

Practice Comprehension # 7- Barrow Airport

As we wait at Barrow airport for our luggage to emerge from the plane, we take it in turns to put our heads out of the exit door and we instantly return giggling like school children. None of us has ever experienced cold like it. The wind is fierce enough to double the discomfort. I am wrapped in the thickest, most professional extreme cold-weather clothing I could find and still it is not enough. I am beginning to revise my oft-repeated assertion that I would rather be too cold than too hot.

At half past ten at night it is still as bright as day.

I wander about the town, taking in the sights, such as they are, before submitting to the fact that it will never be dark. The curtains in my hotel room are not thick enough to keep out the white light and I pass a fitful night.

In the height of Barrow's summer it sometimes gets above freezing. That is the best they have to look forward to. The majority of the town's population is made up of Inupiat Eskimos who subsist by hunting caribou, fish and whale. The federal and international authorities who govern these issues allow the Eskimos of Barrow (and yes, they do prefer to be called Eskimo here, not Inuit) to hunt twenty-two whales a year. The whales, principally bowhead and beluga, are shared amongst the whole community. In a land where fruit and fresh vegetables are not indigenous and hard to come by even today, whale meat [.] provides all the vitamins and nutrition that the Inupiat need.

I have an appointment with whaling captain Henry, who invites me into his home to meet his bouncy and boisterous family. Henry is delightful: a warm, friendly and very proud Inupiat. He makes his own drums, he fashions his own tools, and he tries to live a life that his ancestors would be proud of. He agrees to take us on his whaling boat. The season is nearly upon us and it may be that whales will be spotted in the open seas. I am quite happy if we don't see a whale, for it would mean a killing. While I fully respect the Inupiat's traditional rights and while I recognise their hunting

techniques on oar-powered boats have never endangered the bowhead or the beluga, I am still reluctant to watch the slaughter of any whale, no matter how traditionally done it may be.

The blueness of the ice comes as a shock to me.

I had not thought that frozen sea water could be so hauntingly lovely.

We arrive at the whaler, which is not much bigger than an average [.] dining table. A crew of eight, at a moment's notice, can run the boat off the ice and jump into it just as it hits the water - water in which a human, no matter how fully dressed, could not survive for more than three minutes. [.] Henry shows me his harpoons which he assures me end the life of the whale instantly. The Inupiat take pride in never causing pain or distress to their quarry. [...] [. . .]

Barrow is a coastal town, which is hard to verify when the sea is frozen. Henry's whaler is actually a mile or so out. He pulls us along on sleds, driving a Ski-doo.

We stand where the frozen sea ends and watch the horizon. I am glad to say that I see no whales.

Question 1:

- a) Why are the writer and his companions 'giggling like school children' in paragraph 1? [1]
- b) Using your own words, explain fully what the writer means by 'double the discomfort' in paragraph 1. [2]
- c) What is the fact that the writer is 'submitting to' in paragraph 2. [1]
Why does he need to submit to it? [1]
- d) Give two reasons that justify the Inupiat's right to hunt whales from paragraph 3. [2]
- e) Give a phrase from paragraph 4 that means 'lively'. [1]
- f) How does the writer feel about whale hunting? [1] Give two details from paragraph 4 to support your answer. [2]

- g) -i- Why is Henry's whaler 'a mile or so out' from the shore? [1] -
 ii- Using your own words, explain why the writer describes the sea ice as 'hauntingly lovely'. [1]
- h) Explain, using your own words, the challenges of living in Barrow. Give three details from anywhere in the text to support your answer. [3]

Question 2

- a) What two impressions is the writer trying to create by using the phrase, 'The wind is fierce enough to double the discomfort. I am wrapped in the thickest, most professional extreme cold-weather clothing I could find and still it is not enough.' [2]
- b) Why has the writer used the word 'fitful' instead of 'restless' in the phrase, "and I pass a fitful night." [1]
- c) What is the effect of the word, 'boisterous' in paragraph 3? [1]
- d) In the last line, explain what the writer wants to suggest to the reader by saying, "I am glad to say that I see no whales"? (Paragraph 15) [1]
- e) "The blueness of the ice comes as a shock to me", what effect does the writer want to suggest by using the word, "shock". (Paragraph 4) [1]
- f) Identify one example of how the writer uses language effectively to convey his feelings about the area. "As we wait at Barrow airport for our luggage.....I would rather be too cold than too hot." (Paragraph 1)
 Explain the impression the writer creates in the example you have identified. (3)

Marks Obtained: [/25]

Question 1:

- 1 a They have made a game out of checking the weather and are shocked into amusement when they feel how intensely cold it is outside. Both the game and their lack of experience of the intense cold make them seem like children.
- b The freezing temperature plus the chilling effect of the wind make it seem twice as cold and uncomfortable.

Double: Twice (or any other logical equivalent)

Discomfort: Unease / /

- c The northern location of Alaska means it can be daylight for 24 hours a day. This can make it difficult to relax or sleep, which is unpleasant. The writer must accept or 'submit' to the reality of this fact, because he cannot change it.
- d Whale meat provides vitamins and nutrition that the Inupiat are not able to get from fresh fruit and vegetables. Hunting whales is one of the Inupiat's traditional rights, and their hunting does not endanger the whales as a species because they do not kill more than 22 whales per year.
- e 'bouncy and boisterous'
- [Do NOT accept any other answers]

- f The writer is unenthusiastic and averse to whale hunting. He says he is 'reluctant to watch the slaughter of any whale' and is 'glad' when they do not see any whales on the hunting trip.

→ Detail # 1

Feeling: Against / Averse / Unenthusiastic ...

↳ Detail # 2

Details:

- g i) The whaler is a mile out because the sea water nearer the shore is frozen.
ii) Sea water is normally liquid so seeing it frozen solid is a strange but pleasant experience, indicated by the writer describing it as 'hauntingly lovely'. The writer is also astonished by the 'blueness' of the ice as he says the colour comes as a 'shock' to him.

①

②

- h It being 'bright as day' at night, the 'double' effect of cold temperatures and wind, as well as a lack of fresh fruit and vegetables are all challenges of living in Barrow.

③

Question 2:

a)

Two impressions created:

1. Shows extreme severity of the cold (the wind adds to the suffering)
2. Suggests human helplessness despite preparation (even professional clothing isn't enough)

(2 marks)

b)

Fitful vs Restless:

"Fitful" means broken, irregular, or interrupted sleep (short bursts of sleep due to constant daylight)

"Restless" means continuous unease (steady difficulty relaxing)

The writer's use of "fitful" better conveys fragmented, disturbed rest rather than ongoing discomfort

boisterous

c) Literal meaning: Noisy, energetic

Association: Younger individuals / teenagers

Result: Lively, fun to be around

d)

Shows his personal discomfort / disagreement with whale killing

e) literal meaning: Shock Surprise, awe

Result:- Unexpected beauty, mesmerizing

f)

"I would rather be too cold than too hot"

"Giggling like school children"

"Double the discomfort"

Example	Explanation
'giggling like school children'	playful / innocent / shows fun reaction to cold / like kids enjoying a new experience
'None of us has ever experienced cold like it.'	very strong cold / totally new experience / shows surprise and shock
'The wind is fierce enough to double the discomfort.'	wind feels angry / makes it harder to bear / adds to pain and struggle
'wrapped in the thickest, most professional extreme cold-weather clothing'	many layers / well-prepared / still not enough / cold is too powerful
'still it is not enough.'	short and sharp / shows frustration / nothing helps / nature too strong
'revise my oft-repeated assertion that I would rather be too cold than too hot.'	funny / admits mistake / cold is worse than he thought / relatable feeling