



Blackbeard's Bargain

It all started back at Portsmouth Docks. Sometimes, poor children like me do what we have to do to get by – to survive. Last Wednesday, I did just that.

Hidden down by the docks, I watched as the ships unloaded their cargo; unpacking crate after crate with strange letters down the sides – a language from far away. I knew they must contain something special – something exotic that I could sell to feed my family. Mother would be so proud of me.



As the dock workers went to rest, I came out from my hiding spot and made my way towards the containers – trying to keep hidden from view. I spotted a huge crate, which was beginning to split at the seams from the weight of its mighty load. I knew that it would be easy for a slim boy like me to sneak through the gap. I would grab what I needed and leave without a trace – they wouldn't even notice anything was missing.

So, as I always did, I climbed inside the box. I tried my best to look around but it was difficult to see. I didn't just want to take whatever I could get my hands on – I'm not a crook or a thief. I only wanted tea, tobacco, cotton... anything I could sell to stop my sisters from starving. As I arduously moved around in the crate, struggling to bend and reach in such a tight space, the container began to shake – I knew that if I moved too much, the workers would notice and I would be done for. But that turned out to be the least of my worries, when I felt the box hit the ground with a thump...

Q1: Which three things did the narrator hope to find in the crates?

- _____
- _____
- _____



Q2: 'As I arduously moved around in the crate...'

What do you think the word 'arduously' means in this sentence?

Q3: Why did the narrator think that the crates would contain 'something exotic'?



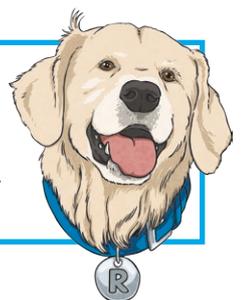
Daring to peer through the crack in the wood, all I could see were the murky bowels of a ship, dimly lit by small lanterns hanging from nails in the wood. As the boat began to sway, I started to feel uneasy and I knew I would be sick if I didn't escape. I had never been on a boat before and this was hardly the best experience to start with. Checking that the coast was clear, I began to squeeze back through the crack from which I had entered.

As I crouched behind the container, my worst fears were confirmed – I was stuck in the belly of a gigantic vessel, travelling further and further from Portsmouth with every second that passed. All I could think of was that the longer it took me to make it to the deck and jump from the side, the further I would have to swim before I was safely back on land. Swimming was not my strongest skill but what else could I do? I couldn't stay here – I'd surely starve... or worse. My choice was clear; I had to at least try. So, with a deep breath, I sneaked out from behind the crate and stood up straight, hoping to get a view of the exit.

I spotted it straight away – it was right at the other end of the hold. Just my luck. Did I run to get there quickly but risk making lots of noise? Or did I sneak, taking my time, and risk an even longer swim back to shore?

I decided to run and I made it to the rickety, wooden door. Bracing myself, I reached out my hand and grabbed the brass handle but, before I could turn the knob, it moved in my hand; someone was at the other side of the door, trying to get in. I would soon find out that that person was Edward Teach – Blackbeard – one of the most infamous and brutal captains of pirate ships that England had ever known.

Q4: What had been used to light up the hold?



Q5: Find and copy a phrase which shows that the narrator was not pleased to be on the boat.





Q6: *'It was right at the other end of the hold. Just my luck.'*
What do these sentences imply about the narrator?

Q7: Why did the narrator need to *'brace'* himself before opening the door?

Q8: Find and copy **two** adjectives that the narrator uses to describe Blackbeard.





With one look at me, I saw anger in his eyes. He grabbed me by the collar. He demanded to know who I was and what I was doing aboard his ship without his knowledge or permission.

I explained that I was simply scavenging by the docks – looking for anything to feed my family – but he took no pity. He said that I would pay in the worst way for trespassing on his ship. He dragged me up to the deck of

the ship, shouting to his crew about the little thief he'd found. As I caught sight of the ocean, I could see that it was already too late. By this point, Portsmouth was long gone and, with no land in sight, I realised that I had no chance of swimming home.

