

Hornbill

Textbook in English for Class XI
(Core Course)



CHAPTER-2

“WE’RE NOT AFRAID TO DIE...
IF WE CAN ALL BE TOGETHER”

BY
GORDON COOK AND ALAN EAST

TEXT, TITLE AND THEMES

- close encounter with death
- kept their courage for they found strength in togetherness
- spirit of human beings to face disasters
- stand victorious with their courage , determination and will power
- a treatise on courage and valour
- a first person account of an adventurous ordeal
- TITLE: “WE’RE NOT AFRAID TO DIE...IF WE CAN ALL BE TOGETHER”
- THEMES: > human nature of knowing and taking on challenges
 - > human instinct for survival
 - > human bravery, grit, courage, unity and determination
 - > faith in ones optimism
 - > sharp presence of mind
 - > qualities of a captain



The Captain James Cook Bicentenary Voyage 1776-1976

Schooner to the Southern Oceans

Gordon Cook

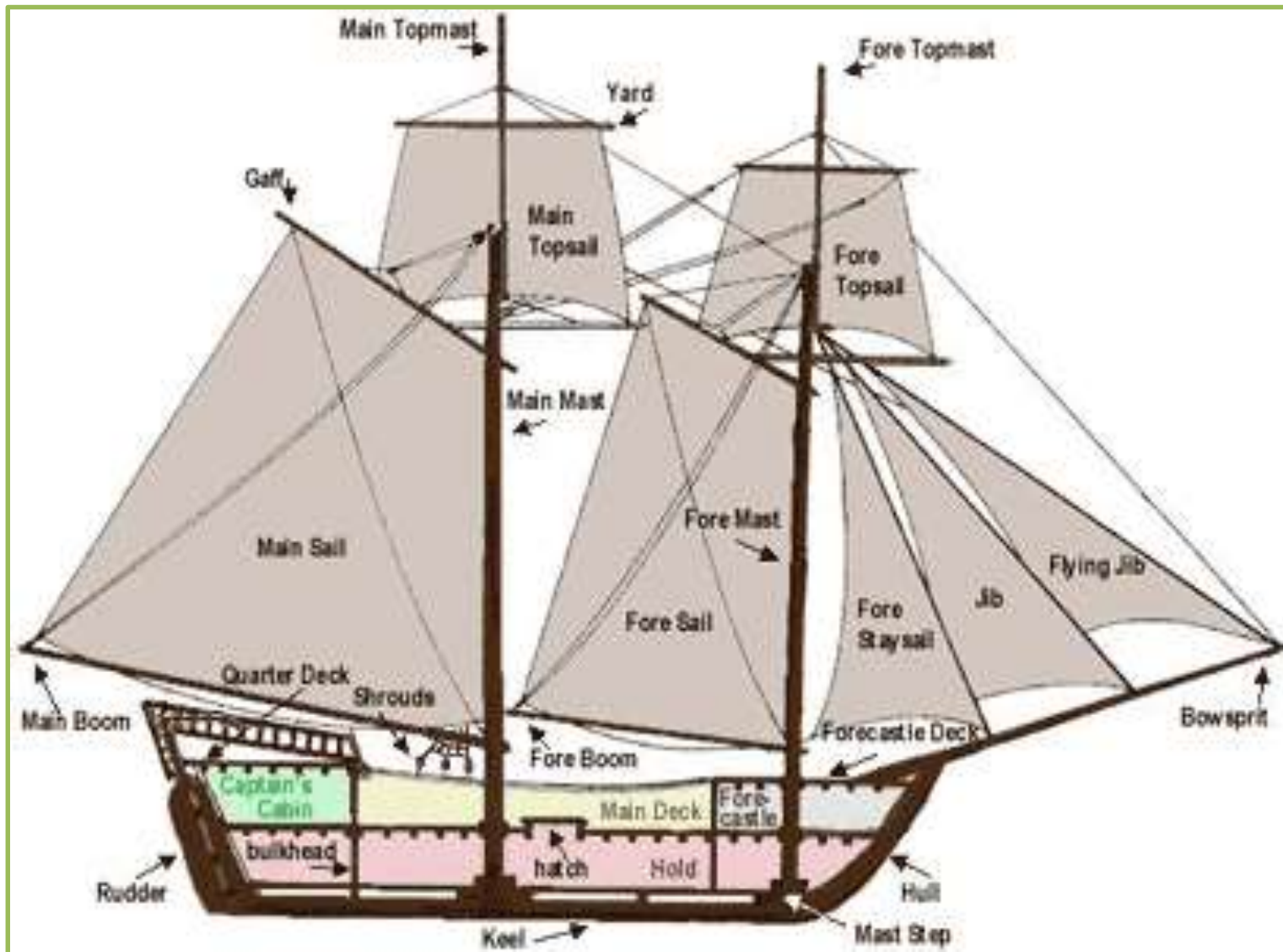
Gordon Cook set out from Plymouth with his wife Mary and their two very young children, to repeat the third and last voyage that Captain James Cook made in 1776. The bicentenaries of Captain Cook's first two voyages in 1963 and 1969 had both passed with little or nothing to celebrate them, despite huge fund-raising efforts. When both of these bicentenary events ended in failure, Gordon vowed to sail in his own ship and repeat Captain Cook's final voyage 200 years later in 1976. Despite numerous problems he completed and fitted out a beautiful seventy-foot schooner, Wavewalker. Gordon was awarded the prestigious Lady Swathling Trophy by the Shipwrecked Mariner's Society for that year's "most outstanding act of seamanship and navigation that saved the lives of all the people on board".

