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Study Guide

for

**Island of the Blue
Dolphins**

by Scott O'Dell



 **Glencoe
McGraw-Hill**

New York, New York Columbus, Ohio Woodland Hills, California Peoria, Illinois

Meet Scott O'Dell



Many of my books are set in the past, but the problems of isolation, moral decisions, greed, need for love and affection are problems of today as well.

—Scott O'Dell

Readers often wrote Scott O'Dell to ask him what it took to be a writer. His reply was the ability to stay seated. "Writing is hard," he said, "harder than digging a ditch, and it requires patience."

O'Dell (1903–1989) began his fiction-writing career in the 1930s. By then he had already worked as a Hollywood movie cameraman and as a book editor for a Los Angeles newspaper. He wrote three novels for adult readers before producing his first novel for young people, and his best-known book, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. The book was an immediate success, winning the Newbery Medal in 1961 as well as many other awards.

Island of the Blue Dolphins, like many of O'Dell's books, takes place near the California coast where O'Dell grew up. His family lived in several towns in southern California, including San Pedro and Julian. San Pedro, located across the San Pedro Channel from San Nicolas Island, would inspire the setting of *Island of the Blue*

Dolphins. Julian was an old gold-mining town on the Mexican border. O'Dell became interested in the histories of Native Americans and Spanish settlers in southern California. This interest led him to choose a Native American or Spanish heroine or hero for several of his novels.

O'Dell also lived on Rattlesnake Island (now called Terminal Island), across a channel from San Pedro. There, from his house at the water's edge, he could listen to the constant sound of the waves and watch three-masted sailing ships pass by. "*Island of the Blue Dolphins* . . . came directly from my memory of the years I lived at Rattlesnake Island and San Pedro," O'Dell said. His love of, and respect for, the ocean are also reflected in the novels *Zia*, *The Black Pearl*, *Alexandra*, and *Venus Among the Fishes*.

While *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is generally regarded as O'Dell's masterpiece, three of his other novels for young people have been widely praised. *The King's Fifth* takes place in New Spain (now Mexico and the southwestern United States) at the time of Coronado's expedition (1535). The main character, Esteban, is a young mapmaker who wants to be the first person to map the unexplored lands north of present-day Mexico. Instead, he becomes caught up in a feverish search for gold. *Sing Down the Moon* is about the forced relocation of the Navajo people in the 1860s, seen through the eyes of a young Navajo girl. *Streams to the River, River to the Sea: A Novel of Sacagawea* takes place during the Lewis and Clark expedition to the Pacific Northwest (1804–1806).

O'Dell's novels continue to appeal to readers because of his universal themes. His characters meet basic human challenges and discover unexpected inner strengths.

Introducing the Novel

This extraordinary book . . . has the timeless, enduring quality of a classic.

—*Chicago Sunday Tribune*

If you were left alone on a deserted island, what would you have to do in order to survive? O'Dell explores this question in *Island of the Blue Dolphins*. Survival is a theme that has appealed to novelists ever since Daniel Defoe published his popular *Robinson Crusoe* in 1719. In that work, Defoe describes how a shipwrecked English sailor uses his own cleverness to survive on a small tropical island.

