

Island of the Blue Dolphins Study Guide

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For the novel by Scott O'Dell



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Synopsis

Karana is a 12-year-old Indian girl who lives with her people on a small island off the coast of California. One spring a ship carrying Aleut otter hunters anchors off the island. The Russian captain asks permission from Karana's father, chief of their people, to hunt sea otters in the waters around the island and to camp on the island while they hunt. In return, the captain promises to repay the Indians for the otter pelts with an equal share of goods. Chief Chowig agrees, but warns his people to beware of the visitors.

When the time comes for the Aleuts to leave, the Russian captain tries to pay much less for the pelts than he agreed. Chief Chowig confronts the Aleuts with a group of his men, armed for battle. There is a brief skirmish. The Aleuts escape with the otter pelts, leaving 27 men from Karana's tribe lying dead, including Karana's father.

The remaining people decide that they no longer wish to live on the island surrounded by the memories of their slain fathers, sons, and brothers. Kimki, the new chief, paddles a canoe to the mainland and sends back a ship to take the whole tribe to a new home.

When the ship arrives, Karana and her people make preparations to leave and hurry to the beach to be taken aboard the ship. The ship sets sail, but Karana, looking back at the island, sees that her brother Ramo has been left behind. Against the protests of her people, Karana throws herself into the sea and swims back to the island, not willing to leave her brother alone. As the ship sails off, Karana tells Ramo that it will return for them soon.

The special companionship of a faithful dog and the daily struggle to provide food pass the time as Karana waits for the ship's return. A pack of wild dogs that lives on the island is only the first of many dangers Karana must face. But Karana exemplifies a simple hope in the eventual return of a rescue ship, while at the same time learning to survive stranded on the Island of the Blue Dolphins.

Chapters 24–29

Questions:

1. Karana says that with all her animals, her yard seemed like a happy place, if only she hadn't thought of Tutok and wondered about her sister, Ulape. Why does thinking of Tutok and Ulape make Karana's yard less happy?
2. How does Karana get another dog after Rontu dies?
3. How does Karana miss a chance to be rescued when a ship arrives on the island in chapter 28?
4. How much time passes before a ship comes again in Chapter 29?

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5. Why had the first ship not come back for Karana when she and Ramo were left behind many years earlier?

Thinking About the Story:

6. Karana says she does not often think of “the white men who had said they would come back, but did not come.” She stops counting the months and does not even count the seasons. Is this an indication that she has given up hope of rescue? Explain your answer.

7. The author describes the man in the long gray robe in this way:

The man in the gray robe had a string of beads around his neck and at the end of it was an ornament of polished wood. He raised his hand and made a motion toward me which was the shape of the ornament he wore.

Who is the man in the gray robe and what is the ornament he wears? Why does the author describe it in this way?

8. Why does the man in the gray robe instruct the other men to make a dress for Karana?

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Expressing Mood with Similes:

9. Using similes can help set the mood of a story. For example, when describing the waves crashing together in Chapter 27, the author writes:

Like two giants [the waves] crashed against each other. They rose high in the air, bending first one way and then the other. There was a roar as if great spears were breaking in battle and in the red light of the sun the spray that flew around them looked like blood.

To what is the author comparing the crashing together of the waves? What mood does this give the passage?

10. How would the mood be different if the author compared the crashing waves to two dancers, and wrote “in the white light of the sun the spray that flew around them looked like sparkling diamonds”?
11. What mood is evident throughout Chapter 27? After describing the island with a happy, peaceful mood in previous chapters, why does the author switch to a different mood for Chapter 27?
12. Write down three sentences from this chapter in which the author expresses this mood through similes.

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Dig Deeper:

13. At the end of Chapter 24, Karana decides to never kill another animal or bird. Why not? What is your opinion of Karana's decision?

14. Has Karana's attitude toward animals changed at all from the beginning of the story to the end? Explain your answer with examples from the book.

15. Read Exodus 23:12, Deuteronomy 22:4, and Proverbs 12:10. What general attitude toward animals is found in these verses? Also read Genesis 9:3 and Genesis 1:28. Paired with the previous verses, what overall attitude are we to have toward animals?

16. Karana says that without animals and birds, the earth would be an unhappy place. Do you agree? Why or why not? What value do animals have to you?

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11. Answers will vary.
12. Answers will vary.
13. Objects of trust found in these verses: wealth, proud men, wise men, false gods, weapons, self, worldly rulers, and God. According to these verses, we should place our trust in God. These verses don't conclude that we should never trust other people, but that it is God in whom we can always trust and in whom we should put our ultimate trust.

Chapters 5–7

Vocabulary:

1. shrouded; 2. pondering; 3. vain; 4. shirk; 5. stern; 6. fateful; 7. beckoned; 8. awl; 9. forlorn; 10. stout; 11. abalone;
12. pitched.

Questions:

1. 27
2. The remaining men complain that the women have taken the tasks that are rightfully theirs: specifically hunting. Life is also made unpeaceful because the people are still mourning those lost in the battle, and the memories of their loved ones becomes a burden.
3. Kimki leaves the island by canoe, hoping to arrive at a country that lies to the east. He promises to find a place for his people to live and says he will return.
4. They think that the Aleuts have returned and they prepare to leave the island in canoes.
5. The thin blue line means that Ulape is unmarried. Answers will vary. Because so many men died in the battle with the Aleuts, Ulape, as well as the other women, probably feel that their chances of marrying are slim. Now that they are moving to a new place, Ulape may want to make sure that any new men they meet will know she is unmarried.
6. Ramo wants to go back to the village to get his fishing spear, but Karana will not let him leave. Later, when Karana cannot find him, Nanko says he is already on the ship. When Karana gets to the ship, she cannot find him there. Ramo has run back to the village and is left behind.

Thinking About the Story:

7. Answers will vary. It is difficult for Karana's people to get over their loss because they are surrounded by things that remind them of those that have died. The shortage of men in the village is also a reminder. By moving to a new country, they may be able to leave their sad memories behind.
8. Answers will vary.
9. Answers will vary. This reveals that Karana is more concerned for the welfare of her brother than her own safety.

Dig Deeper:

10. Answers will vary.
11. Answers will vary.
12. Karana said she would punish Ramo, but when she reaches the shore and sees him standing there, she puts her arms around him to comfort him.
13. Compassion is a deep awareness of the suffering of another and the wish to relieve it. Mercy is a disposition toward being forgiving. Although Karana wanted to punish Ramo, when she sees him "looking so forlorn", she understands how he feels and tries to comfort him. Her actions show an attitude of forgiveness.
14. These verses tell us to be humble, gentle, patient, kind and compassionate to one another, forgive each other, and bear with each other. Over all these we are to show love, which "binds them all together in perfect unity." These verses also warn us to be careful not to sin when we are angry, and to resolve the dispute quickly ("Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry").

Chapters 8–11:

Vocabulary:

1. devoured greedily; 2. the den of an animal; 3. any of various plants with stinging hairs or toothed leaves that can cause skin irritation on contact; 4. with seriousness or soberness; 5. a sandbar that extends out from land into a body of water, created by the action of waves; 6. any of a number of edible marine mollusks usually found attached to rocks or the sides of ships; 7. passed along the edge or border; 8. having importance as a prophetic sign; 9. becoming irritated or sore because of rubbing.