SERIES OF EVENTS

An Overview

- ☐ a dream voyage
- ☐ first leg of the journey
- ☐ first signs of impending disaster
- ☐ January 2- preparing for the worst
- ☐ disaster and its aftermath
- ☐ crew member's show of unparalleled strength
- ☐ January 3- conditions under control but critical
- ☐ only hope for the captain
- ☐ crucial days- January 4 and 5
- ☐ show of exemplary courage
- ☐ safe at last

PARTS OF SHIP



a dream
voyagedescription
of the boat

In July 1976, my wife Mary, son Jonathan, 6, daughter Suzanne, 7, and I set sail from Plymouth, England, to duplicate the round-the-world voyage made 200 years earlier by Captain James Cook. For the longest time, Mary and I — a 37-year-old businessman — had dreamt of sailing in the wake of the famous explorer, and for the past 16 years we had spent all our leisure time honing our seafaring skills in British waters.

Our boat *Wavewalker*, a 23 metre, 30 ton wooden-hulled beauty, had been professionally built, and we had spent months fitting it out and testing it in the roughest weather we could find.

The first leg of our planned three-year, 105,000 kilometre journey passed pleasantly as we sailed down the west coast of Africa to Cape Town. 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.

Preparation

- The journey was planned for three years and a distance of 105,000 kilometers
- Route plan – Start point England, via South Africa, through Indian Ocean, then to Australia, the Americas and finally back in England
- The boat – Wavewalker – a 23 meter long, 30 ton wooden hulled beauty
- Sailors – The narrator, his wife Mary, son Jonathan, 6 years and daughter Suzanne, 7 years, Larry Vigil and Herb Seigler

On our second day out of Cape Town, we began to encounter strong gales. For the next few weeks, they blew continuously. Gales did not worry me; but the size of the waves was alarming — up to 15 metres, as high as our main mast.

December 25 found us 3,500 kilometres east of Cape Town. Despite atrocious weather, we had a wonderful holiday complete with a Christmas tree. New Year's Day saw no improvement in the weather, but we reasoned that it had to change soon. And it did change — for the worse.

- July, 1976 – Voyage begins
- Voyage begins from Plymouth, England
- From England via west coast of Africa
- Larry Vigil, American
- Herb Seigler, Swiss
- In the Indian Ocean – December 25
- Voyagers reaches 3,500 kilometres east of Cape Town
- The weather was still atrocious yet they had a wonderful holiday complete with a Christmas tree
- New Year's Day saw no improvement in the weather

At dawn on January 2, the waves were gigantic. We were sailing with only a small storm jib and were still making eight knots. As the ship rose to the top of each wave we could see endless enormous seas rolling towards us, and the screaming of the wind and spray was painful to the ears. To slow the boat down, we dropped the storm jib and lashed a heavy mooring rope in a loop across the stern. Then we double-lashed everything, went through our life-raft drill, attached lifelines, donned oilskins and life jackets — and waited.

