The Ghost Ship



The Ghost Ship — Full Lesson Plan

A Fantastic Tales short story and lesson plan, courtesy of ManWrites.

Read a mysterious harbour story and practise vocabulary, reading comprehension, discussion, role play, debate and creative writing.

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Introductory Questions

1. Look at the title “The Ghost Ship”. What do you think the story might be about?

2. Have you ever visited a harbour? What could you see and hear?

3. What do you know about old sailing ships?

4. Why do you think people enjoy stories about pirates?

5. Would you want to explore an abandoned ship? Why or why not?

6. What would you do if something mysterious appeared near your home?

7. How can a drone help people investigate a dangerous place?

8. Do you think there is usually an ordinary explanation for a mystery?

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The Ghost Ship

It arrived on a Tuesday morning.

Nobody had seen it come into the harbour. Yet there it was, towering above the fishing boats: a great wooden ship with a black hull and enormous sails that moved gently in the wind.

By nine o'clock, half the town had gathered along the pebble beach.

'Looks like something from two hundred years ago,' someone said.

'Where's the crew?' asked someone else.

There was no one on deck. No voices, no movement. Only the ropes creaking against the masts.

The police cleared the beach and stopped the fishing boats from leaving the harbour. The fishermen were furious. They had a living to earn, and an old ship, however mysterious, wasn't going to pay their bills.

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At the town hall, the mayor called an emergency meeting. The chief of police was there, along with the head of sea rescue and a local historian who had written a book about pirates.

The historian studied a photograph of the vessel.

‘Remarkable,’ he said. ‘It looks exactly like an eighteenth-century sailing ship. The sort that pirates might have used.’

‘Pirates?’ The mayor stared at him. ‘Are you telling me we've got pirates in our harbour?’

‘I'm telling you the ship looks authentic. That doesn't mean it's full of pirates.’

‘Then who owns it? And how did it get here?’

Nobody had an answer.

The sea rescue captain offered to take a boat out and climb aboard, but the police chief shook his head.

‘We don't know whether it's safe. There could be someone hiding on it.’

‘Meanwhile,’ said the mayor, ‘the whole town is standing on the beach, waiting for us to do something.’

His assistant, who had been taking notes, raised her hand.

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‘Why don't we send a drone over?’

The room fell silent.

‘A drone?’ repeated the mayor.

‘We could look at the deck without putting anyone in danger.’

The mayor brightened. ‘Excellent. Do we have one?’

The police chief and the rescue captain exchanged embarrassed glances. Neither department owned a drone.

‘My nephew does,’ the assistant said. ‘He films the coastline for his YouTube channel.’

‘Can he operate it properly?’

‘Very well. He's been doing it for years.’

‘How old is he?’ asked the chief.

‘Fourteen.’

The mayor gave a short laugh. ‘Wonderful. We have a police force and a sea rescue team, but we need a schoolboy to investigate a pirate ship.’

By late afternoon, the story had spread. People crowded the harbour again. An ice cream van had arrived, and several spectators were filming with their phones.

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Harry, the assistant's nephew, set his drone on the ground. He was delighted to have been asked, although the sight of the enormous ship made him feel strangely nervous.

‘Can everyone see the screen?’ he asked.

The mayor, the police chief and the historian leaned closer. Harry lifted the drone into the air and guided it across the water. As it approached the ship, the old wooden hull filled the screen. There were dark marks along its sides and thick ropes hanging from the rails.

‘Take it higher,’ said the historian. ‘Let us see the deck.’

Harry rose above the masts and turned the camera downwards.

Nothing.

There were barrels, coils of rope and a small rowing boat secured to the deck. But not a single person.

‘Go closer,’ whispered the mayor.

Harry lowered the drone until it was hovering a few feet above the boards. The camera passed over a closed hatch, then turned towards a dark opening beneath the raised deck.

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For a second, Harry thought he saw something move in the shadows.

‘Wait,’ he said.

‘What is it?’ asked the chief.

Harry moved the drone back. The opening was empty.

‘Nothing. I thought I saw someone.’

The historian was almost trembling with excitement.

‘Look at the workmanship,’ he said. ‘It's like looking straight into the past.’

Harry made another circuit, checking every corner he could reach. There was still no sign of life. At last, with the battery running low, he brought the drone back to shore.