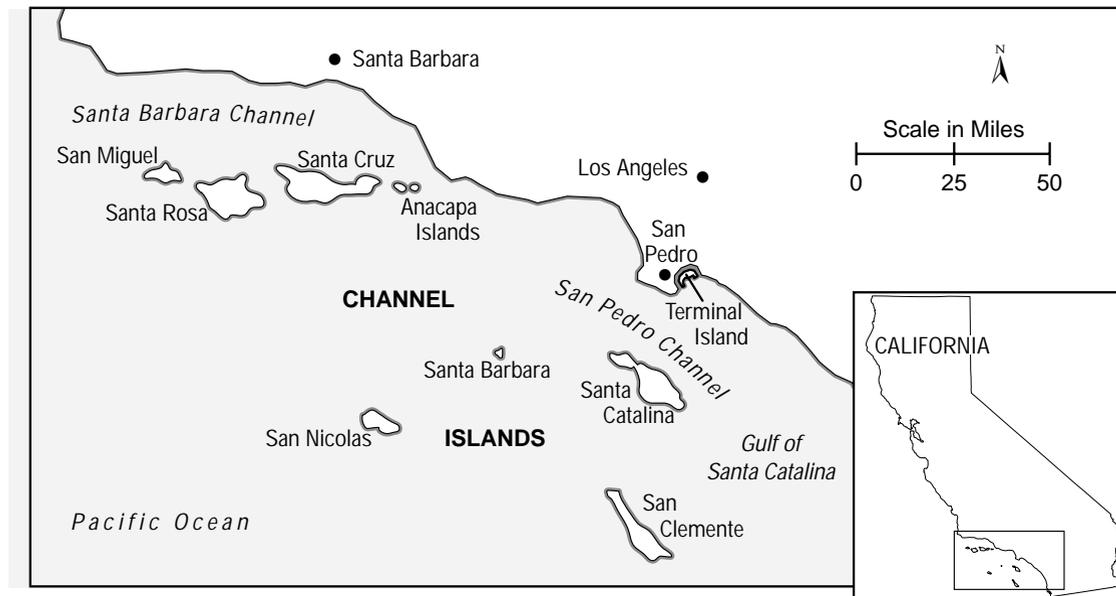
In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, O'Dell tells the story of Karana, a Native American girl who survives alone on a wild, isolated island for many years in the mid-1800s. Karana is tested by her environment, even though it is a familiar one. The story is also about what it means to be human: Karana shows emotional and moral courage as she copes with a terrible loss. In the words of one reader, the novel is

“A sad story, yes; but the sadness . . . is of a singularly inspiring kind.”

Many readers admire *Island of the Blue Dolphins* for its plain but vivid style and for the authentic details that convey the natural richness of the setting. One critic has commented on the “beautiful feeling for the passing of the seasons, and for the companionship offered by the presence . . . of many animals.” Another has noted that O'Dell never allows the narrative pace to slacken as he “intermingles accounts of Karana’s day-to-day activities with the highlights of her adventures.” O'Dell’s style reflects the dignity and perception of the heroine in a moving tale of adventure and self-discovery.

THE TIME AND PLACE

The novel takes place on a remote California island in the mid-1800s. The setting was inspired by San Nicolas Island, one of the Channel Islands. The Channel Islands are located in the Pacific Ocean less than one



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hundred miles off the coast of southern California and separated from the mainland by the San Pedro and Santa Barbara Channels. These islands are home to a rich variety of sea birds and sea mammals, including sea lions and elephant seals, which thrive in its waters. Some of the islands have rugged mountainous terrains and sea caves at the water's edge.

San Nicolas, the outermost of the southern Channel Islands, with an area of about 22 square miles, is small enough to walk completely around in a day. The land rises above sea level to form a plateau, with an altitude of about 900 feet at its

highest point. Gullies that cut into the land run down to the shore. Most of the island is made up of sand dunes, whose sizes and shapes shift constantly because of windstorms and ocean turbulence. The island has virtually no trees but is surrounded by a thick "forest" of giant kelp, a seaweed with large brown leaves. The kelp beds attract many forms of life, including rockfish, lobster, and sea otters.

The Channel Islands have a mild year-round climate and are generally windy. Like mainland California, the islands are shaken by earthquakes, caused by sudden movements in the earth's crust.

Did You Know?

People began to live on the Channel Islands about ten thousand years ago. The first people to come to the area were the Chumash, who lived on the northern islands and on the mainland of present-day California. The Chumash were excellent seafarers. They built large, sturdy canoes out of wooden planks, which allowed them to associate with peoples on the other islands and on the mainland.

Between 2,500 and 4,000 years ago, a second cultural group, the Gabrielinos, began to settle the southern Channel Islands, including San Nicolas. The name *Gabrielinos* comes from the title of the Spanish mission, or religious center, where these people were sent in the late 1700s. The Gabrielinos were related to the Shoshone, who had lived in Southern Oregon and Nevada before migrating to California.

Although the Gabrielinos spoke a different language from that of the Chumash, the two groups had frequent contact through trade. From their neighbors to the north, the Gabrielinos learned to build plank canoes. They also traded with groups on the mainland, exchanging soapstone from the island for

seeds, deer hides, and rabbit skins. The ocean was an abundant source of food for the Gabrielinos. They gathered shellfish along the shore; from their canoes, they caught shark, bonito, halibut, sardines, and other fish. On land they gathered roots and seeds and hunted wild deer and antelope.