The first indication of impending disaster came at about 6 p.m., with an **ominous silence**. The wind dropped, and the sky immediately grew dark. Then came a growing roar, and an enormous cloud towered aft of the ship. With horror, I realised that it was not a cloud, but a wave like no other I had ever seen. It appeared perfectly vertical and almost twice the height of the other waves, with a frightful breaking crest.

The roar increased to a thunder as the stern moved up the face of the wave, and for a moment I thought we might ride over it. But then a tremendous explosion shook the deck. A torrent of green and white water broke over the ship, my head smashed into the wheel and I was aware of flying overboard and sinking below the waves. I accepted my approaching death, and as I was losing consciousness, I felt quite peaceful.

Unexpectedly, my head popped out of the water. A few metres away, *Wavewalker* was near capsizing, her masts almost horizontal. Then a wave hurled her upright, my lifeline jerked taut, I grabbed the guard rails and sailed through the air into *Wavewalker*'s main boom. Subsequent waves tossed me around the deck like a rag doll. My left ribs cracked; my mouth filled with blood and broken teeth. Somehow, I found the wheel, lined up the stern for the next wave and hung on.

Water, Water, Everywhere. I could feel that the ship had water below, but I dared not abandon the wheel to investigate. Suddenly,

Dawn, January 2 1977

- Gigantic waves in the morning
- Sailing with only a small storm jib and were still making eight knots
- Ship rises to the top of each wave
- Endless, enormous seas rolling towards the ship
- The screaming of the wind and spray painful to ears

Fighting the Sea

- The storm jib dropped
- A heavy mooring rope in a loop across the stern lashed
- Double-lashed everything
- Went through life-raft drill
- Attached lifelines
- Donned oilskins and life jackets

6:00 PM, January 2

- Waves higher than the ship, chase the ship
- The wave hits the back of the ship
- The wave breaks the starboard (right side)
- The ship was about to capsize (sink)

the front hatch was thrown open and Mary appeared. "We're sinking!" she screamed. "The decks are smashed; we're full of water."

"Take the wheel", I shouted as I scrambled for the hatch.

Larry and Herb were pumping like madmen. Broken timbers hung at crazy angles, the whole starboard side bulged inwards; clothes, crockery, charts, tins and toys sloshed about in deep water.

I half-swam, half-crawled into the children's cabin. "Are you all right?" I asked. "Yes," they answered from an upper bunk. "But my head hurts a bit," said Sue, pointing to a big bump above her eyes. I had no time to worry about bumped heads.

After finding a hammer, screws and canvas, I struggled back on deck. With the starboard side bashed open, we were taking water with each wave that broke over us. If I couldn't make some repairs, we would surely sink.

Somehow I managed to stretch canvas and secure waterproof hatch covers across the gaping holes. Some water continued to stream below, but most of it was now being deflected over the side.

More problems arose when our hand pumps started to block up with the debris floating around the cabins and the electric pump short-circuited. The water level rose threateningly. Back on deck I found that our two spare hand pumps had been wrenched overboard — along with the forestay sail, the jib, the dinghies and the main anchor.

Then I remembered we had another electric pump under the chartroom floor. I connected it to an out-pipe, and was thankful to find that it worked.

The night dragged on with an endless, bitterly cold routine of pumping, steering and working the radio. We were getting no replies to our **Mayday calls** — which was not surprising in this remote corner of the world.

Sue's head had swollen alarmingly; she had two enormous black eyes, and now she showed us a deep cut on her arm. When I asked why she hadn't made more of her injuries before this, she replied, "I didn't want to worry you when you were trying to save us all."

- Mary (the narrator's wife) took the steering wheel
- Larry and Herb pumped the water from the deck
- An immediate action required
- Water level rose threateningly
- Pumps stopped functioning
- Electric pumps used
- All radio signals blocked. No communication with base.
- Sue (the narrator's daughter) badly injured

On January 4, after 36 hours of continuous pumping, we reached the last few centimetres of water. Now, we had only to keep pace with the water still coming in. We could not set any sail on the main mast. Pressure on the rigging would simply pull the damaged section of the hull apart, so we hoisted the storm jib and headed for where I thought the two islands were. Mary found some corned beef and cracker biscuits, and we ate our first meal in almost two days.