‘So it's empty,’ said the mayor.

‘As far as we can tell,’ said Harry.

The mayor looked towards the ship. ‘But somebody must have sailed it here.’

Nobody replied.

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By early evening, the crowd had begun to lose interest. The ice cream van drove away. Families went home for dinner, and the police promised to keep watch from the harbour wall.

‘We'll decide what to do in the morning,’ the mayor said.

Soon the beach was deserted. Lights appeared in the windows of the houses overlooking the water. Beyond them, the great ship stood motionless in the gathering darkness.

For a long time, nothing happened.

Then a hatch on the deck creaked open.

One man climbed out, followed by another, and then three more. Their clothes were ragged, their boots worn. Curved swords hung at their sides.

They lowered the small rowing boat into the water and climbed aboard. Without a word, they began pulling towards the shore.

As they approached the sleeping town, one of the men started to sing. The others joined him, softly at first, in an old sea shanty that had not been heard in that harbour for hundreds of years.

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Reading Comprehension Questions

1. On which day does the ship arrive?
2. What is unusual about the way the ship arrives?
3. What does the ship look like?
4. How many townspeople have gathered by nine o’clock?
5. What signs of life can people see or hear on deck?
6. What do the police stop the fishermen from doing?
7. Why are the fishermen furious?
8. Who attends the emergency meeting with the mayor?
9. Which period does the historian think the ship resembles?
10. Does the historian say that pirates are definitely aboard?
11. What does the sea rescue captain offer to do?
12. Why does the police chief reject his offer?
13. What does the mayor’s assistant suggest?
14. Why does she think her idea will be safer?
15. Who owns the drone, and what does he use it for?
16. How old is the drone’s owner?
17. What are some spectators doing by late afternoon?
18. How does Harry feel about being asked to help?

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19. Who leans closer to look at Harry’s screen?

20. What objects does the drone reveal on the deck?

21. What does Harry think he sees in the shadows?

22. What happens when Harry moves the drone back?

23. What particularly excites the historian?

24. Why does Harry bring the drone back to shore?

25. What does Harry say when the mayor declares that the ship is empty?

26. What do the police promise to do that evening?

27. How many men climb out of the hatch, and what do they look like?

28. How do the men travel towards the town, and what do they sing?

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The Ghost Ship — Story and Reading Comprehension Questions

This is the story divided into clear sections with reading comprehension questions below each section. This format might be easier for certain classes. You can find the model answers at the end of the lesson plan.

Section 1

It arrived on a Tuesday morning.

Nobody had seen it come into the harbour. Yet there it was, towering above the fishing boats: a great wooden ship with a black hull and enormous sails that moved gently in the wind.

By nine o’clock, half the town had gathered along the pebble beach.

‘Looks like something from two hundred years ago,’ someone said.

‘Where’s the crew?’ asked someone else.

There was no one on deck. No voices, no movement. Only the ropes creaking against the masts.

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The police cleared the beach and stopped the fishing boats from leaving the harbour. The fishermen were furious. They had a living to earn, and an old ship, however mysterious, wasn't going to pay their bills.

Reading Comprehension Questions

1. On which day does the ship arrive?
2. What is unusual about the way the ship arrives?
3. What does the ship look like?
4. How many townspeople have gathered by nine o’clock?
5. What signs of life can people see or hear on deck?
6. What do the police stop the fishermen from doing?
7. Why are the fishermen furious?

Section 2

At the town hall, the mayor called an emergency meeting. The chief of police was there, along with the head of sea rescue and a local historian who had written a book about pirates.
The historian studied a photograph of the vessel.

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‘Remarkable,’ he said. ‘It looks exactly like an eighteenth-century sailing ship. The sort that pirates might have used.’

‘Pirates?’ The mayor stared at him. ‘Are you telling me we've got pirates in our harbour?’

‘I'm telling you the ship looks authentic. That doesn't mean it's full of pirates.’

‘Then who owns it? And how did it get here?’

Nobody had an answer.

Reading Comprehension Questions

8. Who attends the emergency meeting with the mayor?
9. Which period does the historian think the ship resembles?
10. Does the historian say that pirates are definitely aboard?

Section 3

The sea rescue captain offered to take a boat out and climb aboard, but the police chief shook his head.

