

It was a long while later that Alfie first heard it. Neither had caught a fish, nor even felt a suggestion of a bite. Both were silent, and deep in concentration. Alfie was sitting there, hunched over the line, gazing intently down into the clear blue-green of the sea below, the fronds of weed waving mockingly up at him. That was when he heard something calling. The sound seemed at once strange to him, out of place somehow, not right. Alfie looked up from his fishing. It came from the island, a hundred yards or so away, from somewhere near the shore, a soft cry, a whimpering. A seal pup perhaps. But it was more human than that.

“YOU HEAR THAT, FATHER?” Alfie said.
“Just gulls, Alfie,” Jim replied. And, sure enough, there was a young seagull on the beach, scurrying along after its mother, neck outstretched, mewling, begging to be fed. But Alfie realised soon enough that wasn’t at all the sound that he had heard. He knew gulls better than any other bird, but he had never before heard a young gull cry like that. The crying he had heard was different, not like a bird at all, not like a seal pup either. It was true that gulls were known to be good mimics – not as good as crows, but good enough. Alfie was perplexed, and distracted now entirely from his fishing. The two gulls, mother and fledgling, lifted off the beach and flew away, the young bird still pestering to be fed, leaving the beach deserted behind them, but not silent. There it was again, the same sound.

“Not gulls, Father. Can’t be,” he said. “Something else. Listen!”

It came from somewhere beyond the shoreline altogether, from the direction of the old Pest House, or from the great rock in the middle of the island. Alfie was quite sure by now that no gull, however clever a mimic, could possibly cry like that. And then it came to him. A child! A child cries like that! Gulls didn’t cough, and Alfie could hear quite clearly now the sound of coughing.

“There’s someone there, Father!” he whispered. “On the island.”

“I hear it,” Jim said. “I hear it all right, but it don’t seem hardly possible. Can’t see no one there, nothing

Extract from ‘Listen to the moon’ by Michael Morpurgo.

Challenge 1:

1. How is Alfie sitting at the start of the extract?
2. Using your answer from question 1, how do you think he is feeling at the start of the extract? Why?
3. What got Alfie’s attention?
4. Have Alfie and Jim just arrived at the coast or have they been there for a while? How do you know?
5. How do Alfie and Jim know each other? How do you know?
6. Can you find 3 adjectives?
7. What is your opinion of this extract? Explain your answer.

Challenge 2:

1. Use a dictionary to find the definition of:
 - a) Pestering
 - b) Mimic
 - c) fledgling
2. What did Alfie think the noise was?
3. Can you name 2 things that Alfie could see on the coast?
4. How does Alfie feel at the start of the extract? How is this similar or different at the end of the extract?
5. Why do you think Alfie *whispers* to Jim at the end of the extract?
6. Can you summarise this extract into 5 key events.
7. What is your opinion of this text? Give 2 different reasons for your answer.

Challenge 3:

1. Use a dictionary to find the definition of:
 - a) fronds
 - b) intently
 - c) perplexed
2. Find 2 words or pieces of punctuation that show how Alfie was talking during the extract.
3. Can you locate 2 simple expanded noun phrases (determiner, adjective, noun)
4. How do Alfie’s emotions change throughout the extract? Explain your answers.
5. Why do you think the author describes the weeds as ‘waving mockingly’?
6. Why might Jim think it is not possible for a child to be on the island?
7. What do you think might happen later in the story? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.