But our respite was short-lived. At 4 p.m. black clouds began building up behind us; within the hour the wind was back to 40 knots and the seas were getting higher. The weather continued to deteriorate throughout the night, and by dawn on January 5, our situation was again desperate.

When I went in to comfort the children, Jon asked, "Daddy, are we going to die?" I tried to assure him that we could make it. "But, Daddy," he went on, "we aren't afraid of dying if we can all be together — you and Mummy, Sue and I."

I could find no words with which to respond, but I left the children's cabin determined to fight the sea with everything I had. To protect the weakened starboard side, I decided to heave-to — with the undamaged port hull facing the oncoming waves, using an improvised sea anchor of heavy nylon rope and two 22 litre plastic barrels of paraffin.

That evening, Mary and I sat together holding hands, as the motion of the ship brought more and more water in through the broken planks. We both felt the end was very near.

January 4

- Water level almost dipped
- Still unable to hoist sail on the mast for fear of the ship's possible wreckage
- Hoisted the storm jib
- Headed to the direction of Ile Amsterdam (not very certain about it)
- Ate a meal after 48 hours

January 5

- Weather went on deteriorating (became worse)
- Jonathan says "Daddy, we are not afraid of dying if we can all be together"
- More water flowed in

changes of course, drift and current in an effort to calculate our position. The best I could determine was that we were somewhere in 150,000 kilometres of ocean looking for a 65 kilometre-wide island.

While I was thinking, Sue, moving painfully, joined me. The left side of her head was now very swollen and her blackened eyes narrowed to slits. She gave me a card she had made.

On the front she had drawn caricatures of Mary and me with the words: "Here are some funny people. Did they make you laugh? I laughed a lot as well." Inside was a message: "Oh, how I love you both. So this card is to say thank you and let's hope for the best." Somehow we had to make it.

I checked and rechecked my calculations. We had lost our main compass and I was using a spare which had not been corrected for magnetic variation. I made an allowance for this and another estimate of the influence of the westerly currents which flow through this part of the Indian Ocean.

About 2 p.m., I went on deck and asked Larry to steer a course of 185 degrees. If we were lucky, I told him with a conviction I did not feel, he could expect to see the island at about 5 p.m.

Then with a heavy heart, I went below, climbed on my bunk and amazingly, dozed off. When I woke it was 6 p.m., and growing dark. I knew we must have missed the island, and with the sail we had left, we couldn't hope to beat back into the westerly winds.

At that moment, a tousled head appeared by my bunk. "Can I have a hug?" Jonathan asked. Sue was right behind him.

"Why am I getting a hug now?" I asked.

"Because you are the best daddy in the whole world — and the best captain," my son replied.

"Not today, Jon, I'm afraid."

"Why, you must be," said Sue in a matter-of-fact voice. "You found the island."

"What!" I shouted.

"It's out there in front of us," they chorused, "as big as a battleship."

I rushed on deck and gazed with relief at the stark outline of Ile Amsterdam. It was only a bleak piece of volcanic rock, with little vegetation — the most beautiful island in the world!

Pg 17 January 6

• Sue made a card with her family in the ship as a caricature.

• Narrator went to sleep after predicting the ship's reaching Ile Amsterdam

• Before 6.00 pm the ship reached Ile Amsterdam

• courage, conviction and presence of mind brought them out of ordeal

• Love and support of family members induces a fighting spirit and helps human beings to remain optimistic and succeed against all odds

QUESTIONS FOR PRACTICE

1. Why did the author undertake the sea journey?
2. What preparations did the author and his wife make for the voyage?
3. How did the children respond when the captain went into their cabin to comfort them?
4. What problems did the hand pumps cause? How did the author resolve it?
5. What was the impact of the children's behaviour on the narrator?
6. How did the first leg of their journey pass and when and where did they sense the first sign of the disaster?
7. Describe the boat which was made for undertaking the voyage.
8. What happened at 6pm on 2nd of January?
9. Justify the title of the text.
10. Explain : 'pinpricks in the vast ocean'.