Several thousand people were living on the Channel Islands when a Portuguese explorer, Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo, arrived in 1542 in the service of Spain. By the late 1700s, the Spanish government had set up a system of missions on the mainland to spread the Catholic religion. Spanish leaders rounded up many of the islanders and brought them to the missions to convert them to Christianity. Others were forced to work on Spanish-owned ranches. Many islanders died of measles and other new diseases introduced by the Europeans.

Between 1812 and 1816, a weather pattern that made parts of the Pacific Ocean abnormally warm disrupted the food supply in the Channel Islands. This disaster, along with the danger posed by earthquakes, caused many of the remaining islanders to move to the mainland.

Before You Read

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 1–9

FOCUS ACTIVITY

How do people respond to a deep personal loss?

Sharing Ideas

With a partner, discuss different situations that can cause overwhelming sadness, such as the death or absence of a loved one. How do people express their sadness over a great loss? What helps them keep going and find purpose in life in spite of their sadness?

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out about a young girl who experiences a great loss.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

Setting is the time and place in which the events of a story, novel, or play occur. Writers can reveal setting by describing such things as the landscape, weather, seasons, buildings, and clothing styles typical of a locale. They can also indicate the setting through the ways in which the characters talk and behave. In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, the setting is critical to the novel. In fact, the plot and the setting cannot be separated. Both the landscape of the island and the animals that live on it play important roles in the action of the book.

The Aleuts

At the opening of the novel, outsiders called Aleuts visit Karana's island. The Aleuts were a native people who lived on the Alaska Peninsula and Aleutian Islands to the far north. The Aleuts lived in small villages and hunted various sea mammals from large open boats or small one- or two-person kayaks.

The first Europeans to encounter the Aleuts were the Russians. In 1784 Russian fur traders arrived to hunt for sea otters, which were abundant in the region. They were quickly joined by British and U.S. fur traders. Competition for hunting grounds was fierce, and huge numbers of sea otters were killed. To find more otters, fur traders and hunters traveled far down the Pacific Coast. By 1805 some were hunting in waters near the Channel Islands.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

crevice [krev'is] *n.* narrow opening resulting from a split or crack

headland [hed'lənd] *n.* point of unusually high land jutting out into a body of water

pelt [pelt] *n.* the removed skin of a furry or woolly animal

spring [spring] *n.* source of water flowing out of the earth

stern [sturn] *adj.* harsh or severe in manner

vow [vou] *v.* to promise solemnly

Active Reading

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 1–9

A **motive** is a need or a desire that causes a person to act. Sometimes the author states a character's motives. At other times, a reader must infer, or figure out, a character's motives from details that the author gives. As you read Chapters 1–9, use the chart to note the motives in each situation.

Action or Feeling	Motive
1. Tribe members keep watch over the Aleut ship and Aleut camp.	The tribe wants to make sure that the Aleuts do not leave without paying a fair price for the pelts.
2. Karana joins her people on the ship that is taking them from the island.	
3. Karana leaps from the ship and swims to shore.	
4. Karana vows to kill the wild dogs.	
5. Karana burns the village where she had lived with her tribe.	
6. Karana throws away the beads from the chest left by the Russian captain.	
7. Karana makes a spear and a bow and arrow.	
8. Every day Karana watches for the ship's return.	

Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 1–9

Personal Response

Describe Karana's response to her brother's death and the absence of her tribe members. Do you think her response is unusual? What could explain her response? Before answering, review your discussion of loss in the **Focus Activity**.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. What do the Aleuts want to do on the island? Why do the Aleuts and the people of Ghalas-at fight? What is the result?

2. Why and how do Karana's people leave the island a year later?

3. How does Ramo die? What does Karana promise to do after his death? Where does she go to live after her brother's death?

Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 1–9

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. What hints suggest that something bad will happen to Karana’s people before the Aleuts leave?

