

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]
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- 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]