

THE ANCIENT MARINER - DETAILED SUMMARY

The first two parts describe how the old sailor (Ancient Mariner), defying laws of hospitality, cruelly kills a sea bird - an Albatross, and is then haunted and followed by the spirit of Albatross.

In the first part of the poem, the sailor appears suddenly as three guests are about to enter a wedding feast, and stops one of the guests who is a close relative of the bridegroom. The wedding feast, with its music is already in progress, but the Mariner holds the guest first by the hand and then with his glittering eye. There is a strange compulsion in the glittering eye and in the whole mannerism of the sailor that engulfs the wedding guest who cannot choose but listen to the story.

The ballad begins with a ship setting sail for the South. The ship soon reaches the equator as the sun stands 'above the mast at noon'. At this point, the poet tells the reader that the wedding guest was impatient and wished to leave as he could hear the wedding music (bassoon). But then, the Mariner's bright eyes compel him to stay and listen.

Then the ship gets caught in a storm and with 'sloping masts' and 'dipping prow', the ship flees towards the South and reaches the Antarctic regions - the land of mist, snow and icebergs as green as emeralds. They do not sight either birds or human beings during this time till they are icebound.

Then, at last they sight an Albatross. They receive it with joy and think it as a messenger of god. The bird also brings further fortune. The ice, which had kept them blocked, breaks up and they sail into the Pacific Ocean. The Albatross follows the ship like its guardian spirit, and comes to the ship when the sailors call it. Then one day, the sailor (the subject of the poem) shoots the Albatross with no reason. A thoughtless deed, which now haunts him with guilt and regret.

In the second part, the killing of the bird brings retribution. At first, the mariners only miss the friendly bird. But soon, they blame the killing for the condition in which they are. They however, change their opinion and their fickleness is shown when they enter the more temperate climate and the glorious sun rises brightly again. All the sailors now praise him for killing the bird that had brought the fog and mist.

Things go on well for some time till the ship reaches the equator in the Pacific, the area of the Doldrums, where there is no wind and the current seems to go around in a circle. The terrible situation is made clear through the use of imagery and repetition. (All in a hot Day after day). Using a simile, the poet describes how the ship was.. as idle as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.. Completely motionless. The situation becomes desperate as even the deep ocean seemed to be rotting and slimy things seemed to crawl on the water. This is due to large quantities of seaweed being washed into this part of the ocean, and the sea creatures feeding on it on the surface of the water.

The water, with its rotting creatures, is described as death fires fuelled by the witch's oils - An indication that death and destruction overtook the sailors in the ship. The sailors finally realise that their pathetic condition is because of the Mariner's crime. They decide to punish

him and with parched throats and evil looks, the sailors remove the cross from the Mariner's neck and hang the dead Albatross around his neck. The bird is the symbol of his guilt and a constant reminder of his evil deed.

Question 1

It is an ancient **Mariner**,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and
glittering eye, How wherefore
stopp'st thou me?

Where are the three men going? (Stanza 1)

Answer: The three men are the guests going to the wedding of a relative.

Question 2

It is an ancient **Mariner**,
And he stoppeth one of three.
'By thy long grey beard and
glittering eye, How wherefore
stopp'st thou me?

Describe the Mariner. (Stanza 1)

Answer: The Mariner is fearsome. He has a long grey beard and hypnotic eyes.

Question 3

The Bridegroom's doors are
opened wide And I am next of **Kin**;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'

Why does the guest explain 'I am next of kin'? (Stanza 2)

Answer: The guest wants the Mariner to allow him to leave for the wedding.

Question 4

The Bridegroom's doors are
opened wide And I am next of **Kin**;
The guests are met, the feast is set:
May'st hear the merry din.'

What is 'merry din'? (Stanza 2)

Answer: A happy joyful noise or commotion (as in a wedding) is called 'merry din'.

Question 5

He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' **quoth** he. 'Hold
off! unhand me, grey-beard **loon!**
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

Who is called the 'loon'? (Stanza 3)

Answer: The Ancient Mariner is called the 'loon'. A loon is a fox like animal. Here, it means 'lunatic'.

Question 6

He holds him with his skinny hand,
'There was a ship,' **quoth** he. 'Hold
off! unhand me, grey-beard **loon!**
Eftsoons his hand dropt he.

Who is 'he' and who is 'him'? (Stanza 3)

Answer: 'He' is the Mariner and 'him' refers to the wedding guest.

Question 7

He holds him with his glittering eye-
The Wedding-Guest stood still,
And listens like a three years's child.
The Mariner hath his will.

What was the Mariner's will? (Stanza 4)

Answer: The Mariner's will was to make the wedding guest listen to his story.

Question 8

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone;
He cannot coose but hear,
And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

What does 'he sat on a stone' signify? (Stanza 5)

Answer: It means complete surrender by the wedding guest and a display of interest in the Mariner's story.

Question 9

The Wedding-Guest sat on a stone;
He cannot coose but hear,

And thus spake on that ancient man,
The bright-eyed Mariner.

Give the equivalent of 'spake'. (Stanza 5)

Answer: 'Spoke' is the equivalent of 'spake'. Spake is archaic English.

Question 10

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

Which direction are they travelling? How do you know? (Stanza 7)

Answer: They are travelling towards south. We know this by the direction of sunrise.

Question 11

How did the reaction of the people change after that?

Answer: Soon afterwards, as they moved into the Pacific Ocean and the weather became splendid, the sailors changed their opinion and praised the Ancient Mariner for killing the Albatross, which they now think brought the fog and mist.

Question 12

Explain the lines "Water, water everywhere nor any drop to drink".