5. Why must Karana make weapons for herself? Why is she fearful about doing this? Do you think her fear is reasonable?

Literature and Writing

Character Profile

What is your first impression of Karana? Does she seem to be someone you would like to know? Write a paragraph in which you give your opinion of the main character of the novel. Before you write, review Karana’s actions and the motives behind them, as you recorded them on your **Active Reading** chart. Use this information to make some general statements about her personality. Is she brave, confident, quiet, perceptive, or something else? What is important to her? What strengths does she have? How do her hopes, fears, and actions reflect who she is?

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

At the end of Chapter 9, Karana is totally alone on the island and has several problems to solve. With your group, make a list of the problems she faces. Then, brainstorm possible solutions for each problem. When brainstorming, write down as many ideas as you can think of without rating them or criticizing them. Record your ideas in the form of a web or a chart. Once you have recorded everyone’s ideas, review and discuss them. Circle the solutions that fit Karana’s situation the best or seem to be the most likely to succeed. Then share your possible solutions with other groups.

Ecology Connection

Karana is worried that the Aleuts are killing too many sea otters. Her father says many otters are hiding and will return when the hunters leave. Find out what laws exist to regulate hunting today. You may want to investigate the laws in your own state by contacting the Fish and Game Commission. Or you may want to research international agreements that concern the hunting of sea creatures such as whales and dolphins. Share your information with the class. Does your research most closely support Karana’s view of hunting or her father’s?

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Before You Read

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 10–19

FOCUS ACTIVITY

Think about, or look up, the meaning of the word *resourceful*. Define this term in your own words.

Think–Pair–Share

With a partner, discuss your definitions of the word *resourceful*. Then create a two-column chart. In the left column, list difficult situations a person might face. In the right column, describe how a resourceful person might respond to each situation.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Karana makes use of the resources available to her on the island.

BACKGROUND

Did You Know?

An author's **style** includes his or her word choice, sentence structure, and choice of figurative language and imagery. Scott O'Dell's writing style suits his narrator. Karana leads a simple life and has never been beyond her own tiny island, so O'Dell uses simple language and makes concrete observations rather than expressing complicated ideas. O'Dell also uses images that are based on Karana's own experiences. The swimming and leaping dolphins, for example, crisscross each other "as if they were weaving a piece of cloth with their broad snouts."

Elephant Seals

One of the largest animals on Karana's island is the elephant seal, also called the sea elephant. Like other seals, the elephant seal is a powerful swimmer with a streamlined body and four short limbs that end in flippers. The elephant seal received its name because of its large size—males weigh almost four tons—and because of the chunky but flexible snout that hangs down over the mouth of the male. During the breeding season, the males, called bulls, frequently engage in fights as they establish their territories and try to attract females.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

clamor [klam'ər] *n.* loud, continuous noise

lure [loor] *n.* bait; thing that attracts

mourning [môr'ning] *n.* feeling of sorrow after a death

omen [ō'mən] *n.* sign of something good or bad to come

pitch [pich] *n.* dark, sticky substance from trees or other plants, used for waterproofing or for plugging holes

reef [rēf] *n.* low ridge of rocks, sand, or coral that rises above the surface of a body of water

rival [rī'vəl] *n.* one who competes with another

scarce [skārs] *adj.* hard to find; few in number

swarm [swôrm] *n.* large number of things in busy motion

Active Reading

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 10–19

Some of the traits in the list below fit Karana and some do not. Select four traits that describe her well and write them in the chart. Then, for each trait, list at least one action in Chapters 10–19 in which Karana exhibits the trait.

intelligent	funny	responsible	caring	honest
realistic	hardworking	problem-solver	confident	generous

Trait	Actions that Demonstrate Trait
problem-solver	Builds a fire to try to force dogs out of cave so she can shoot at them.

Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 10–19

Personal Response

Imagine yourself in Karana's position. In what ways would you be better prepared than she is to handle the situations with which she is faced? In what ways would you be less well prepared than she is? Explain.

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. Why does Karana decide to canoe to the country lying to the east? What causes her to return to the island? Why is she happy after she returns?

2. What materials does Karana use to build her house? How does she assemble them?

3. Who is Rontu? How does Rontu change Karana's life? How does he help keep her safe?

Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 10–19

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Why does Karana feel that she must be prepared to flee from the island? What resourceful steps does she take to be ready to flee? Before answering, review the chart you made in the **Focus Activity**.

5. Were you surprised that Karana rescued the wounded Rontu? Explain. In what earlier scene did Karana also decide not to kill a wounded animal? What do these acts say about her?

