

TEXT 1 — SHORT STORY

Questions 1–5

Salt

My father has a saying: the sea gives, and the sea takes, and a wise man does not complain about either. He says it every morning as he loads the boat, with his breath smoking in the dark and his hands moving over the nets with the weary tenderness of long habit. I have heard it eight thousand times. Today, for the first time, I wonder whether he believes it.

The Marlin is thirty years old and smells of diesel, bait and the particular loneliness of things that work all night. My father has owned her since before I was born. He taught me to splice rope on her deck, to read the weather in the colour of the sky and to gut a snapper with a single quick movement. All my life, I assumed that I would inherit her, the way I inherited his jaw and his stubborn silences.

But the catches have been getting smaller. Last year, they were half what they had been when I was a child. This year, they are half of that. At the wharf, the other skippers talk in lowered voices about quotas and warming currents and the bank that has begun sending polite, relentless letters. Dad listens without speaking and then goes home to a dinner that none of us can quite swallow.

Tonight, we are out beyond the point, the engine thudding beneath our feet. The net comes up almost empty: a few flapping fish, a tangle of weed, a bottle that glints green in the deck lights. Dad turns it over in his hands. "Twenty years ago, there were so many fish that we had to throw some back," he says, almost to himself. "Now I am hauling rubbish." His voice is flat. It is the first time I have heard him say what he means.

I do not know what to do with this. I am sixteen, and I have been taught that my job is to say nothing and carry the buckets. But the words rise in my throat anyway. "Dad," I say. "We could sell the boat." The silence that follows is so complete that I can hear the water lapping the hull. He does not look at me. "And then what?" he asks. I realise I have no answer. It is the only life either of us knows.

We stay out until dawn, though there is nothing to catch. The sun comes up pink and enormous over the water, and for a moment, the whole sea blazes, as if it had never been anything but generous. Dad lowers himself onto an upturned crate and takes a thermos from his bag. He pours a cup and offers it to me, and I take it, because it is the nearest he has ever come to saying sorry.

On the way back, I take the wheel. It is the first time he has let me. The Marlin is heavy and slow, and she answers reluctantly, like an old horse. But she answers. Behind me, I hear Dad chuckle, a rare sound, like a gate swinging on rusty hinges. "You'll do," he says. I grip the wheel and say nothing, because I know now that some things cannot be inherited whole. They have to be steered.

1. What is the name of the narrator's father's boat?

- A the Snapper
- B the Kahawai
- C the Tui
- D the Marlin

2. In the third paragraph, “relentless” describes the letters as

- A never easing
- B kind and gentle
- C short and rare
- D bright and cheerful

3. Why does the narrator accept the thermos?

- A It is the last drink in the flask
- B Dad’s way to apologise
- C It is a prize for the work
- D It is an order from Dad

THE WORKED ANSWERS TO THOSE 3 QUESTIONS

1. What is the name of the narrator’s father’s boat? [Detail]

Correct answer: D — the Marlin

- What is the question asking? It asks for a fact that the text states.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: “The Marlin is thirty years old”
- The second paragraph names it.
- So the correct answer is D (the Marlin).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - A (the Snapper): The text says the Marlin.
 - B (the Kahawai): The text says the Marlin.
 - C (the Tui): The text says the Marlin.

LOS: Reading: finding information stated in the text

KEY TAKEAWAY

Go back to the text and find the exact words that answer the question, then match them to an option.

2. In the third paragraph, “relentless” describes the letters as [Vocab]

Correct answer: A — never easing

- What is the question asking? It asks what a word means in this text.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: “the bank that has begun sending polite, relentless letters”
- Relentless means persistent.
- So the correct answer is A (never easing).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - B (kind and gentle): ‘Relentless’ means unstoppable.
 - C (short and rare): ‘Relentless’ means unstoppable.
 - D (bright and cheerful): ‘Relentless’ means unstoppable.

LOS: Reading: understanding word meaning in context

KEY TAKEAWAY

Reread the sentence, put each option in place of the word, and see which one still makes sense.

3. Why does the narrator accept the thermos? [Inference]

Correct answer: B — Dad's way to apologise

- What is the question asking? It asks what the clues in the text show.
- Go back to the text and find the evidence: "because it is the nearest he has ever come to saying sorry"
- The gesture is an apology.
- So the correct answer is B (Dad's way to apologise).
- Why the other options are wrong:
 - A (It is the last drink in the flask): The text says it is the nearest he has come to saying sorry.
 - C (It is a prize for the work): The text says it is the nearest he has come to saying sorry.
 - D (It is an order from Dad): The text says it is the nearest he has come to saying sorry.

LOS: Reading: working out what the text suggests

KEY TAKEAWAY

When the text does not say it directly, use the clues it gives, then ask: what must be true?

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