Answer: The sailors are stuck in the sea in the Doldrums (an equatorial ocean region of calms, sudden storms, and light unpredictable winds) and have run out of water. Thirsty in the hot sun, they crave for a drop of water to drink. It is an ironical situation that though they are surrounded by water on all sides, they cannot drink it, as it is seawater that is salty.

Question 13

Explain the following lines:

- a) "The very deep did rot..... upon that slimy sea."
- b) "Of the spirit that plagued us so....."
- c) "Instead of the cross the Albatross about my neck was hung."

Answer: a) As they are stuck in the sea, the very deep ocean seemed to be rotting and slimy things seemed to crawl on the water. This is due to large quantities of seaweed being washed into this area and sea creatures feeding on it on the surface of the water.

- b) The sailors are convinced that the spirit of the dead Albatross is troubling them.
- c) The sailors decide to punish the Ancient Mariner. They remove the symbol of the Lord, 'the cross' from his neck and hang the Albatross round his neck.

Question 14

Point out the literary device used in the following lines and explain the device.

"It cracked and growled, and roared and howled."

Answer: The literary device used here is onomatopoeia - the formation of a word from a sound associated with what is named (e.g. cuckoo, sizzle etc.). This is the formation of words that imitate the sounds that they stand for.

Question 15

Explain how the poem ancient mariner is a narration about crime and punishment?

Answer: It is certainly about crime and punishment. The sailors are stuck in the South Pole when they suddenly see an albatross flying towards the ship. They welcome it as a messenger from god and befriend it. It stays with them circling over the ship and sitting on the mast. The sailors give it food and play with it. With the coming of the albatross the ship miraculously breaks through the ice and is able to sail smoothly. There is a fair amount of breeze blowing which pushes the ship forward. Then suddenly one day the Ancient mariner commits the sin of killing the albatross. The sailors first blame him and then praise him as they experience wonderful weather. Then they are stuck in the Pacific Ocean without any water. It is as if nature is punishing them for having killed an innocent creature. Even the other sailors are partners in the crime as they have not condemned the ancient mariner completely. Their suffering forces them to believe that the spirit of the albatross is following them right them to South Pole causing them to suffer. Finally, the other sailors punish the ancient mariner by hanging the albatross around his neck as a constant reminder of his heinous crime. So the poem is about sin and the retribution by the powers of nature.

Question 16

"And every tongue through utter drought

Was withered at the root"

1. Whose tongue was parched and why?
2. Explain the comparison used?

Answer: 1. The sailors tongue were parched because there was no water. They were stuck in the middle of the ocean and they were suffering.

2. The poet has used a metaphor to explain the condition of the sailors. The dryness of their tongues is compared to a withered root of a plant.

Question 17

The bride hath paced into the hall,
Red as a rose is she;
Nodding their heads before her goes
The merry **minstrelsy**.

Who actually is narrating these lines of the poem and to whom? (Stanza 9)

Answer: The poet is revealing to the reader, the thoughts going on in the wedding guest's mind as he listens to the Ancient Mariner.

Question 18

'And now the STORM-BLAST came, and he
Was **tyrannous** and strong:
He struck with his o'ertaking-wings,
And chased us south along.

Identify the figure of speech in line 1 of the poem. (Stanza 11)

Answer: The figure of speech is personification. (The storm blast is personified as some one tyrannous and strong).

Question 19

And through the **drifts** the snowy **clifts**
Did send a dismal sheen
Nor shapes of men nor beasts we **ken**
The ice was all between.

Why is the sheen dismal? (Stanza 14)

Answer: There is no living animal or man anywhere on the land of ice and snow. Therefore, the sheen is dismal or sad.

Question 20

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a **swound!**

What is the poetic device used in line 1. (Stanza 15)

Answer: Repetition is the poetic device used.

Question 21

The ice was here, the ice was there,
The ice was all around:
It cracked and growled, and roared and howled,
Like noises in a **swound!**

Where have the sailors reached? (Stanza 15)

Answer: The sailors have approached the South Pole.

Question 22

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The **helmsman** steered us through!

Why did Albatross eat the food it had not eaten before? (Stanza 17)

Answer: Albatross did so because the sailors fed it with food they had brought from their land.

Question 23

It ate the food it ne'er had eat,
And round and round it flew.
The ice did split with a thunder-fit;
The **helmsman** steered us through!

Did the Albatross prove to be lucky for the sailors? (Stanza 17)

Answer: Yes it did. The ice cleared and the ship was able to reach the destination.

Question 24

In mist or cloud, on mast or **shroud**,
It **perched** for **vespers nine**;
Whiles all the night, through fog-smoke white,
Glimmered the white Moon-shine.

What does the 'presence of the moonshine through the fog' signify? (Stanza 19)

Answer: 'Presence of the moonshine' signifies that God is pleased with the sailors on the ship and his blessings are with them.

Question 25

God save thee, ancient Mariner!
From the fiends, that **plague** thee thus! -
Why look' st thou so?' - With my **cross-bow**
I shot the ALBATROSS.

The line 1 is said by whom and why? (Stanza 20)

Answer: The wedding guest says it. He says so because he sees a look of pain and horror on the Mariner's face.

Question 26

The Sun now rose upon the right:
Out of the sea came he,
Still hid in mist, and on the left
Went down into the sea.

In which direction are they proceeding now? (Stanza 21)

Answer: They are proceeding towards the North.

The Rime of the Ancient Mariner Conclusion

A thoughtless deed results in a lifetime of guilt and repentance. This is evident in the Mariner's strange compulsion to narrate the story to a passerby. Sometimes, a seemingly simple mistake can mete out a life-long punishment, which might not equate to the crime committed. The poet wishes to emphasise the importance of coexistence between man and animal. They need each other and must help each other.