

## The Opus

**Read the passage and answer the following questions. You have 45 minutes.**

*Donovan Hohn, a journalist, is investigating an unusual cargo spillage on the Pacific Coast. He hitches a ride on The Opus.*

This morning, after a night on the Opus, the first of several to come, after gassing up, it was thrilling to be out on the water, far more thrilling than my slow, soggy, fever-inducing ferry ride to Sitka two years ago, for much the same reason that riding a motorcycle of horse is more thrilling than riding a Greyhound bus. The Opus is so small, even the short, six-foot seas of Resurrection Bay made the boat indulge in nearly every one of the six degrees of freedom. The co-pilot's seat is so close to the water, I could put my hand out the Plexiglas port window and feel the spray.

When a pair of Dall's porpoises started racing alongside us, cavorting, braiding their wakes around ours, they seemed near enough almost to touch. Beyond Fox Island we emerged from Resurrection Bay and into the Gulf of Alaska. Before us the North Pacific stretched all the way to Sitka, all the way to Hawaii, all the way to the North Pacific garbage patch, all the way to Hong Kong and Guangzhou.

On we coasted, on a southwesterly nearing, among the forested tops of partially submerged mountains, past the point where the tour boats ventured, on and on, until there were not even any fishing boats to be seen, only wildlife - orcas, Dall's porpoises cavorting at metabolically improbable speeds through submarine canyons, puffins dragging their football bodies over the waves as they flap-flap-flapped their little wings. White mountain goats speckled the sorrel-green lower slopes of snowcapped granite peaks. A pair of black dorsal fins described momentary arcs then vanished, their owners, a humpback mother and calf, having slipped below the surface without breaching or turning fluke, much to my disappointment.

It was hard to carry on a conversation over the rebuilt outboard's roar. That Pallister is slightly deaf, or as he puts it, "deaf as a stump" - made it harder still. Mostly he shouted and I listened. He shouted about the metric system, how crazy it was we hadn't adopted it. He shouted about overpopulation, how it was the root of all environmental evils. He shouted about exercise, to which he objected almost as strenuously as he did to overpopulation. "People go walking out in the road with weights in their hands!" he explained in disbelief. "Why don't you build a wall or dig a hole in the ground?" That's one reason he likes cleaning up beaches: "It makes me feel like I'm doing something that's real important! It gives me a reason for being alive!"

There are dirty dishes in the galley, fragrant sports sandals piled among rubber boots beneath a coat-rack heavy with wet-weather gear. There is even, we will later discover, a secret stash of beer that Pallister's sons have hidden from their teetotaling father. I notice a tattered copy of Tortilla Flats beside a rumpled sleeping bag. It belongs to Keiler Pallister, the eldest and tallest of the boys. Of Steinbeck's novel Keiler will later remark, "They sure drink a lot of wine in that book!" From Steinbeck he'll move on to Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, of which Erik Pallister, the next eldest, will remark, "That the one about marlin? The whole book's about that?"

Pallister's youngest son, nineteen-year-old Ryan, is the one I find most sympathetic, in part because he reminds me of my more likable students, and in part because Pallister is far harder on Ryan than he is on Keiler and Erik. When I mention my son Bruno's fear of sea-bathing, Pallister says, "You just got to make him do it."

"And if he doesn't want to," Ryan says sardonically, "pressure him."

All your answers must be written in full sentences and should be appropriately punctuated. There are 9 questions. Good luck!

1. What is the Opus? (1)

---

---

---

2. Explain in your own words the behaviour of the porpoises. (3)

---

---

---

---

---

3. Why do you think puffins are compared to footballs? (2)

---

---

---

---

4. Why is the writer disappointed by the behaviour of the humpbacks? (2 marks)

---

---

---

---

5. List Pallister's concerns in their order of importance, with 1 being the most important. (3)

- 1. \_\_\_\_\_
- 2. \_\_\_\_\_
- 3. \_\_\_\_\_

6. Explain the meaning of the following words: (5)

- a) Fever-inducing \_\_\_\_\_
- b) Partially \_\_\_\_\_
- c) Breaching \_\_\_\_\_
- d) Overpopulation \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Fragrant \_\_\_\_\_

7. What impressions do we get of Pallister in the second half of the passage? (4)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

8. Explain why the author particularly likes Ryan Pallister. (2)

---

---

---

---

9. Pallister and his sons seem to have some different attitudes to life. What are these differences and how might they make life on the boat difficult? (3)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

Away from it all

***Read the passage and answer the following questions. You have 45 minutes.***

*In 1978 a team of scientists chanced upon a family who had remained hidden from the world for more than 40 years...*

Siberian summers do not last long. The snows linger into May, and the cold weather returns again during September, freezing the Taiga into a still life awesome in its desolation: endless miles of straggly pine and birch forests scattered with sleeping bears and hungry wolves; steep-sided mountains; white-water rivers that pour in torrents through the valleys; a hundred thousand icy bogs. This forest is the last and greatest of Earth's wildernesses. It stretches from the furthest tip of Russia's arctic regions as far south as Mongolia, and east from the Urals to the Pacific: five million square miles of nothingness, with a population, outside a handful of towns, that amounts to only a few thousand people.