‘We don't know whether it's safe. There could be someone hiding on it.’

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‘Meanwhile,’ said the mayor, ‘the whole town is standing on the beach, waiting for us to do something.’

His assistant, who had been taking notes, raised her hand. ‘Why don't we send a drone over?’

The room fell silent.

‘A drone?’ repeated the mayor.

‘We could look at the deck without putting anyone in danger.’

The mayor brightened. ‘Excellent. Do we have one?’

Reading Comprehension Questions

11. What does the sea rescue captain offer to do?
12. Why does the police chief reject his offer?
13. What does the mayor’s assistant suggest?
14. Why does she think her idea will be safer?

Section 4

The police chief and the rescue captain exchanged embarrassed glances. Neither department owned a drone.

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‘My nephew does,’ the assistant said. ‘He films the coastline for his YouTube channel.’

‘Can he operate it properly?’

‘Very well. He's been doing it for years.’

‘How old is he?’ asked the chief.

‘Fourteen.’

The mayor gave a short laugh. ‘Wonderful. We have a police force and a sea rescue team, but we need a schoolboy to investigate a pirate ship.’

Reading Comprehension Questions

15. Who owns the drone, and what does he use it for?

16. How old is the drone’s owner?

Section 5

By late afternoon, the story had spread. People crowded the harbour again. An ice cream van had arrived, and several spectators were filming with their phones.

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Harry, the assistant's nephew, set his drone on the ground. He was delighted to have been asked, although the sight of the enormous ship made him feel strangely nervous.

‘Can everyone see the screen?’ he asked.

The mayor, the police chief and the historian leaned closer. Harry lifted the drone into the air and guided it across the water. As it approached the ship, the old wooden hull filled the screen. There were dark marks along its sides and thick ropes hanging from the rails.

‘Take it higher,’ said the historian. ‘Let us see the deck.’

Harry rose above the masts and turned the camera downwards.

Nothing.

There were barrels, coils of rope and a small rowing boat secured to the deck. But not a single person.

‘Go closer,’ whispered the mayor.

Reading Comprehension Questions

17. What are some spectators doing by late afternoon?
18. How does Harry feel about being asked to help?

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19. Who leans closer to look at Harry’s screen?

20. What objects does the drone reveal on the deck?

Section 6

Harry lowered the drone until it was hovering a few feet above the boards. The camera passed over a closed hatch, then turned towards a dark opening beneath the raised deck. For a second, Harry thought he saw something move in the shadows.

‘Wait,’ he said.

‘What is it?’ asked the chief.

Harry moved the drone back. The opening was empty.

‘Nothing. I thought I saw someone.’

Reading Comprehension Questions

21. What does Harry think he sees in the shadows?

22. What happens when Harry moves the drone back?

Section 7

The historian was almost trembling with excitement.

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‘Look at the workmanship,’ he said. ‘It's like looking straight into the past.’

Harry made another circuit, checking every corner he could reach. There was still no sign of life. At last, with the battery running low, he brought the drone back to shore.

‘So it's empty,’ said the mayor.

‘As far as we can tell,’ said Harry.

The mayor looked towards the ship. ‘But somebody must have sailed it here.’

Nobody replied.

Reading Comprehension Questions

23. What particularly excites the historian?

24. Why does Harry bring the drone back to shore?

25. What does Harry say when the mayor declares that the ship is empty?

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Section 8

By early evening, the crowd had begun to lose interest. The ice cream van drove away. Families went home for dinner, and the police promised to keep watch from the harbour wall.

‘We'll decide what to do in the morning,’ the mayor said.

Soon the beach was deserted. Lights appeared in the windows of the houses overlooking the water. Beyond them, the great ship stood motionless in the gathering darkness.

For a long time, nothing happened.

Then a hatch on the deck creaked open.

One man climbed out, followed by another, and then three more. Their clothes were ragged, their boots worn. Curved swords hung at their sides.

They lowered the small rowing boat into the water and climbed aboard. Without a word, they began pulling towards the shore.

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As they approached the sleeping town, one of the men started to sing. The others joined him, softly at first, in an old sea shanty that had not been heard in that harbour for hundreds of years.

