

Peachtree Pointers

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The Wreck of the Ethie

WRITTEN BY HILARY HYLAND
INTERIOR ILLUSTRATIONS BY PAUL BACHEM

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6 x 9 / 116 pages / 6 black & white illustrations,
6 photos, 2 maps / Juvenile Fiction, History, ages 8–12 / Fall 1999

A Peachtree  Junior Book

ABOUT THE BOOK

In 1919, just before Christmas, the SS *Ethie* departs Port Saunders, Newfoundland, for St. John's harbor with 92 passengers and crew aboard. After struggling against a violent winter storm, the coastal steamer is cast upon the rocks off the cliffs of northwest Newfoundland. Guided by his fisherman master and by the love of his young owner, Skipper, a hardworking Newfoundland dog, uses his skills and instincts to brave the icy, treacherous waters and carry a lifeline from the sinking ship to shore. The crew rigs a seat to the line, and all 92 persons are saved.

In this minute-by-minute fictionalized account of the *Ethie's* dramatic, true story—told from the viewpoint of young Colleen on shore and ship's boy Patrick on board—Hyland vividly brings the adventure to life, showing the spirit of survival among the passengers and crew, as well as the strength and determination of a poor fishing family ashore and their courageous dog.

An Author's Note details the facts about the wreck and about the actual persons involved.



Hyland discusses the primary and secondary sources that she found to support the story and provides photos of the ship, of the physical evidence that remains, a newspaper clipping of the wreck, and a poem written by the poet laureate of Canada a year after the events. A glossary lists the nautical terms used in the story.

AWARDS

- Volunteer State (Tennessee) Book Award Nominee 2002-3
- Maxwell Medal for Best Children's Book 2000
- Finalist for GA Literacy Award 2000
- Finalist for VA Literacy Award 2000
- Finalist for Telly Award (Public TV) 2002

THEMES

- History, early 20th century maritime provinces
- Man against nature
- Determination, belief in oneself, courage
- Generosity and helping, cooperation
- Applying skills to solve problems
- Working dogs

BEFORE YOU READ

THE WRECK OF THE *ETHIE* is a work of fiction based upon an historic shipwreck off the western coast of Newfoundland. To gain an understanding of the novel's location and subject, students should use maps and reference sources to help set the scene.

■ On a globe or map of the world, where is Newfoundland? What is notable about its location? What are its longitude and latitude? What are the longitude and latitude of your hometown or city?

■ On a map of Canada, identify the ten provinces and two territories that comprise the country. Where is the St. Lawrence River? Does it appear to be one of the largest rivers in Canada? What bodies of water does it connect?

■ On a map of Newfoundland, find the two separate areas that comprise the province of Newfoundland. What are they called? Where is the capital of the province? What are the bodies of water that surround the island of Newfoundland?

■ How did Newfoundland get its name? How did your state or province get its name?

■ Using books or internet sources, find photographs of the landscape of Newfoundland. How would you describe the landscape? Does it remind you of other places in the world? How is it similar to or different from the landscape where you live?

■ Brainstorm familiar shipwrecks and what caused them—e.g., the *Lusitania*, the *Titanic*, the *Endurance*, and the *Andrea Doria*. Did anyone survive these wrecks? How were survivors rescued? What it would be like to be a passenger on a sinking ship?

AS YOU READ

Note: The maps in the front of the book will be helpful to consult as you progress through the novel.

■ In the opening chapters, what words and phrases describe the blustery December weather?

■ How does the author help the reader visualize the seaside setting?

■ How does the author make the reader believe that the story takes place in 1919?

■ Patrick Logan is only sixteen, but he dreams that one day he will become captain of his own ship. How does Patrick demonstrate that he has the ability to become a future captain?

■ Why is the *Ethie's* crew described as a "superstitious lot"? Why do people believe in superstitions? Why might sailors, especially, believe in superstitions?

■ If you were Colleen, would you urge your dog to swim out toward the wreck in wintry seas?

■ What motivates Skipper as he swims to the rescue? (Is he trying to please Colleen, to be a hero, to have an adventure, or is he just fond of fetching and hauling?) Does the author give us any clues about what Skipper is thinking or feeling?

■ Why are the lives of the rescuers and the rescued "forever linked to one another"?

