

Making Inferences

Refugee

When things are not explained literally in a text, you can use clues to reach a logical conclusion. This is called inference.

Read the short story, then answer the questions in full sentences.

I am not alone, but I am alone. A thousand shuffling people are walking beside me but I don't know any of them by name. The silence deafens me but I hear the sound of fear loud and clear. My world has fallen apart around me and I am afraid for my life and my future.

This week started like any other for me; I went to school on Monday morning as usual, but that was where the similarity ended. By mid-morning, from the **flimsy**¹ shelter of the classroom, we could hear the boom of bombs **relentlessly**² dropping on the southern side of our village and we could feel the earthquake tremble of their **impact**³ through the soles of our feet. Bricks rained from above and **shards**⁴ of glass pierced the air without a care.

As the **bombardment**⁵ stopped, our teacher ordered us to remain in the safety of the school grounds – but how did she know where safety was? I thought our village was safe, our neighbourhood was safe, our country was safe.

The unsettling quiet afterwards did nothing to calm or reassure us. Our fathers had been working in the fields around the village, our mothers had been shopping in the village market, our brothers and sisters had been sleeping in their cots as we left for school. Where were they now? How were they now?

I had to know what had happened to my family, so I left the familiar setting of my school and stepped into an unknown landscape of destruction. Not one house on the south side remained standing. Not one tree upright. Not one familiar face to be seen. Dust and rubble covered everything in sight like a death shroud.



Glossary

1. Easily broken; not strong.
2. Continuing without becoming weaker or less severe.
3. The force with which one object hits another.
4. A sharp broken piece of glass or metal.
5. To attack somebody forcefully without a break.

Questions

1a. What could the opening sentence, 'I am not alone, but I am alone.' mean?

1b. Using the information from the opening paragraph. How does the author feel?
Circle one word.

disappointed	tired	excited	terrified
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Use evidence from the text to support your opinion.

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2. How does the description of how the bombs dropped make you feel about the attack?

3. How did the teacher know the children would be safe in school?

4. Should the author go and find their family? Give reasons for your opinion.

5. What do you think the author in the story will find when they get to their part of the village? Answer as fully as you can, using information from the whole text to help you.

Making Inferences - Answers

1a. What could the opening sentence, 'I am not alone, but I am alone.' mean?

If the author feels as though there is no one around, or no family that he or she knows, then they could feel as though they are alone even though there are lots of other people close by.

1b. Using the information from the opening paragraph. How does the author feel? Circle one word.

Circle *terrified*.

Use evidence from the text to support your opinion.

The author has had a frightening experience 'My world has fallen apart around me' and feels alone and surrounded by strangers. There isn't much sound, as though people have been shocked into silence or are lost in their thoughts. An atmosphere of fear is hanging in the air as though it can be heard 'I hear the sound of fear loud and clear'.

2. How does the description of how the bombs dropped make you feel about the attack?

The bombs are described as dropping 'relentlessly' (without stopping) and making loud 'booms' and causing the earth to tremble like an 'earthquake'. This must have made it very frightening as the children wouldn't have known how long it would last and the noise and trembling of the ground would feel terrifying.

3. How did the teacher know the children would be safe in school?
The teacher would not have known that school was a safe place as the bombs could have landed there too. If the rest of the village had been bombed, then it may be sensible to stay in the place that hadn't been hit, but that place could be next to be bombed.
4. Should the author go and find their family? Give reasons for your opinion.
Even though the author was in a safe place at the moment, there may have been other safe places in the village and until he or she went to look, they wouldn't know. I think they should go and see whether the rest of the family were safe or not and then decide what to do.
5. What do you think the author in the story will find when they get to their part of the village? Answer as fully as you can, using information from the whole text to help you.

Various responses, which could include:

The author finding some or all of his family alive and safe. The author finding none of his family alive and safe.

A degree of ambiguity about whether any or all of his family have escaped to find safety.

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In some ways, the events of the past week could have taken place a year ago. Time seems to have raced while standing still. The enormity of the attack on my home and family is yet to sink in for me. I don't want to think about it, don't want to remember it, don't want to look it in the eye and face it.

Forcing myself to put one foot in front of the other, I beat time with my pace and keep up with thousands of other homeless, shocked and frightened people. I don't know where we are going, but the movement of our tidal wave of bodies creates its own **momentum**¹ and we surge forwards as one.

Hundreds of homes in my **province**² have been destroyed by those once regarded as 'friends'. Without shelter, food or water, the only chance of survival is to keep moving and stay together. The larger townships are in sight on the horizon and so is hope; the sort of hope that comes from not thinking too far ahead or **considering**³ too many options.

Shouting from the front of the group signals that safety has been reached. But who wants another thousand uninvited **residents**⁴? Who can risk sheltering 'the enemy'? Who has enough food for unwanted visitors? Hope is **tempered**⁵ with reality, but the rock to cling to is hope. Just one welcoming face, the offer of a cup of friendship, a warm hand in mine, could make the difference between life or death – my life or death.

