

## CLASS NOTES

Class: XI

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

Subject: ENGLISH

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

#### **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 the 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 lifelines 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 stem 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 lie 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.

<b>Understanding</b>	<b>the</b>	<b>Text</b>
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1. 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.**

**Ans: (i)** the narrator decided to slow down the ship to protect it from bad and stormy weather. He dropped the storm jib and lashed heavy mooring rope across the stern of the ship. Then, they double – lashed everything. They carried their life-raft drill, attached lifelines, donned life jackets and oilskins.

**(ii)** to check the flooding of the water, the narrator put waterproof hatch which covered the gaping holes. This diverted the water flow to the side. His hand pumps were blocked due to debris and his one electric pump was short-circuited. He found a hand pump and a spare electric pump. He connected the electric pump to the out pipe and started it.

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

**Ans:** On January 4, the voyagers felt relieved as they were continuously pumping out water for the past 36 hours and only a few centimetres of water was left. They had their first meal in two days. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits.

Later, around 4 pm, the weather changed as black clouds marched towards them. The wind was now 40 knots and the sea was getting higher. The weather got worse and by the early morning of January 5, the situation was bad. This gave them mental stress.

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

**Ans:**

**The first section:** Beginning of the Round - the - Voyage  
The first section was cheerful and full of hope as the family began their planned voyage just like the one done 200 years ago by the famous Captain James Cook. They had perfected their seafaring skills for 16 years. They built a ship 'Wavewalker' professionally which was a 23 metres long, 30 tons wooden-hulled ship. They celebrated Christmas on the ship despite the bad weather.

**The Second Section:** the struggle with the big attack  
This section changed from cheerful to intense. The family was under great pressure to survive the oncoming waves and bad weather conditions. A giant wave created chaos and the ship was about to overturn. The narrator was thrown off

into the water and he almost drowned and got injured. Along with two hired crewmen, the narrator pumped out the water from the ship for a continuous 36 hours. He also tried repairing the parts of the ship. He almost lost his hope and believed they would die. But his children were fearless and courageous enough which gave him the determination to fight back.

### **The third section: Victory**

With the support of his children, the narrator kept trying to save the ship in order to reach the two small islands, Ile Amsterdam. They finally reached the destination and got help from the inhabitants of the island. His son called him the best daddy and best captain

### **Talking about the Text**

#### **1. What difference did you notice between the reaction of the adults and the children when faced with danger?**

**Ans:** There was a huge difference between the reaction of the adults and the children. The adults lose their hope at the end and wait for their fate of death. On the other hand, the children were hopeful and gave the narrator moral support. With the support of his children, Jonathan and Suzanne, he decided to make it to the island at any cost. The children showed maturity. His son expressed courage as to how he wasn't afraid to die if they all were together. His daughter made him a card expressing her love and affection towards her parents and wrote a beautiful message. She was injured still, she didn't let it become a hurdle for her parents who were trying to save the ship.

#### **2. How does the story suggest that optimism helps to endure "the direst stress"?**

**Ans:** Optimism is the determination to overcome any challenges. Without optimism, it is impossible to face difficulties and solve problems. The family fought with the sea with great optimism and determination which ultimately saved them. Again and again, on being attacked by the sea, they didn't stop trying which helped them get to the shore of the Ile Amsterdam island.

When the son of the narrator told him, "we aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together — you and Mummy, Sue and I". This showed the maturity of the children and how they played an important role in motivating the narrator who had almost lost hope. Sue, his daughter who made him a card showed how she was proud of her parents and didn't make a big deal of her injuries which were in a bad condition. With the struggles and efforts, they finally made it to the destination.

#### **3. What lessons do we learn from such hazardous experiences when we are face-to-face with death?**

**Ans:** Life is never about being happy all the time. We are constantly tested and how we tackle every problem and rise through it is the ultimate lesson. Such hazardous situations teach us how we should react towards them. We must never lose hope and keep trying as it will lead to success. In certain situations, one must keep calm and think logically. No matter how bad the situation is, there is always a way to get out of it. The significance of being extra cautious and to make sure that the situation doesn't get worse

is required at such moments.

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

**Ans:** The willingness to accept challenges drives people to take such adventurous expeditions in spite of the risk involved. People like to try different elements of nature and some do it as a passion. Surely people already know of the risks involved in such activities, but still, they do not hesitate to try it out.