear like pin heads on a map of the vast ocean. The crew of the Wavewalker was desperately trying to reach the Amsterdam Ile, a small volcanic rock.

e. A tousled head: this refers to hair in disarray or the disarranged hair of the author’s son, Jonathan. His hair was messed up and was uncombed. This symbolises the turbulent situation through which the entire was going through.
1. When do you think, Mary and the narrator feel the end was near? Why did they feel so?

**Answer:** As the motion of the ship brought more and more water into the boat through the broken planks, the author and his wife felt that their end was near. They had tried his best to repair the ship but had not been completely successful.

2. What do you observe about the reaction of the adults and the children when faced with the disaster?

**Answer:** The children show amazing maturity and resilience in the face of the disaster. They remain strong and composed. Despite serious injuries, both the children showed great courage and patience. Suzanne was brave enough to write a card. John said that they were not afraid to die if they could all be together. The adults also reacted with fighting spirit and optimism. Their undaunted efforts helped them to survive the disaster.

3. “I didn’t want to worry you when you were trying to save us all”, said Sue. What has happened to her?

**Answer:** Sue had hit her head somewhere and a huge bump had formed above her eyes. Later her head became swollen alarmingly and she had a deep cut on her arm. She had been brave and did not want to worry her father.

4. I had no time to worry about bumped heads”, says the narrator. What problems do you think deserved his immediate attention?

**Answer:** The problem that deserved immediate attention was the repair of the starboard side which had bashed open and with every wave, it was letting water enter the boat. He realized that if did not make some repairs, the boat would surely sink and they would drown.

5. Give a brief description of the narrator’s boat. How did the narrator equip and test it?

**Answer:** The narrator’s boat named ‘Wavewalker’ was 23 metres long, 30 ton wooden boat. It was built professionally and had been tested in the roughest weather. The author had spent months fitting it out.

**What was the scene before the narrator’s eyes after the crash of the Giant wave?**

**Answer:** When the giant wave crashed against the sea the narrator saw that the boat got filled with water. Larry and Herb were pumping water out of the ship.
Broken timber, clothes, crockery, charts, tins and toys were floating everywhere. The whole starboard side had bulged inwards.

**What happened to the narrator when the storm hit the boat?**

**Answer:** The roar of the thunder increased and then a huge torrent of sea water broke over the ship. The narrator’s head smashed into the wheel and he accepted his approaching death. Subsequent waves tossed him around and he felt that his left ribs were cracked, his mouth was filled with blood and broken teeth. He still found the wheel and hung on.

**What happened on January 2nd? What did the narrator do to face the strong or high waves?**

**Answer:** Early morning on January 2nd, the waves were huge and sea was extremely rough. Their ship was hit by strong mighty waves. They slowed down the speed of the boat and double lashed everything. They got ready to face the danger by wearing life jackets and they waited for the worst.

**When did the narrator set sail for its round the world voyage and how did it pass in the beginning?**

**Answer:** The narrator set sail from Plymouth, England in July 1976 with his wife Mary, six year old son Jonathan, seven year old daughter Suzanne and two crew men, an American called Larry Vigil and a Swiss Herb Seigler. The first part of the voyage remained uneventful and it passed pleasantly from the west coast of Africa to Capetown.

**What did he do for this mission?**

**Answer:** The narrator wanted the achievement of duplicating the round the world voyage made two hundred years earlier by Captain James Cook. He had spent sixteen years preparing for this brave adventure. He acquired experience in sailing around the British waters. He prepared his entire family to undertake this adventure. Their ‘Wavewalker’, a 23 metre 30 ton boat had been professionally built.

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

**Answer:** People undertake such adventurous expeditions due to two reasons. They thirst for risk, thrill and uncertainty and they can push their limits of skill and endurance when faced with dangerous situation. They seek such adventures for pure joy and exhilaration. Some people do it for attaining name, fame and recognition.
How did the narrator succeed in finding the small island?
Answer: Despite the lost compass and a faulty compass, the author did not lose hope. He used his intelligence to estimate the influence of the westerly currents which flowed through that part of the Ocean. He asked Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees and remained optimistic about spotting the island at about 5 pm. Finally they succeeded in their endeavor.