Reading Comprehension Questions

26. What do the police promise to do that evening?

27. How many men climb out of the hatch, and what do they look like?

28. How do the men travel towards the town, and what do they sing?

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Essential Vocabulary

harbour	towering	hull
sails	deck	creaking
masts	furious	emergency
historian	vessel	remarkable
eighteenth-century	authentic	aboard
assistant	drone	coastline
operate	embarrassed	investigate
spectators	delighted	guided
rails	barrels	coils
secured	hovering	hatch
shadows	trembling	workmanship
circuit	shore	deserted
motionless	ragged	worn
curved	swords	rowing boat
pulling	sea shanty	gathering darkness

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Vocabulary Practice Exercise

Follow the steps below to help you learn and remember new words and phrases more effectively:

Write each new word or phrase in your vocabulary notebook.

Look up its meaning in your dictionary and write a clear, simple definition.

Create your own sentence using the word or phrase correctly. Connect it to your own life or experiences.

Examples

Harbour — *an area of water where boats can shelter.*

*Example sentence: We watched the fishing boats return to the **harbour**.*

Authentic — *genuine, rather than a copy or imitation.*

*Example sentence: The museum displays an **authentic** eighteenth-century sword.*

Why do this?

Writing definitions and making your own examples helps you use and remember new language. This supports your reading, writing, speaking and listening.

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Vocabulary Practice Exercise

Match each word (1–15) with its correct definition (a–o).

Word	Write letter here →
1. harbour	
2. hull	
3. deck	
4. masts	
5. historian	
6. vessel	
7. authentic	
8. drone	
9. spectators	
10. hovering	
11. hatch	
12. workmanship	
13. shore	
14. ragged	

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15. sea shanty	

Definitions:

a. a song traditionally sung by sailors while working

b. the quality and skill shown in making something

c. people watching an event

d. the main body of a ship

e. genuine rather than an imitation

f. the land along the edge of the sea or a lake

g. an area of water where boats can shelter

h. a person who studies or writes about the past

i. staying in one position in the air

j. a small aircraft controlled remotely without a pilot aboard

k. torn and in poor condition

l. the floor of a ship that people walk on

m. a boat or ship

n. tall poles on a ship that support sails

o. an opening with a cover in a floor or deck

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True or False

Read the statements below and decide if they are True or False. Correct the false statements. You can find the answers at the end of the lesson plan.

1. Several people watch the ship enter the harbour.

2. The ship has a black hull and enormous sails.

3. The fishermen are pleased that they cannot leave the harbour.

4. The historian confirms that pirates are definitely on the ship.

5. The police chief is concerned that someone might be hiding aboard.

6. Both the police and sea rescue departments own drones.

7. Harry films the coastline for his YouTube channel.

8. Harry clearly identifies a man beneath the raised deck.

9. Harry returns the drone because its battery is running low.

10. Five men leave the ship in a small rowing boat.

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What is the Correct Synonym?

A synonym is a word of similar meaning. Match each word from the story with a word from the box. Use each answer once.

Word Box: *fastened*, *extraordinary*, *still*, *huge*, *anxious*, *genuine*, *empty*, *angry*, *pleased*, *correctly*

1. enormous → _____
2. furious → _____
3. remarkable → _____
4. authentic → _____
5. properly → _____
6. delighted → _____
7. nervous → _____
8. secured → _____
9. deserted → _____
10. motionless → _____

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What is the Correct Antonym?

An antonym is a word of opposite meaning. Match each word from the story with a word from the box. Use each answer once.

Word Box: *farther*, *light*, *full*, *moving*, *tiny*, *loudly*, *dangerous*, *miserable*, *open*, *lower*

1. enormous → _____
2. safe → _____
3. empty → _____
4. closed → _____
5. higher → _____
6. closer → _____
7. delighted → _____
8. motionless → _____
9. softly → _____
10. darkness → _____

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Words and Meanings

Match each expression from the story (1–10) with its correct meaning (a–j).

1. had a living to earn

2. climb aboard

3. the room fell silent

4. brightened

5. exchanged embarrassed glances

6. running low

7. as far as we can tell

8. lose interest

9. keep watch

10. pulling towards the shore

Meanings:

a. stop feeling curious or interested

b. look at each other while feeling awkward

c. have only a small amount remaining

d. row towards land

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e. need to make money to support themselves

f. look happier or more hopeful

g. observe a place carefully for possible danger

h. get onto a boat or ship

i. according to the information available to us

j. everyone in the room stopped speaking

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Gap Fill Exercise

Complete each sentence with the correct word from the box. Use each answer once. Two words will not be used.