Literature and Writing

An Island of Caves

The Island of the Blue Dolphins has many caves. In Chapters 10–19, important scenes take place in three of these caves. Identify these three scenes. Then, write a brief report describing where the caves are located, what they look like from the inside and the outside, and what events occur in them.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Dividing the task among members of your group, skim Chapters 10–19 for scenes that show Karana observing or interacting with animals. Together, discuss those scenes. How would you summarize her relation to animals? Has her attitude toward animals changed in this section of the book?

Learning for Life

Karana's skills help her survive on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. Name some skills that people need to survive in today's world. Prepare a list of six to ten survival skills for the twenty-first century. The knowledge and use of these skills should help people function better in their day-to-day lives. As you make your list, think about these general questions: Does Karana possess skills and abilities that would also be useful to people living in a modern society? Do people need physical skills as well as mental skills to survive today? Do men and women need the same skills? What survival skills have you already learned? What survival skills do you expect to develop?



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Before You Read

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 20–29

FOCUS ACTIVITY

What mental and emotional changes do people typically undergo as they grow from adolescence into adulthood?

Quickwrite

Write about how people at different levels of maturity might cope with fear, hardship, disappointment, and personal disagreements. How would a child, in comparison with a teenager, deal with these things? How would an adult? Consider reasons why their abilities to cope might differ.

Setting a Purpose

Read to find out how Karana continues to change in response to her experiences on the Island of the Blue Dolphins.

BACKGROUND

The Channel Islands Today

Today, five of the Channel Islands off the coast of California make up the Channel Islands National Park—San Miguel, Santa Rosa, Santa Barbara, Anacapa, and Santa Cruz. About one-half of the acreage of the park is under the ocean, extending one mile out from the shorelines around the islands. Most of the islands have primitive campgrounds and hiking trails. San Nicolas, where *Island of the Blue Dolphins* takes place, and San Clemente are owned today by the U.S. Navy and are used for military training and research. Santa Catalina, also called Catalina Island, is a resort area.

Did You Know?

The **plot** of a novel is the sequence of events in the story. Most plots unfold in five steps. In the **exposition**, the author introduces the characters and sets up the conflict. The **rising action** includes events in which the conflict is developed. The **climax** is the point of greatest suspense, and the **falling action** includes events that happen after the climax. The **resolution** is the final outcome of the conflict. In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, the exposition is presented in Chapters 1–9, which tell how Karana ends up on the island alone. Chapters 10–19 provide the rising action, showing Karana confronting the problem of living alone. The last section, which you are about to read, presents the climax, the falling action, and the resolution.

