

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

The Iceberg Hermit

by
Arthur Roth

Book Information

Arthur Roth, The Iceberg Hermit

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Book Level: 6.4

Interest Level: UG

Shipwrecked in 1757 on an iceberg in the Arctic seas with only an orphaned polar bear cub for companionship, seventeen-year-old Allan begins a seemingly hopeless struggle for survival.

Topics: Adventure, Lost/Abandoned; Adventure, Survival; Countries/Regions, Arctic; Disasters, Shipwrecks

Main Characters

Allan Gordon the principal character in the story, a seventeen-year-old boy who is the sole survivor of the wreck of a whaling ship

fortuneteller the old gypsy lady who read Allan's palm and told him he was going on a long voyage full of danger

Herard an elderly man who appeared to be the tribe's priest

Intuk lead hunter of the tribe and one of the three hunters who discover Allan and take him to the village

Ireek the grandson of Herard, a young hunter about the same age as Allan

Master Bunty Duff the schoolmaster whom Allan hated for telling his mother that school was a waste for him because he lacked brains

Nancy the girl Allan intends to marry when he returns to Aberdeen, Scotland

Nancy, the bear the polar bear Allan raises after he kills the mother bear; she becomes his constant companion

Vocabulary

blubber the fat of whales

keel a timber or plate extending along the center of the bottom of a ship and often projecting from the bottom

scurvy a disease marked by spongy gums, loosening of the teeth, and a bleeding into the skin

yard a long, pole-like piece of wood stretched horizontally or crosswise from a mast to support a sail

yardarm either end of the yard supporting a sail

Synopsis

Seventeen-year-old Allan Gordon lives in Aberdeen, Scotland, around the year 1757 and is an apprentice for a tailor. He meets the girl he wishes to marry and wants to provide better for her than the wages of a tailor would allow. His dream is to own his own fishing trawler. The quickest way he can think of to earn the money is to sign on as a hand on a whaling ship.

The whaling ship has spent the summer around Greenland and is beginning its trip back to Scotland. Unfortunately, the captain has waited too long to make a safe return. The ship hits an iceberg, and Allan is the sole survivor of the wreck. He finds himself alone on the iceberg.

Allan finds that "Anne Forbes" has not sunk completely, and he is able to make a shelter for himself in the captain's cabin in winter and in an ice cave during the summer. He spends two years trying to survive on the cold Arctic iceberg in the hope that he will spot a whaling ship on which he can return home to Nancy.

In those two years he faces the challenges of cold, starvation, and polar bears. After killing a polar bear, he finds its cub. He raises the cub, which becomes his constant companion. Several times the bear saves him when he gets lost or is in danger.

After two years, he realizes he must find land and other people. Traveling with Nancy, the polar bear, he follows the tracks of a sled and reaches land. He is found by hunters, and he becomes part of their tribe. He learns their language and their ways. Even

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though he has found friendship with them, he remains dedicated to finding a ship to take him back to Nancy in Scotland.

After five years with the tribe, Allan is informed that the hunters have spotted a whaling ship. The decision is difficult, but he goes to the ship and convinces the captain to take him back to Europe. Allan relates his story as he travels back. Many of the men don't believe the tales he relates to them.

When he arrives in his hometown, he finds that Nancy has married and moved to Edinburgh. He knows he is up to the challenges that face him in the future.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Allan's biggest hope is to be rescued by a whaling ship headed back to Europe. How might the story have changed if he had returned to Aberdeen five years earlier?

Nancy may have been waiting to marry him. He probably would not have become as self-sufficient or have gotten as good a sense of who he was.

Literary Analysis

The fortuneteller predicted that Allan would go on a voyage in a space of four and return home in a space of seven with a valuable treasure that was not gold. Explain the parts of her prediction that came true.

Allan left on his voyage four months after talking to the fortuneteller. He returned to Aberdeen seven years after he left on the whaling ship. The valuable treasure that he gained was a sense of self-sufficiency and a knowledge of who he was.

Inferential Comprehension

When Allan leaves the tribe, Intuk tells him, "If you do not find your ships, then come back to us." What does this suggest about how Intuk feels about Allan?

In his eyes, Allan has become part of the tribe. Even though he doesn't seem to like Allan, his view of Allan has changed over the years.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the story, even though things didn't work out as he expected, Allan feels good about who he is and what he has accomplished. Tell about an accomplishment or something in your life that has made you feel good about yourself.

Answers will vary according to each child's experiences. The answers should involve something that would reflect a sense of accomplishment.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting Have students draw a map showing the possible route that Allan's whaling ship followed from Scotland to the fishing areas around Greenland. Ask them to mark where they think the ship hit the iceberg, the probable location of the tribe's village, and where Allan boarded the whaling ship that took him back to Scotland.

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning The beginning chapters of the book use many words related to the parts of a whaling ship. Have students make a diagram or model of a whaling ship that would have been used in the 1700s. Have them label the parts with correct terminology such as yard, yardarm, spar, etc.

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors Allan claimed the tribesmen were descendants of the Vikings or Norse Greenlanders. Have the students look for information on the early explorations from the 1200s through the 1700s, including where explorers built settlements, what routes they took, and what type of ships they used. Have students make a poster to share their findings.

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Identifying Persuasive Language Have the students write an imaginary interview that might be aired on a TV show such as *Good Morning, America* or *Today*. The moderator could be interviewing two people with opposing views about whether Allan really told the truth about his seven years of absence. Have them write the dialogue for the moderator and two interviewees. Then have them choose some friends to video or perform it in front of the class.