Blackbeard ordered members of the crew to tie my hands behind my back and to tie my feet together with old, frayed rope from the mast. They covered my eyes and I said my final prayers – hoping and wishing that my family would be okay without me. They lifted me up to the platform from which I would be pushed into the depths of the freezing ocean. The wait felt like an eternity – almost worse than the fate itself.

However, as if by the grace of God, instead of being pushed forward, I was pulled backwards. I landed with a thump on the deck of the boat. When the crew removed the blindfold from my eyes, I could see, on the horizon, the black flag of an enemy ship, steering its course straight towards us. That is when Blackbeard said the words I will never forget:

“Prove yourself, son, and it will save you from a trip to Davy Jones’s locker.”



Q9: Explain how the narrator’s feelings change in the last four paragraphs.

Q10: Why did the narrator feel that being pulled back onto the deck was like ‘the grace of God’?

Q11: What did Blackbeard want the narrator to do in return for his life?



Q12: Sum up the plot of this extract in thirty words or less.





Blackbeard's Bargain Answers

Q1: Which three things did the narrator hope to find in the crates?

Accept the answers 'tea', 'tobacco' and 'cotton' only.

Q2: *'As I arduously moved around in the crate...'*

What do you think the word arduously means in this sentence?

Accept answers which compare the meaning of the word arduously to something which is difficult, a struggle or requiring a lot of strength / energy.

Q3: Why did the narrator think that the crates would contain 'something exotic'?

Accept answers which refer to the fact that the crates had a language, which the narrator did not recognise decorating the outsides, e.g.

- **The narrator did not recognise the language on the crates so he must have thought they were from far away, which was rare in those times.**
- **Because the narrator did not recognise the words on the crate, he might have thought that they were going to contain something out of the ordinary.**

Q4: What had been used to light up the hold?

Accept the answer 'small lanterns (hanging from nails in the wood)' only.

Q5: Find and copy a phrase which shows that the narrator was not pleased to be on the boat.

Accept any of the following phrases:

- **I started to feel uneasy**
- **This was hardly the best experience**
- **My worst fears were confirmed**
- **I couldn't stay here**
- **I'd surely starve... or worse**

Q6: *'It was right at the other end of the hold. Just my luck.'*

What do these sentences imply about the narrator?

Accept answers which discuss that the sentences imply that the narrator is usually quite an unlucky person / that he does not experience the best of luck and this was another example of that, such as:

- **The sentences imply that the narrator is quite an unlucky person normally.**
- **They imply that the narrator usually has bad luck and this was another example of it.**
- **Gordon thought it was inconsiderate because it was loud and would attract his mum's attention – something he did not want.**

Q7: Why did the narrator need to 'brace' himself before opening the door?

Accept answers which discuss that the narrator needed to compose and prepare himself because he did not know what would be on the other side of the door, e.g.

The narrator needed to brace himself because he did not know what he would have to face when he opened the door.

Q8: Find and copy **two** adjectives that the narrator uses to describe Blackbeard.

Accept the adjectives 'infamous' and 'brutal' only.

Q9: Explain how the narrator's feelings change in the last four paragraphs.

Accept any answer which explains that the narrator goes from feeling terror upon his discovery to relief when he is pulled back onto the ship's deck. Answers may also discuss feeling curiosity or nerves regarding Blackbeard's request.

Q10: *Why did the narrator feel that being pulled back onto the deck was like 'the grace of God'?*

Accept any answer which discusses the narrator's feelings about his life being spared as being miraculous / incredibly rare, e.g.

- **The narrator thought that his prayers to God had been answered.**
- **The chances of his life being saved were so rare that he felt like it was a miracle from God.**

Q11: What did Blackbeard want the narrator to do in return for his life?

Accept any answer which infers that Blackbeard required the narrator to fight against the enemy ship in return for his survival.

Q12: Sum up the plot of this extract in thirty words or less.

Accept any reasonable summary of the plot, which includes the narrator's accidental voyage on a pirate ship and almost facing death, in thirty words or less, such as:

'A boy accidentally ends up on a pirate ship. He is discovered by Blackbeard who almost throws him overboard before giving him a job to do.'