VOCABULARY PREVIEW

banks [ˈbæŋks] *n.* mounds, piles, or ridges

glimpse [ˈɡlɪmpz] *n.* brief look

hasten [ˈhæˈsən] *v.* to move quickly

horizon [ˈhɒrɪˈzən] *n.* line where earth and sky meet

reproachfully [riˈprəʊtʃˈfəl̩] *adv.* in a disapproving manner

snares [ˈsneɪz] *n.* traps

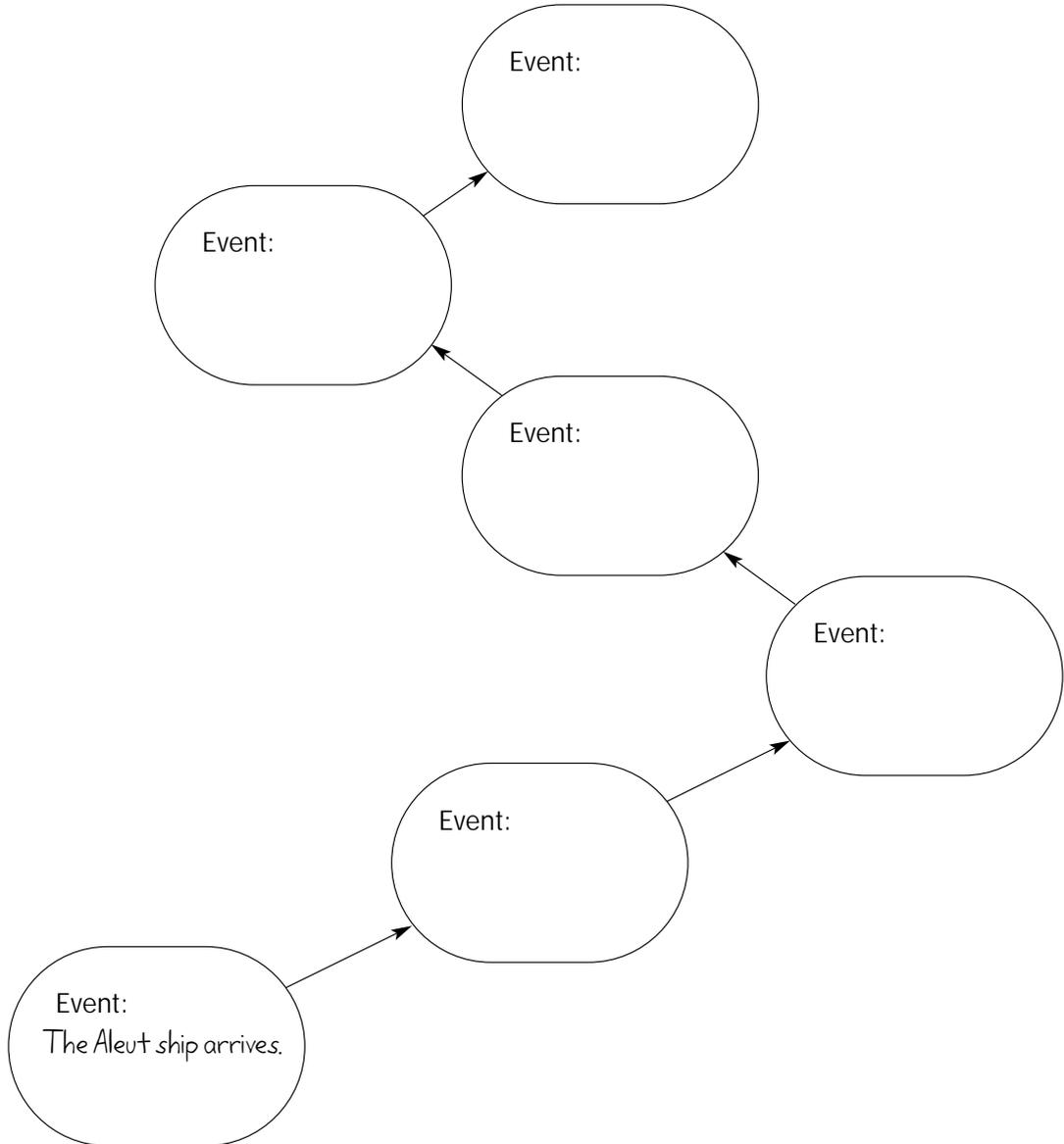
victor [ˈvɪkˈtɔːr] *n.* winner; one who defeats an opponent

wreckage [ˈrekˈɪdʒ] *n.* broken and disordered parts from something wrecked

Active Reading

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 20–29

In Chapters 20–29, Karana’s attitude toward living on the island changes. As you read this section, use as many ovals as you need to record the events that cause or reveal her changing attitude.



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Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 20–29

Personal Response

Might Karana have reacted differently if Tutok had been a young man instead of a young woman? Why or why not?

Analyzing Literature

Recall and Interpret

1. How does Karana react when she sees the Aleut ship? What conflicting feelings does Karana have about Tutok? How do her feelings change and why?

2. How does Karana's animal family grow and change? Why does Karana vow never to kill another animal or bird?

3. Why is Karana eager to greet the men from the unfamiliar ship? When the ship returns, what does Karana learn about her people? Where is she now headed?

Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins Chapters 20–29

Analyzing Literature (*continued*)

Evaluate and Connect

4. Earlier in the book, Karana nursed Rontu back to health, even though he was one of the wild dogs that had killed her brother. What similar situation occurs in this section of the novel? Why is the situation similar?

5. When she goes to meet the white men, why does Karana draw the mark on her face that indicates that she is still unmarried?

