The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor

Retold by Pauline Francis

SUMMARY

The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor contains the stories of seven voyages. In each story, something exciting, dangerous and often fantastical happens. But in many ways, all seven stories are very similar.

All the stories, except the first and the last one, begin with Sindbad getting bored with life in Baghdad and deciding to go on a voyage. In all the stories but the last, Sindbad makes his way to the south and the west from Basra, i.e. towards India, by trading goods. In all the stories, something disastrous happens to end the voyage, either the ship is sunk or he is marooned on an island for some reason. In all the voyages, the men he meets in adversity (as opposed to the half-men, giants and phantoms such as the Old Man of the Sea) are kind to him and help him. And, most important of all for the continuation of the book, all the stories end happily, with Sindbad returning to Basra and Baghdad a rich man and able to help the poor like any good Muslim, and vowing never to set foot on a ship again ... until the next time!

BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The Sindbad stories are typical of travellers' tales of ancient times. They contain references to real places and information about those places that only a true visitor could know. There are real insights into foreign cultures, such as the observation that saddles for horses were not developed at the same time in every country. There are craft skills which Sindbad learns from the people he stays with, such as how to kill an elephant. He could not have learnt this in his home region where elephants did not exist as an indigenous species. There is also the practical underpinning of mercantilism – Sindbad makes his way on these voyages through trade.

And yet, the stories are peopled by impossible half-men, half-animals, giants and enormous birds. This is the 'here be dragons' element with which ancient cartographers completed the outer edges of their maps, which either comes from exaggeration or ignorance of the real fauna of exotic lands.

Sindbad himself may be a historical character. Some say he was not from Baghdad at all, but from Sohar on the north-eastern coast of Oman. However, it is more likely that the stories of his exploits come from Arab sailors of the period, with the fantastical additions provided by the writer or perhaps by the original story-teller himself. It is probably no coincidence that the Sindbad stories date from the golden age of Arab geography, when maps of the East were constructed from the tales of the sailors who had actually been to India and China.
The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the Reader and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student’s Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of the discussion and pair/groupwork activities, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access centre.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK
Put students in groups to discuss the following questions:
1. Would you like to go somewhere that people from your country have never been to – the moon, perhaps, or to the depths of a jungle or an ocean? Why? Why not?
2. Do you think it is normal to exaggerate when you tell a story of a strange adventure?
3. When you talk about a journey you have made, do you tell the exact truth, or do you exaggerate?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION
‘The First Voyage’ and ‘The Second Voyage’
1. Ask students to work in pairs and to think of a suitable title for each voyage. Then elicit all the titles for each voyage and choose the best.
2. Ask students to discuss in small groups the strange things that happened in the two voyages. Are any of them possible?

‘The Third Voyage’ and ‘The Fourth Voyage’
1. Ask students to work in pairs and to think of a suitable title for each voyage. Then elicit all the titles for each voyage and choose the best.
2. All the events in the fourth voyage are quite possible. Ask students to think of something in their own culture which visitors from another country might be shocked or very surprised about, like burying alive the husband of a dead woman. It may not be something that everybody in their culture does, just some people.

‘The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Voyages’
1. Ask students to work in pairs and to think of a suitable title for each voyage. Then elicit all the titles for each voyage and choose the best.
2. Ask students to work in pairs. One student is Sindbad, the other is a person from Baghdad who does not believe Sindbad’s stories of the last three voyages. Sindbad must try to convince the other man that his stories are true.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK
Ask students to work in groups to discuss this question:
In what ways are all seven voyages similar? See the Summary for some ideas.

Glossary
It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the ‘Before You Read’ sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

‘The First Voyage’ and ‘The Second Voyage’
captain (n) someone who is in charge of a ship or plane
cave (n) a large natural hole in the side of a hill or under the ground
diamond (n) a very valuable clear hard stone used in jewellery
elephant (n) a very large grey animal with big ears and a trunk
giant (n) an extremely tall, strong man in children’s stories

‘The Third Voyage’ and ‘The Fourth Voyage’
monkey (n) a type of animal that lives in hot countries and uses its tail and hands to climb trees

‘The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Voyages’
coconut (n) a large brown nut with white flesh, which is filled with a liquid
pirate (n) a sailor who attacks other boats and steals things from them
The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor

Activities before reading the book
1. Work in pairs. There is one illustration for each story. Find the illustration and try to guess part of the story.
2. Read the Introduction. Find some things in the stones which are, or might be, true. Discuss in pairs.

Activities while reading the book
‘The First Voyage’
Are these sentences about the story true or false?
(a) Sindbad was the only merchant on the ship.
(b) Sindbad gave the captain money to sail on his ship.
(c) The first island they came to was in the Gulf.
(d) The captain knew the island.
(e) The island was really a fish.
(f) When the island-fish went down, everybody went down with it.
(g) Sindbad was in the water for two nights.
(h) Sindbad met some people who lived on the second island.
(i) King Mihraj was kind to Sindbad.
(j) Sindbad can speak many languages.
(k) Sindbad got his goods back at the end of the story.
(l) The King did not want Sindbad to go back to Baghdad.

