

The Mystery of Eilean Mòr

PASSAGE · NON-FICTION

SKILLS TRAINED

Working memory

Delayed recall

Comprehension

HOW TO USE THIS SHEET

About 15 minutes

- 1 Read the passage twice, slowly. Take about four minutes.
- 2 Turn to the next page and cover this one. No looking back.
- 3 Write what you remember, then mark it on the last page.

Twenty miles off the west coast of Scotland, a handful of rocky islands rises straight out of the Atlantic. The largest is called Eilean Mòr. Nobody lives there. Nobody ever has, except the keepers of its lighthouse.

In December 1900, three men were stationed on the island: Thomas Marshall, James Ducat and Donald McArthur. Their work was simple but lonely. Every evening they lit the great lamp that warned ships away from the rocks, and every morning they put it out again.

On the fifteenth of December, a passing steamer noticed something wrong. The light was dark. The captain made a note of it, but the sea was rough and he sailed on.

It was not until Boxing Day that a relief boat reached the island. The crew blew the ship's whistle. No answer came. They fired a flare. Nothing moved on the cliffs. A sailor named Joseph Moore climbed the long steps to the lighthouse alone.

He found the gate shut and the door closed. Inside, the beds were unmade and the clock had stopped. In the kitchen a meal sat half eaten on the table, and a chair lay tipped over on the floor.

Two of the men's oilskin coats were gone from their hooks. The third still hung where its owner had left it — and no keeper would step out onto those cliffs in winter without one.

The logbook told its own strange story. The final entries described a terrible storm, waves taller than the lighthouse itself, and one keeper weeping. Yet weather records from the mainland showed the sea around the island had been calm on those very days.

Nobody has ever explained what happened. The most likely answer is also the dullest: a freak wave swept the men off the landing stage while they struggled to save their equipment. But the island keeps its secret. The lighthouse still stands, and it still shines, though no one has lived on Eilean Mòr since the lamps were made automatic in 1971.

Cover the passage before you start.

Looking back turns this into a copying exercise. Getting it slightly wrong from memory is what makes it work.

PART A Tell it back

Write down everything you can remember about what Joseph Moore found when he reached the lighthouse. Order does not matter. Keep writing until you run out.

PART B 5 questions

- 1 How many keepers were stationed on Eilean Mòr, and in which month did they disappear?

- 2 Name two things Joseph Moore found inside the lighthouse that seemed wrong.

- 3 Why did the third oilskin coat worry the people who investigated?

- 4 What did the logbook describe, and why was that strange?

- 5 The passage calls the most likely explanation "the dullest". What does it mean by that, and what is that explanation?

PART C Mark your own work

Now go back to the passage. Tick every answer you got right. You do not need the same words as the answer below — if you wrote the same idea in your own words, it counts.

- ☐ 1 · Three keepers, in December 1900.
- ☐ 2 · Any two of: the beds were unmade, the clock had stopped, a meal sat half eaten, a chair lay tipped over.
- ☐ 3 · It meant one keeper had gone outside without his coat, and no keeper would do that on those cliffs in winter — so he must have left in a great hurry.
- ☐ 4 · It described a terrible storm with waves taller than the lighthouse, but mainland weather records showed the sea had been calm on those days.
- ☐ 5 · It means the least exciting or dramatic one: that a freak wave swept the men off the landing stage while they tried to save equipment.

FACTS RECALLED IN PART A

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QUESTIONS CORRECT

— / 5

DATE

THE STRATEGY Make a film of it

As you read, turn the words into pictures you can actually see — the stopped clock, the tipped chair, the empty hook. A sentence you have pictured is remembered roughly twice as well as a sentence you have only read, because you store it twice: once as words and once as an image.

WHERE YOU ALREADY DO THIS

When someone gives you directions to a place you have never been, what do you do to keep them in your head until you get there?

FOR THE PARENT OR TEACHER · This sheet trains recall, not reading speed. Resist prompting during Part A — the effort of retrieving a half-remembered fact is exactly what builds the memory, and a child who is rescued too early never does that work. Compare the Part A count across several sets rather than chasing a score on any single one.