AFTER YOU READ: INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

LANGUAGE ARTS

■ Why did the author choose to tell the history of the *Ethie's* shipwreck as a novel rather than as a work of nonfiction? (Use the author's note at the end to determine which characters are based on fact and which are fictional.) What do the fictional characters add to the story? Who is the main character? Why?

■ One of the fictional characters, Mr. Reginald Warren, is very outspoken in his challenges to Captain Flannery's authority. Why did the author create such a contrary character? How does Captain Flannery respond to Mr. Warren?

■ The novel is written in the third person. What does this mean? How would the story have changed if the author had written the story in the first person? Who might have been a possible narrator?

■ What is the most dramatic moment in the book? Explain why.

■ What does it mean to be a hero? Is it possible to be a hero without taking a risk? Might a hero feel afraid? Are there other heroes in the story besides Skipper?

■ In writing the novel, the author used both primary and secondary sources. What is a primary source? What is a secondary source? What is the difference? What is the importance of each kind of source?

■ What is the message of the poem "Carlo" by Edwin J. Pratt? What does it add to the novel?

■ The SS *Ethie* was part of the Alphabet Fleet of ships built in Scotland and named after Scottish places. Using a map of Scotland, find names to complete the alphabetical list begun on page 35.

■ Fergus, the *Ethie's* chief engineer, tells stories about the pirates Captain Kidd and Blackbeard. Who were these pirates? Did they really live? Was there really a rare albino dolphin called Hatteras Jack, or was Hatteras Jack just a legend? Was the legend derived from *Moby Dick*?

■ A Glossary of Nautical Terms is provided in the book. As a class, create a glossary of terms from Newfoundland that you gather as you learn about the province.

SOCIAL STUDIES

■ [This project is good for groups or the whole class.] Develop a timeline based on research into relevant historic events, such as Marconi's first transatlantic radio signal, the Wright brothers' first airplane flight, Roald Amundsen's discovery of a Northwest Passage, Admiral Peary's conquest of the North Pole, L. M. Montgomery's publication of *ANNE OF GREEN GABLES*, the sinking of the *Titanic*, the First World War, Lindbergh's first solo Atlantic flight, the Second World War, and the year Newfoundland became a Canadian province.

■ What is St. John's famous for? Find pictures of the city (in books or on the internet).

■ What is the importance of the St. Lawrence river? What can you learn about its size, its cities, its commerce? What is the St. Lawrence Seaway? Draw a map of the St. Lawrence River.

■ Are there important rivers near your hometown or city? How do they impact your region and the life of the people who live there? Draw a map of a local river.

■ Who were the Vikings? Where did they land in North America? Create a map to show their travel and landing sites.

■ What is the history of seal hunting in Newfoundland? How it has changed since the early 1900s?

■ Who were the native peoples of Newfoundland and Labrador? Create a poster to show their culture, art, and daily lives.

SCIENCE AND NATURE

Health

■ What is hypothermia? Why did it threaten the passengers on the SS *Ethie*? Find examples in the story.

Nature

■ The richest fishing area in the world is called the Grand Banks. Where is the Grand Banks? What is its importance to Newfoundland? Why is it threatened? What can you learn about the ecology of the Grand Banks and the problem of over-fishing?

■ The tuckamore tree and the puffin are examples of the flora and fauna of Newfoundland. What adaptations do the plants and animals of Newfoundland have to help them live in that chilly coastal climate? How are the plants and animals of your region different from those of Newfoundland?

■ What is the history of the Newfoundland breed of dog? What is it known for? What are its instinctive behaviors?

Nutrition

■ Foods that are mentioned in the book include cod stew, hard tack, and skillygalee. Can you find recipes for one of these, or another dish from Newfoundland, to prepare for the class? Is there a special local recipe from your region? How does the region affect the foods we eat?

Physical Science

■ The ship has an engine room where coal is shoveled into a boiler to keep the steam pressure at a high level. How does coal release its energy? Create and label a diagram to show how a steam engine works. What other vehicles or machines were powered by steam engines?

■ As the blizzard rages, Captain Flannery fears that empty herring barrels stored on the ship's deck will get crusted with ice, causing the ship to become "top-heavy from the extra weight of the ice" and possibly roll over. To demonstrate this

principle, use a sink or washpan to float a block of wood or a plastic container with attached lid. (Put a little sand or water in the plastic container as ballast.) Make the water deep enough to allow the block or container to roll over as you add weights to the top.