Thus it was in the remote south of the forest in the summer of 1978. A helicopter sent to find a safe spot to land a party of geologists was skimming the treeline a hundred or so miles from the Mongolian border when it dropped into the thickly wooded valley of an unnamed tributary of the Abakan, a seething ribbon of water rushing through dangerous terrain. The valley walls were narrow, with sides that were close to vertical in places, and the skinny pine and birch trees swaying in the rotors' downdraft were so thickly clustered that there was no chance of finding a spot to set the aircraft down. But, peering intently through his windscreen in search of a landing place, the pilot saw something that should not have been there. It was a clearing, 6,000 feet up a mountainside, wedged between the pine and larch and scored with what looked like long, dark furrows. Was this evidence of human habitation? It seemed to be a garden that, from the size and shape of the clearing, must have been there for a long time, and standing within it a small wooden house.

When, later, the scientists returned they found the dwelling much as before. The low door to the house creaked, and the figure of a very old man emerged into the light of day, straight out of a fairy tale. Barefoot. Wearing a patched and repatched shirt made of sacking. He wore trousers of the same material, also in patches, and had an uncombed beard. His hair was disheveled. He looked frightened and was very attentive.... We had to say something, so I began: 'Greetings, grandfather! We've come to visit!'

The old man did not reply immediately.... Finally, we heard a soft, uncertain voice: 'Well, since you have traveled this far, you might as well come in.'

The sight that greeted the geologists as they entered the cabin was like something from the middle ages. Jerry-built from whatever materials came to hand, the dwelling was not much more than a burrow - “a low, soot-blackened log kennel that was as cold as a cellar,” with a floor consisting of potato peel and pine-nut shells. Looking around in the dim light, the visitors saw that it consisted of a single room. It was cramped, musty and indescribably filthy, propped up by sagging joists, and astonishingly, home to a family of five.

The silence was suddenly broken by sobs and lamentations. Only then did we see the silhouettes of two women. One was in hysterics, praying: ‘This is for our sins, our sins.’ The other, keeping behind a post... sank slowly to the floor. The light from the little window fell on her wide, terrified eyes, and we realized we had to get out of there as quickly as possible.

Slowly, over several visits, the full story of the family emerged. The old man’s name was Karp Lykov, and he was an Old Believer—a member of a fundamentalist Russian Orthodox sect, worshiping in a style unchanged since the 17th century. Old Believers had been persecuted since the days of Peter the Great, and Lykov talked about it as though it had happened only yesterday;

Under the Soviets, isolated Old Believer communities that had fled to Siberia to escape persecution began to retreat ever further from civilization. During the purges of the 1930s, with Christianity itself under assault, a Communist patrol had shot Lykov’s brother on the outskirts of their village while Lykov knelt working beside him. He had responded by scooping up his family and bolting into forest.

That was in 1936, and there were only four Lykovs then - Karp; his wife, Akulina; a son named Savin, 9 years old, and Natalia, a daughter who was only 2. Taking their possessions and some seeds, they had retreated ever deeper into the Taiga, building themselves a succession of crude dwelling places, until at last they had fetched up in this desolate spot. Two more children had been born in the wild - Dmitry in 1940 and Agafia in 1943 - and neither of the youngest Lykov children had ever seen a human being who was not a member of their family. All that Agafia and Dmitry knew of the outside world they learned entirely from their parents’ stories. The family’s principal entertainment, was for everyone to recount their dreams.

As the Soviet geologists got to know the Lykov family, they realized that they had underestimated their abilities and intelligence. Each family member had a distinct personality; old Karp was usually delighted by the latest

innovations that the scientists brought up from their camp, and though he steadfastly refused to believe that man had set foot on the moon, he adapted swiftly to the idea of satellites. The Lykovs had noticed them as early as the 1950s, when “the stars began to go quickly across the sky,” and Karp himself conceived a theory to explain this: “People have thought something up and are sending out fires that are very like stars.”

***All the answers must be written in full sentences and should be appropriately punctuated. There are 8 questions. Good luck!***

1. Describe the landscape of the Taiga region in your own words. (4)

---

---

---

---

2. In the second paragraph why did the helicopter find it so difficult to land? (2)

---

---

---

3. Why is the old man in the third paragraph described as coming ‘straight out of a fairy tale’? (2)

---

---

4. Looking at the words in the passage, explain what they mean: <sup>[ ]</sup>~~SEP~~Awesome (line 2)

---

Torrents (line 4)

---

Skimming (line 10)

---

Dishevelled (line 23)

---

5. Why does the writer feel the fact that the house is home to a family of five is astonishing? (2)

6. Why do the scientists feel they have to leave as quickly as possible when they meet the women? (2)

---

---

---

---

7. Old Karp is described as ‘scooping up his family and bolting into forest’ during the Soviet purges of the 1930s. What does this phrase mean and why do you think Karp might have done this? (4)

---

---

---

8. Describe the personality of Old Karp. (2)

---

---

9. Briefly explain the effect being ‘discovered’ will have on the Lykovs in your opinion. (3)