What were the narrator's thoughts on landing at the Ile Amsterdam? Why?
Answer: On landing at Ile Amsterdam, the narrator thought about Larry and Herbie, his crew members who remained cheerful and optimistic throughout the hardships. He thought of his wife also, who stayed at the wheel for all those crucial hours. He also thought of his daughter, who had been so brave all through the ordeal and had not bothered about her head injury.

Why do you think, did the narrator call Ile Amsterdam ‘the most beautiful island in the world’?
Answer: The island was only a bleak piece of volcanic rock with little vegetation – the author called it the most beautiful island in the world because it had given them a ray of hope for survival. They could at least anchor there and repair their ship. It held a hope of their survival.

How did Sue try to enliven the gloomy atmosphere?
Answer: Sue tried to enliven the gloomy atmosphere by trying her hand at making a card for her parents. She drew two caricatures resembling their parents. She had written that she loved both her parents. The card expressed her heartfelt thanks to them and managed to foster some positive energy in the dismal scenario.

How did Jonathan react to the desperate situation they found themselves in on 5th January?
Answer: Jonathan initially got scared and started thinking about death. He asked his father if they were all going to die. On the father’s reassurance, he said that they were not afraid of dying if they could all be together – his dad, mom, Sue and himself.
What problems ‘in plenty’ did the narrator face during the night of January 2, 1977?

**Answer:** On the night of January 2, around 6 pm the wind dropped and the sky grew dark. A growing roar came and an enormous cloud formed in the sky right above the ship. The narrator thought it was a cloud but it was actually a gigantic wave and was twice the height of other waves. The wave hit the ship hard and the narrator’s head hit the wheel and he broke his ribs. He saw a few metres away 'Wavewalker' was almost capsizing. He found the ship filled with water. The whole sideboard side had bulged inwards. He managed to stretch canvas and secure waterproof hatch covers across the gaping holes. However the problem persisted due to floating debris. Also, Sue got badly injured during the storm. The water level rose threateningly. The night dragged on with an endless, bitterly cold routine of pumping, steering and working the radio.

Even when everything is lost you have one thing left in you and that is hope”. We can overcome any obstacle in life if we have strong will. Comment on the virtues of ‘hope and willpower’ based on the biographical story, *We’re Not Afraid to Die…If We Can All Be Together.*

**Answer:** The author’s family was united in achieving the dream of making a world voyage in the route sailed by Captain James Cook. They were highly optimistic even while their ship was almost wreaked and sinking. They were battered severely and suffered serious injuries, their equipments were lost and damaged but they hoped to overcome the gigantic waves and hurling wind.

Optimism boosts willpower and helps one to find ways and means to overcome difficulties. The author found many improvised devices to fight their way towards Ile Amsterdam. It is optimism that boosted their mental and physical energy to withstand all adversities and to fight for life. This story should inculcate in us optimism that will lead us to success in the darkest moments of our life.

**What impression do you form about the narrator on the basis of this extract?**

**Answer:** The narrator was a lover of thrill and adventure. He had dreamt of going on a sea voyage round the world since childhood. He had worked with diligence and prepared for the trip with great care and attention. He had a practical approach and he remained alert and strong willed. He engaged two crew men to assist him and he received full co-operation and help from his family. He was quick witted and made immediate arrangements when faced a violent storm during their voyage. He did not lose hope and remained calm and courageous in the face of difficulties. He had his priorities fixed. Repairing the damaged ship was essential despite his injuries. He worked and motivated everyone in the rescue operations. He was resourceful and quick to improvise. He managed to calculate a new course and his
precise calculations brought them safely on an island. He was level headed and his courage and practical knowledge made him a good captain.

**How did the narrator and his family members face the disaster in the form of a huge wave that struck the ‘Wave Walker’?**

**Answer:** The narrator dropped the storm jib and tied heavy rope attached to the anchor in a loop across the stern. Along with his crew, he double fastened everything. The first mighty wave seemed to have destroyed everything and in order to remain afloat they had to act fast. The narrator handed over the wheel to Mary. He stretched canvas and fastened water proof hatch covers across the gaping holes in the star board side. As the two pumps got blocked and the electric pump short circuited. He found another electric pump and started it. The narrator checked the charts and found that there were two small islands, a few hundred kilometers to the east. But their chances of sailing to those islands were slim because the wind and sea did not seem to abate. He re-checked his calculations. They had lost the main compass but he made discount for magnetic variation in the spare one and then asked Larry to steer a course of 180 degrees. They succeeded in reaching Ile Amsterdam in 4 hours.