Glossary

1. The power to increase or develop at an ever-growing pace.
2. A political region or division of a country.
3. Taking something into account.
4. Somebody who lives in a place.
5. Balanced

Questions

1. How can the passage of time change to feel quick and slow at once?

2. Why does the author describe the memories of the attack in human form (with an eye and face)?

3. Why does the author have to force their feet to move?

Questions

4. What reason could a 'friend' have for attacking other people?

If a thousand refugees marched into the place where you live, how would you react? Using information from the whole text, give reasons for your answer.

Making Inferences - Answers

1. How can the passage of time change to feel quick and slow at once?
Sometimes, time seems to fly past quickly, especially if events are enjoyable or happy, but also if there are a lot of things happening in quick succession. At other times, time seems to drag slowly, especially if things are unenjoyable. There are some situations, like those that the author is experiencing, where time seems to go past both quickly and slowly at the same time.
2. Why does the author describe the memories of the attack in human form (with an eye and face)?
The attack is described in human form because although the bombs that did the damage aren't human, humans were operating the machinery that fired them and the author doesn't want to face that fact yet.
3. Why does the author have to force their feet to move?
The author may be weary of travelling and emotionally exhausted but if he or she stops, they may be left behind and won't reach safety. Forcing their feet to move will keep up with the rest of the group.
4. What reason could a 'friend' have for attacking other people?
Just like children fall out of friendship in the playground, adults can disagree about things and quickly become enemies. It may be about who makes the rules and laws or who owns some land. It can quickly turn into an argument or even a war when people hurt or kill each other.
5. If a thousand refugees marched into the place where you live, how would you react? Using information from the whole text, give reasons for your answer.
If a thousand refugees came through the place where I lived I would give them food and water and shelter if I could. You may not know when you might need the same things.

Or: If a thousand refugees came through the place where I lived, I would not give them food and water and shelter because the people who bombed the refugees may attack me for helping them.

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The kindly face in my imaginings never appeared. There was a scant cup of grimy water for each weary traveller and the wave was moved on before the township fell to the same fate as my precious village. The quality of kindness posed a danger that no one was prepared to risk.

Once through the town's guilty streets, there was talk of a boat trip. I looked up with eagerness – maybe this would be the route to safety? Without time to consider, I was bundled onto a small rowing boat with 47 others; far too many for the small vessel, but not enough to carry us all. I considered myself lucky that I secured a place, but at what cost? Until we were well out of sight of land, there was no word of payment, but as soon as the boat rowed over the horizon, the hopeful mood changed to menace. Those that couldn't (or wouldn't) pay were tossed overboard to fend for themselves – whether they could swim or not. The remainder parted with their only belongings; a watch here, a ring there, at times cash or precious belongings crossed hands. The journey to safety was tainted with greed.



Land was sighted, but the owners of the small boat refused to beach. Once more, people were thrown overboard to make their own way to shore and the little boat retreated. How I thanked the moon and stars for my wasted youth at the village pond! Helping those I could, we scabbled, bedraggled, onto dry land. Like ants from their hill, people came to greet us with waving arms and clothes and blankets. The smell of freshly baked bread filled my nose and filled with relief, hope and expectation, my legs buckled underneath me and I fell, exhausted, to the ground.

Questions

1. How would the author feel if there was no kind face to greet the travellers?

2. Explain how kindness could be dangerous.

3. Why are the streets described as 'guilty'?

4. Why do you think the boat owners waited until the travellers were well out to sea before they asked them for money?

5. Why was the author thankful for his time at the village pond?

Questions

Challenge: In a few sentences, continue the last part of the story after the author comes round.

Use the information in the last paragraph to change the atmosphere of the story.

Making Inferences - Answers

1. How did the author feel if there was no kind face to greet the travellers?

The author must have been devastated when he or she thought that help was close by as they approached the town and it turned out that it wasn't to be. The refugee travellers were tired and shocked at what had happened to their villages and they must have been expecting some food, water and kindness to greet them.

2. Explain how kindness could be dangerous.

If the townsfolk gave the refugees shelter and food, then they may be punished by the same people who bombed the villages, so offering kindness could put them in the same danger.

3. Why are the streets described as 'guilty'?

If some of the townspeople wanted to help the refugees but decided not to, or were told not to, then they may have felt ashamed about not offering assistance. The streets where they lived could then be described as being guilty, even though it means the people who lived in them, not the streets themselves.

4. Why do you think the boat owners waited until the travellers were well out to sea before they asked them for money?

Once the refugees were on the boat and well out to sea, it would be easier for the boat owners to get money out of them than if they were on the shore. The boat owners could have pretended that the journey would be free but changed their story once they were rowing. The refugees who couldn't swim were not likely to argue about it if they were already at sea with no way to get back to shore.

5. Why was the author thankful for his time at the village pond?

If the author played at the pond when he or she was younger, they might have learned how to swim, or at least may not be afraid of water. This would help them now – especially as they were thrown overboard to make their own way to shore at the end of the journey.

Challenge: In a few sentences, continue the last part of the story after the author comes round. Use the information in the last paragraph to change the atmosphere of the story.

Various responses which could include:

Mentioning positive qualities of care and welcome as people brought clothes and blankets.

Receiving food and water as there was a smell of bread in the air.

Expecting to be helped with kindness, resulting in collapsing with exhausted relief as the tension of the situation and journey is released.