10. The Real *Lord of the Flies*

**10.A Text: The Real *Lord of the Flies*: what happened when six boys were shipwrecked for 15 months**

**Please note that the underlined passages in this text are related to questions in task 14.**



For centuries Western culture has been permeated by the idea that humans are selfish creatures. That cynical image of humanity has been proclaimed in films and novels, history books and scientific research. But in the last 20 years, scientists from all over the world have switched to a more hopeful view of mankind.

When I started writing a book about this more hopeful view, I knew there was one story I would have to address. It takes place on a deserted island in the Pacific. A plane has just gone down. The only survivors are some British schoolboys, who can’t believe their good fortune. Nothing but beach, shells and water for miles. And better yet: no grownups.

This story never happened. An English schoolmaster, William Golding, made up this story in 1951 – his novel *Lord of the Flies* would be hailed as one of the classics of the 20th century. In hindsight, the secret to the book’s success is clear. Golding had a masterful ability to portray the darkest depths of mankind. Of course, he had the zeitgeist of the 1960s on his side, when a new generation was questioning its parents about the atrocities of the Second World War.

I first read *Lord of the Flies* as a teenager. Now I began to wonder: had anyone ever studied what real children would do if they found themselves alone on a deserted island? I came across an obscure blog that told an arresting story: “One day, in 1965, six boys set out from Tonga on a fishing trip ... Caught in a huge storm, the boys were shipwrecked on a deserted island.”

I went to meet Peter Warner, the captain of the ship who rescued the boys, and he told me his story. It was a fishing trip that brought him to Tonga in the winter of 1966. On the way home he took a little detour and that’s when he saw it: a minuscule island in the azure sea, ’Ata. Peter noticed something odd. Peering through his binoculars, he saw burned patches on the green cliffs. “In the tropics it’s unusual for fires to start spontaneously,” he told me, a half century later. Then he saw a boy. Naked. Hair down to his shoulders. This wild creature leaped from the cliffside and plunged into the water. Suddenly more boys followed, screaming at the top of their lungs. It didn’t take long for the first boy to reach the boat. “My name is Stephen,” he cried in perfect English. “There are six of us and we reckon we’ve been here 15 months.”

The boys told Warner they were pupils at a strict Catholic boarding school. The oldest was 16, the youngest 13, and they had had one thing in common: they were bored witless. So they came up with a plan to escape: to Fiji, some 500 miles away, or even all the way to New Zealand. There was only one obstacle. None of them owned a boat, so they decided to “borrow” one from a fisherman they all disliked. The boys took little time to prepare for the voyage. Two sacks of bananas, a few coconuts and a small gas burner were all the supplies they packed. It didn’t occur to any of them to bring a map, let alone a compass.

No one noticed the small craft leaving the harbour that evening. Skies were fair; only a mild breeze ruffled the calm sea. But that night the boys made a grave error. They fell asleep. A few hours later they awoke to water crashing down over their heads. It was dark. They hoisted the sail, which the wind promptly tore to shreds. They drifted for eight days. They managed to collect some rainwater in hollowed-out coconut shells and shared it equally between them, each taking a sip in the morning and another in the evening.

Then, on the eighth day, they spied a small island on the horizon. Not a tropical paradise with waving palm trees and sandy beaches, but a hulking mass of rock, jutting up more than a thousand feet out of the ocean. These days, ’Ata is considered uninhabitable. But “by the time we arrived,” Captain Warner told me, “the boys had set up a small commune with food garden, hollowed-out tree trunks to store rainwater, a gymnasium with curious weights, a badminton court, chicken pens and a permanent fire, all from handiwork, an old knife blade and much determination.” While the boys in *Lord of the Flies* come to blows over the fire, those in this real-life version tended their flame so it never went out, for more than a year.

The kids agreed to work in teams of two, drawing up a strict roster for garden, kitchen and guard duty. Sometimes they quarrelled, but whenever that happened they solved it by imposing a time-out. Their days began and ended with song and prayer. One of them fashioned a makeshift guitar from a piece of driftwood, half a coconut shell and six steel wires salvaged from their wrecked boat – an instrument Peter has kept all these years – and played it to help lift their spirits. And their spirits needed lifting. All summer long it hardly rained, driving the boys frantic with thirst. They tried constructing a raft in order to leave the island, but it fell apart in the crashing surf.

It’s time we told a different kind of story. The real *Lord of the Flies* is a tale of friendship and loyalty; one that illustrates how much stronger we are if we can lean on each other. “Life has taught me a great deal,” Peter Warner says, “including the lesson that you should 10.7.”

*This is an adapted excerpt from Rutger Bregman’s Humankind, translated by Elizabeth Manton and Erica Moore.*

Source: *The real Lord of the Flies: what happened when six boys were shipwrecked for 15 months*. The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/may/09/the-real-lord-of-the-flies-what-happened-when-six-boys-were-shipwrecked-for-15-months>. Published: 9.5.2020. Accessed: 15.5.2020. Adaptation: YTL.

Source: <http://i.cdn.turner.com/cnn/2011/US/07/22/guam.missing.skiff/t1larg.micronesia.rescue.navy.jpg>. Accessed: 25.8.2020.