Word Box: *hatch*, *authentic*, *shore*, *furious*, *hovering*, *spectators*, *motionless*, *harbour*, *ragged*, *historian*, *drone*, *swords*

1. The fishing boats returned to the _____ to shelter from the storm.

2. He was _____ when he discovered that someone had stolen his bicycle.

3. A local _____ gave a talk about life in the town two hundred years ago.

4. The expert confirmed that the signature was _____, rather than a modern imitation.

5. Harry controlled the camera on his _____ from the beach.

6. The _____ cheered as the runners crossed the finish line.

7. The helicopter was _____ above the field without moving forwards.

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8. The sailor opened the _____ in the deck and climbed down the ladder.

9. After years of use, the old coat was torn and _____.

10. The child stood completely _____ while the butterfly rested on her hand.

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Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think nobody sees the ship arrive?

2. How does the opening create a sense of mystery?

3. Are the fishermen right to be angry with the police?

4. Would you support the decision to close the harbour? Why?

5. Why does the mayor react so strongly to the word “pirates”?

6. Does the historian help the investigation, or distract from it?

7. Why might the officials feel embarrassed about needing Harry’s help?

8. Should someone’s age affect whether adults listen to their ideas?

9. How does Harry’s nervousness affect the atmosphere of the story?

10. Why does the writer include an ice cream van?

11. Why do people enjoy watching unusual events?

12. Would you film the ship or put your phone away and watch?

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13. What can the drone show, and what can it fail to show?

14. Why is “As far as we can tell” an important reply?

15. Do you think the officials give up too soon?

16. What other explanations could there be for the old ship and its crew?

17. Does the ending prove that the men are ghosts? Explain your view.

18. How does the sea shanty make the ending more unsettling?

19. What do you think will happen when the men reach the town?

20. Would you prefer the mystery to be explained? Why or why not?

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Role Play: What Should We Do Next?

This is a role play activity.

There are two characters in the role play.

1. Harry

2. The Mayor

The Situation

The drone has returned to shore. The mayor wants to announce that the ship is empty and leave the investigation until morning. Harry is less certain: the camera could not see below deck, and he thought he saw movement. The mayor must consider public safety, the fishermen's work and the worried crowd. Harry must explain what he saw and suggest a sensible next step. This conversation is an imagined extension of the scene.

In pairs, create a conversation that you can present to the class.

Try to agree on what to tell the crowd and what to do before nightfall.

Take some time to prepare your role play.

When you are ready, show the class.

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Debate: Should Public Safety Come Before Earning a Living?

The Motion

"This house believes that the authorities should close a harbour when there may be danger, even if local people lose income."

Option A — Full Two-Team Debate

Divide the class into two teams.

Team A — For the Motion

Argue that protecting people must come first. An unexplained ship could be dangerous, and a temporary closure gives officials time to investigate.

Team B — Against the Motion

Argue that closing the entire harbour without clear evidence unfairly harms local people. Officials should use less disruptive measures and explain their decisions.

Preparation (10 minutes)

Each team should prepare its arguments. Think about:

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What evidence is needed before a harbour is closed?
Who bears the costs of a closure?
Could boats leave by a safe route away from the ship?
How long should the closure last, and should lost income be compensated?

The Debate

1. Team A gives an opening statement (2 minutes).
2. Team B gives an opening statement (2 minutes).
3. Rebuttal round: each team responds to the other's points (2 minutes each).
4. Closing statements: each team sums up its strongest argument (1 minute each).

The Vote

The rest of the class votes on which side made the more convincing argument. The teacher acts as moderator and timekeeper.

Option B — Simplified Class Discussion

The teacher can present the motion to the whole class and ask students whether they agree or disagree and why. Encourage students to respond to each other's ideas and support their opinions with examples.

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Writing

This is a creative writing exercise.

You are going to continue writing the next part of the story.

- What happens when the five men reach the shore?
- Does anyone notice them arriving?
- Do Harry or the officials become involved?
- Who are the men, and what do they want?
- Will you explain the mystery or leave some questions unanswered?