Literature and Writing

More Than the Facts

Figurative language communicates ideas beyond the literal meaning of words. Types of figurative language include **personification**, in which a human quality is given to an animal, object, or idea; **metaphor**, in which a comparison between seemingly unlike things is implied; and **simile**, in which unlike things are compared using words such as *like* or *as*.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

Is it more important to learn to rely on yourself or to learn to love and accept others? In your group, debate this question. Before you begin, review the Quickwrite you did for the **Focus Activity**. To support your point of view, be sure to give evidence from the novel as well as from your own experience.

Art Connection

Karana is proud of the beautiful skirt of cormorant feathers that she has made, and she is happy when Tutok admires it. When she goes to meet the ship that will take her from the island, she wears the skirt along with her otter cape and treasured black bead necklace. Use O'Dell's description of Karana's appearance to create a drawing, painting, or cardboard figure of Karana in her finery. You may wish to gather feathers and other materials to use in creating the clothing and jewelry. If you draw these items instead, try to convey their different colors and textures.



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Responding

Island of the Blue Dolphins

Personal Response

Did you find the story sad or inspiring or both? Would you use some other word to describe it? Explain your answer.

Writing About the Novel

Have you ever heard the expression “No man is an island”? What do you think this statement means? Do you agree with it? Would the author of *Island of the Blue Dolphins* agree with it? Answer these questions in a well-organized paragraph.



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A Mother's Yarn

a Saami story adapted by James Riordan

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think about people who achieved greatness or have survived difficult experiences. What combination of personality traits, beliefs, and skills do these people seem to have?

Background

"A Mother's Yarn" is a lesson tale from the Saami (or Sami) people of Lapland, a region of Northern Europe near the Arctic Circle. The Saami are a native people who occupied this area of Europe long before Swedish, Finnish, and Viking people settled there. In this story, a young woman must learn to build the confidence and skills she needs to survive on her own in the wild.

Responding to the Reading

1. Explain the difference between the old man and his wife in "A Mother's Yarn."

2. Why does Nastai's father leave her? How does she feel when she finds herself completely alone?

3. How is Nastai able to turn her life around? What qualities does she display?

4. **Making Connections** What do Karana in *Island of the Blue Dolphins* and Nastai in "A Mother's Yarn" have in common?

Plan for Survival

Could you survive on your own in a new situation, without familiar people and conveniences? Imagine yourself stranded in one of the following places: a dark forest, an island like the Island of the Blue Dolphins, or a large city. Think about what you would do to find food and shelter. What past memories and experiences would give you the knowledge and strength to survive? Where might you seek companionship or relaxing activities? Create a plan for survival. Include practical survival ideas as well as thoughts that would give you emotional strength. Think about what your life would be like in a new place if you could succeed and do well.

Alone

Maya Angelou

Before You Read

Focus Question

What is the difference between being alone and feeling lonely? How do you keep yourself from feeling loneliness?

Background

Maya Angelou is an African American writer, poet, playwright, actor, and political activist. She is best known for her autobiographical classic *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, which is about her childhood struggles with racism, abuse, and poverty. Angelou's five collections of poetry focus on the African American experience and the basic human struggle for happiness, companionship, freedom, and understanding. In this poem, she writes about a person's need to feel truly connected to other people.

Responding to the Reading

1. What does the speaker mean when she says she wants to "find her soul a home"? What does she need?

2. In what ways can a person with a great deal of money who is surrounded by people still feel alone?

3. Why do you think Angelou believes the race of man is suffering? What is her answer to the problem?

4. **Making Connections** Being without human companionship, and then finding out every member of her community has died, affects Karana in different ways. Despite her isolation, why is she often without loneliness? By the end of the novel has her soul "found a home" on the island? Do you believe the novel illustrates the idea that a person can make it alone, or does it emphasize the idea that ". . . Nobody / Can make it out here alone"?

Connecting to Others

With a partner, think about people in the world and in your own community who might be experiencing loneliness. You might consider people in hospitals, the elderly in nursing homes, students in new schools, people moving into new neighborhoods, and people without homes. Think about how loneliness might affect each person. Then write a paragraph about small ways in which people can try to ease some of this loneliness.



California Sea Otters

Richard Wolkomir

Before You Read

Focus Question

Under what circumstances might a wild animal need the help of a human?