‘The Second Voyage’
Match the questions (a–j) and answers (i–x).
(a) Why did Sindbad go on his second voyage?
(b) In what way was Sindbad very stupid?
(c) Why did the sky go dark?
(d) How did Sindbad get off the island?
(e) Where did the bird land?
(f) Why didn’t Sindbad leave the valley of the snakes?
(g) What did he see on the valley floor?
(h) How did he get out of the Valley of Diamonds?
(i) Who did he meet at the top of the mountain?
(j) How did he get money from this voyage?
(k) Because a giant bird flew over Sindbad’s head.
(l) Because he couldn’t climb out.
(m) Because he was bored and wanted to see other
   countries and cities again.
(n) Diamonds.

‘The Third Voyage’
1. Put these things from the third voyage in order.
   (a) a big stone house
   (b) a boat made from wood
   (c) a box made from wood
   (d) a fruit tree
   (e) a giant
   (f) a giant snake
   (g) a ship
   (h) an angry wind
   (i) great stones
   (j) red-hot wood
   (k) Sindbad’s letters
   (l) the fattest man
   (m) the Island of Zughb
   (n) the monkey-men
   (o) the ship’s captain
   (p) the three giants

2. Work in pairs. Tell the story of the third voyage,
   using the words from Exercise 1.

‘The Fourth Voyage’
Match the beginnings (a–t) and endings (i–xx) of these sentences about the fourth voyage.
(a) One day some merchants came to my house
(b) We remembered only the good times
(c) ‘It will be interesting to sail to the east again,’ we said
(d) We were a long way from home
(e) Great seas hit it
(f) But some wood from the ship came past me
(g) The sea threw us onto an island
(h) In the morning some animal-men found us
(i) When these men catch people from another country
(j) One day I moved away into the trees
(k) I met some men
(l) They went everywhere on horses
(m) I made a saddle for the king’s horse
(n) Every great man wanted a saddle
(o) I married
(p) But one day my wife died
(q) They took me to a hole in the mountain
(r) I followed an animal
(s) I went back into the cave
(t) When a ship came,
(i) and brought out thousands of diamonds.
(ii) and forgot about the other, bad times.
(iii) and found another way out of the cave.
(iv) and he was very happy with it.
(v) and I put my arms round it.
(vi) and I was happy
(vii) and I was rich again.
(viii) ‘and it will make us rich.’
(ix) and nobody saw me.
(x) and people took her to the Cave of the Dead.
(xi) and put me in a cave.
(xii) and they took me back to their city.
(xiii) and threw us into the water.
(xiv) and took us to their king.
(xv) and we spoke about our voyages to strange
countries and islands.
(xvi) and we stayed there because we could not move.
(xvii) but they had no saddles.
(xviii) went back to Basra and then to Baghdad.
(xix) they give them food to make them fat.
(xx) when a big wind pushed our ship over.

‘The Fifth Voyage’
Complete each sentence with one word from the box.
back  bird  coconuts  coconuts  drink  egg  house
island  legs  man  monkeys  mother  river  sailors
sea  ship  stones  wind

(a) One day we came to a big ...
(b) The merchants went for a walk but I stayed on the ...
(c) They found a giant bird’s ....
(d) They took big ... and broke it.
(e) They ate the young ...
(f) Two great birds, the father and the ..., flew over us.
(g) They dropped stones as big as a ....
(h) One stone fell on us and I fell into the ...
(i) The ... took me to an island.
(j) I met an old ...
(k) I wanted to help him across the ...
(l) He put his ... round me and kept me for many weeks.
(m) I made a very strong ... from a fruit.
(n) He drank and he fell off my ....
(o) I ran away and met some ....
(p) They said they came to the island for the ...
(q) They threw stones at ... in the trees.
(r) The monkeys got angry and threw ... at the men.

‘The Sixth Voyage’
Put these events from the voyage in order.
(a) A strong wind pushed the ship into a cave.
(b) He fell asleep.
(c) He had a good voyage to Basra and took everything
to the Khalif.
(d) He heard about a ship on its way to Basra.
(e) He told the people his story.
(f) He went on a horse to the king’s city.
(g) He woke to the sound of shouts.
(h) People looked down at him
(i) The king gave him rooms and the best clothes and
food.
(j) The king heard his story.
(k) The ship hit stone walls and broke.
(l) The strong wind pushed him through the cave on
some wood.
(m) They said, ‘You have to tell this story to the king.’

‘The Seventh Voyage’
1 What ‘rules’ for killing elephants does Sindbad learn?
There are at least three.
2 Which ‘rule’ does he break the last time?
3 Where do the elephants take Sindbad?
4 Why do the men from the city stop killing elephants?

Work in groups and discuss these questions:
1 Which story did you like best? Why?
2 In which story did Sindbad do
   (a) the cleverest thing
   (b) the stupidest thing