Think about these questions to help you write the next part of the story.

Now write the story.

When you have finished, read it aloud to your classmates.

Or give it to your teacher for review.

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Reading Comprehension Questions — Answers

1. Tuesday morning.
2. Nobody has seen it enter the harbour.
3. It is a great wooden ship with a black hull and enormous sails.
4. Half the town.
5. There is nobody on deck, no voices and no movement; only the ropes creak against the masts.
6. They stop them from leaving the harbour in their fishing boats.
7. They need to earn a living and pay their bills.
8. The chief of police, the head of sea rescue and a local historian. The mayor’s assistant is also present, taking notes.
9. The eighteenth century.
10. No. He says it looks authentic, but that does not mean it is full of pirates.
11. He offers to take a boat out and climb aboard.
12. They do not know whether the ship is safe, and someone could be hiding aboard.
13. Sending a drone over the ship.
14. They can examine the deck without putting anyone in danger.

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15. Her nephew Harry; he films the coastline for his YouTube channel.
16. Fourteen.
17. They are filming with their phones; an ice cream van has also arrived.
18. He is delighted, but the enormous ship makes him feel strangely nervous.
19. The mayor, the police chief and the historian.
20. Barrels, coils of rope and a small rowing boat secured to the deck.
21. He thinks something moves in the shadows beneath the raised deck.
22. The opening is empty.
23. The workmanship, which makes him feel he is looking into the past.
24. The battery is running low.
25. “As far as we can tell.”
26. They promise to keep watch from the harbour wall.
27. Five men. Their clothes are ragged, their boots worn, and curved swords hang at their sides.
28. They lower a small rowing boat and row towards shore. They sing an old sea shanty that has not been heard in that harbour for hundreds of years.

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True or False — Answers

1. False. Nobody sees the ship enter the harbour.

2. True.

3. False. They are furious because they need to earn a living.

4. False. He says it looks authentic, but this does not mean pirates are aboard.

5. True.

6. False. Neither department owns a drone.

7. True.

8. False. He thinks he sees movement, but the opening is empty when he checks again.

9. True.

10. True.

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What is the Correct Synonym? — Answers

1. enormous = huge
2. furious = angry
3. remarkable = extraordinary
4. authentic = genuine
5. properly = correctly
6. delighted = pleased
7. nervous = anxious
8. secured = fastened
9. deserted = empty
10. motionless = still

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What is the Correct Antonym? — Answers

1. enormous ↔ tiny
2. safe ↔ dangerous
3. empty ↔ full
4. closed ↔ open
5. higher ↔ lower
6. closer ↔ farther
7. delighted ↔ miserable
8. motionless ↔ moving
9. softly ↔ loudly
10. darkness ↔ light

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Words and Meanings — Answers

1. had a living to earn = e. need to make money to support themselves

2. climb aboard = h. get onto a boat or ship

3. the room fell silent = j. everyone in the room stopped speaking

4. brightened = f. look happier or more hopeful

5. exchanged embarrassed glances = b. look at each other while feeling awkward

6. running low = c. have only a small amount remaining

7. as far as we can tell = i. according to the information available to us

8. lose interest = a. stop feeling curious or interested

9. keep watch = g. observe a place carefully for possible danger

10. pulling towards the shore = d. row towards land

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Gap Fill Exercise — Answers

1. harbour
2. furious
3. historian
4. authentic
5. drone
6. spectators
7. hovering
8. hatch
9. ragged
10. motionless

Unused words: shore, swords.

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Vocabulary Practice Exercise — Answers

1. g — harbour: an area of water where boats can shelter

2. d — hull: the main body of a ship

3. l — deck: the floor of a ship that people walk on

4. n — masts: tall poles on a ship that support sails

5. h — historian: a person who studies or writes about the past

6. m — vessel: a boat or ship

7. e — authentic: genuine rather than an imitation

8. j — drone: a small aircraft controlled remotely without a pilot aboard

9. c — spectators: people watching an event

10. i — hovering: staying in one position in the air

11. o — hatch: an opening with a cover in a floor or deck

12. b — workmanship: the quality and skill shown in making something

13. f — shore: the land along the edge of the sea or a lake

14. k — ragged: torn and in poor condition

15. a — sea shanty: a song traditionally sung by sailors while working

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