Background

Freelance writer Richard Wolkomir is very interested in endangered animals. With his wife Joyce Wolkomir, he wrote a book on the subject called *Junkyard Bandicoots and Other Tales of the World's Endangered Species*. Wolkomir traveled to the coastal town of Monterey, California, to write this article for *National Geographic* magazine.

Responding to the Reading

1. What are three dangers that California sea otters face?

2. How do mother sea otters protect baby sea otters? What do mothers teach their offspring?

3. How do people at the Monterey Bay Aquarium try to help orphaned sea otters?

4. How do California sea otters affect the environment?

5. **Making Connections** What observations does Karana make about sea otters that this article proves to be correct?

Creating a Comic Strip

Create a comic strip that features a California sea otter as a main character. You may want to include humans in your comic strip, or you may want to focus on a family of otters. You may want to let the otters talk, or you may want to tell a story using only pictures. Refer to the article for information about the appearance and behavior of sea otters, and use those details in your comic strip.

The Fish

Elizabeth Bishop

pete at the seashore

Don Marquis

Before You Read

Focus Question

Think about a striking or interesting feature of a favorite pet or of an animal in the wild. What personality traits can you find in the animal that are similar to human traits?

Background

Elizabeth Bishop (1911–1979) was an American writer most well-known for her clever and descriptive poetry. A Massachusetts native, Bishop spent time living in San Francisco, California; Key West, Florida; Mexico; and Brazil. In addition to poetry, Bishop wrote a travel book and translations of twentieth-century Brazilian poetry. In this poem, a person out for a casual day of fishing takes a close look at a fish caught on a hook. Don Marquis (1878–1937) is an American writer who worked as a poet, a playwright, an editor, and a journalist. His most famous characters are Archy the cockroach and Mehitabel the cat, whose humorous and often clever ideas and observations appear in a series of poems. In this poem, Marquis writes from the point of view of a dog running on the beach.

Responding to the Reading

1. Why does the speaker call the hooks and lines attached to the lower lip of the fish “medals with their ribbons” and a “five-haired beard of wisdom”? What story do these hooks and lines tell about the life of the fish?

2. Why do you think the speaker lets the fish go?

3. According to the Marquis poem, what effect does the dog have on its surroundings?

4. What human feelings and wishes does Marquis give the dog in this poem?

5. **Making Connections** In *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, Karana is determined to kill all the wild dogs that killed her brother. However, she decides to spare the wounded Rontu and keep him as a companion. She also develops a new appreciation for sea otters and no longer believes they should be killed for their fur. How is Karana’s change of heart similar to the experience of the speaker in “The Fish”? How is Karana’s attitude toward Rontu similar to that of Marquis to the dog in the poem?

Creative Writing

Write a poem or journal entry from the point of view of an animal that you love or find fascinating or frightening. Imagine what your animal is thinking as he or she takes part in an activity such as playing, stalking prey, hiding from a predator, flying, or observing humans. Before you begin your writing, freewrite about your animal. Try to think about your subject in new ways. Read your completed piece to your classmates. See if they can identify your animal.



from *Daring the Sea*

David W. Shaw

Before You Read

Focus Question

What are some reasons people risk their lives to break or set world records?

Background

George Harbo and Frank Samuelsen set a world record when they rowed across the Atlantic Ocean in 1896. They traveled approximately three thousand miles in fifty-five days on a boat that had no sail, engine, or rudder. However, few people were aware of their story until writer and sailor David W. Shaw turned it into a book in 1998.

Responding to the Reading

1. How do Harbo and Samuelsen feel when they see the Norwegian ship *Eugene*? Why?

2. What signs let Harbo and Samuelsen know they are close to shore?

3. What dangers do the sailors face as they try to land?

4. **Making Connections** Like Harbo and Samuelsen, Karana attempted to make a long sea journey in a boat powered only by oars. Karana had to turn back. What advantages did Harbo and Samuelsen have that allowed them to reach their goal?

Research a Voyage

Research a famous journey across the Atlantic Ocean. You may want to research a historic journey, such as the voyage made by Christopher Columbus in 1492 or by the Pilgrims in 1620. You may want to research a record-breaking journey, such as Harbo and Samuelsen's; or you may want to research a contemporary journey, such as Captain Bill Pinkney's Middle Passage Voyage. Look for answers to who, what, where, when, and why questions as you conduct your research. Present your findings to the class.