■ Using ropes and pulleys, rig up a pulley line to transport a small object across an open space.

Weather

■ How does a barometer work? How is it used to predict changes in the weather?

■ What is a weather front (low and high pressure fronts)? What is a "mackerel sky"? Where is it located on a weather front? If people see the clouds looking like a mackerel sky, what can they predict about the weather?

■ What is the strange phenomenon known as "St. Elmo's fire"?

■ How are storms classified? How do a gale, a hurricane, and a blizzard differ from each other?

MATH

■ Using a chart of time zones, what is the difference in hours between the time in your hometown and the time in Newfoundland?

■ The voyage of the SS *Ethie* was cut short by a forceful storm that drove the ship from its intended course. Using a scaled map of Newfoundland, calculate the distance in nautical miles from the launch site, Port Saunders, to the site of the shipwreck, Martin's Point. How great is the distance of the intended trip from Port Saunders to St. John's?

■ On a modern road map of Newfoundland, find the most direct land route from Port Saunders to St. John's. What is the total distance in miles, in kilometers? How long would the drive take if the speed limit were 30 mph (48 kph)?

■ Using the reported times given in the story, how many hours passed from the SS *Ethie's* departure on December 10 to its grounding on December 11, 1919?

■ "A hundred yards from the rocky beach a ship [the SS *Ethie*] was wedged broadside in the cove." How far is 100 yards? To visualize the distance, the class should find a long hallway or a large open space (playing field) and measure out the distance of 100 yards.

ART

■ Paint a portrait of Skipper, or show him from a scene in the book.

■ Draw or paint dual images: the view from the wrecked ship toward the rocky bluffs on shore and the view from the bluffs out across rough seas to the doomed ship.

■ Create a diorama of a passenger making the dangerous trip by breeches buoy from the wrecked ship to the safety of shore.

CULMINATING ACTIVITY

PLAN A CELEBRATION

Imagine it is June 11, 1929, nearly ten years after the shipwreck. Everyone has gathered under a blue sky in St. John's for a reunion—crew, passengers, and rescuers—to celebrate the gift of life and to remember the event "that had changed all of them." Mr. Reid from the Reid Shipping Company has organized the event and will be master of ceremonies. Once all the guests have arrived and have had a chance to get reacquainted, there will be a formal ceremony. Each person will have a chance to speak about how his or her life has been changed by the wreck, by the close brush with death, by the miraculous rescue. Following the speeches, a luncheon will be served. [Invite parents and administrators to attend.]

Emily Daren, who was only 18 months old when she was safely rescued in the mailbag, is now eleven. She stands with her mother, Alice, and her younger sister, who was not yet born when the *Ethie* was lost. The Reilly family—Gerald, Celeste, and Colleen—have arrived with their elderly dog, Skipper, who still wears his honorary collar. Mike Lawrence, the fisherman who lives near the Reillys on Martin's Point bluff, has also arrived. Patrick Logan and Fergus are standing together and telling seafaring stories. Captain Flannery is talking with former members of the *Ethie's* crew—the first mate, the bo'sun, the purser, a few firemen, and several stokers. Reginald Warren walks up to shake Captain Flannery's hand. Several other seamen and passengers are coming on the scene.

It is time to begin: Each student should take the role of one of the guests at the reunion—a crew member, a passenger, or a rescuer. Prepare a brief speech, imagining what you might say, looking back ten years. What are you doing now? What do you want to say to the people gathered around you? How is your life different because of the wreck of the *Ethie*?

After all have spoken, Skipper is honored once again, and then everyone sits down to share a meal together. Sea chanteys may be played as background music. Enjoy!

NOTES

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Hilary Hyland is a former hotel industry executive. She lives with her family in Virginia where she writes full time and gives school presentations and speaking engagements. Visit her website: www.hilaryhyland.com.



ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Paul Bachem has worked for many years as a freelance illustrator, producing award-winning work for most of the major book and magazine publishers in the United States and Australia. Some of his work is in the permanent collection of the Forbes Gallery in New York. Bachem has also illustrated *THE BUSHWHACKER* for Peachtree Publishers.

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A Peachtree Junior Book

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