

The Billow Maiden by James Dixon



| Chapter | Discussion and comprehension questions | Activity |
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| One | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was Alisa's favourite part of the journey to the island? • What had the caves along the coast been used for in the past? • <i>Water pounded the beaches every day as the tide rose and the wind whipped up</i> <p>What does this description suggest about the sea?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The tide was eating its way up the beach</i> <p>What technique has the writer used here? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Moxie was barking at the cave? • How do you think Ailsa felt when she arrived on the island? | <p>Find out about how the Moon affects the tides on the Earth. Look at tide tables to see how quickly tides can turn.</p> |
| Two | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Based on the description of Aunt Bertha (page 8), what can you infer about the work she does? • Why does Ailsa not like Dr Arbuthnot very much? • How does Uncle Nod describe the Galach family? • Why was it still light, even though it was late in the evening? • How does Moxie the dog help to advance the plot in this chapter? • How would you describe the cave containing the strange woman? | <p>Draw an illustration of the woman in the cave based on the descriptions on pages 11 and 12. Alternatively, write a paragraph describing her.</p> |
| Three | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Ailsa slept fitfully that night</i> <p>What does fitfully mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What impression does the writer create of Ailsa's mother at the start of this chapter? • What is the weather like when Ailsa visits the docks? • Why do you think the writer has written, <i>I found a strange woman in a cave and I don't know what to do</i> in italics? • What do the docks smell like? • What do you think the fisherman means when he says, <i>'it feels like the sea is plotting against us'</i>? | <p>Think of a time when you wanted to tell somebody something but you found it difficult to get the words out. Describe how it felt. (Think about your body's physical response.)</p> |



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| Four | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Ailsa think the starfish collection is horrible? • <i>Her skin was as pallid as it had been before</i> What is a synonym for <u>pallid</u> ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Again she was drawn to it. Repelled by it, but drawn to it, too</i> Why do you think the cave had this effect on Ailsa? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What evidence is there that the woman is magical? • What do you predict Ailsa will bring the woman next time she visits the cave? • What connections can you make between Ailsa's Mum and the woman in the cave? | Research starfish (also known as sea stars) and create a fact file about them. |
| Five | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who does Ailsa meet as she is walking home? • <i>Moxie glided like a ghost beside her</i> What does this tell you about Moxie? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Foolish glodhund</i> What do you think <u>glodhund</u> means? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The sadness was palpable as ever</i> What does <u>palpable</u> mean? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think Ailsa felt when the woman told her to go away? • How does the writer create the impression of the woman being somewhat like an animal? | Make a list of five questions you would like to ask the woman. Role play asking and answering your questions with a partner, taking it in turns to play the strange woman. |
| Six | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>They laughed like children all the time</i> What impression does this create of Uncle Nod and Aunt Bertha? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do we find out about Camilla in this chapter? • Why do you think Ailsa, <i>only ever felt really free when she visited Uncle Nod and Ant Bertha?</i> • <i>He licked her mercilessly</i> Write a definition of the word <u>mercilessly</u> . <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Uncle Nod call Ailsa 'a foolish girl'? • Uncle Nod says that his sister has, 'real iron in her blood.' What do you think he means? | Find out more about Yggdrasil, the world tree, and its importance in Norse mythology. |

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|---------|--|--|
| Seven | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does Aunt Bertha treat Ailsa's sunburn? • <i>'The sun is a harsh master, my ma used to say'</i> <p>Do you think this is a fair statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>A slender slip of beach</i> <p>What does <u>slender</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The salt seemed to eat into her sunburn, chewing like crazy</i> <p>Why do you think the writer has chosen to describe salt in this way?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did Ailsa and her mum do in Spain? • <i>My parents send me so they don't have to put up with me.</i> <p>What do you think the writer wants you to feel when Camilla makes this statement?</p> | <p>Write a description of a secret place, either real or imagined, that you would describe as, <i>'a hidden piece of paradise.'</i></p> |
| Eight | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was Camilla reading about? • What does Camilla say she is going to do when she leaves school? • What special power did Odin grant his ravens? • <i>It sounded like the crash of the surf on jagged rocks</i> <p>What does <u>jagged</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think the woman wants to meet Camilla? • Why do you think the sadness in the cave had lessened? | <p><i>'It's wonderful what they do ... with cocoa and sugar these days.'</i></p> <p>Write out a recipe for something you think the woman would enjoy eating.</p> |
| Nine | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is your impression of the Galach house? • <i>'Her head, Aunt Bertha says. Uncle Nod says it's her heart. Maybe it's both.'</i> <p>How does this help you to understand Mum's illness?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Ailsa feels good about sharing her secret with Camilla? • What is Camilla drawing a picture of? • What do Aloe plants look like? • What do you think Ailsa is planning to use the aloe sap for? | <p>Find out more about aloe plants. Where do they grow? How should you care for a potted aloe plant?</p> |

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|---------|--|--|
| Ten | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Sounds ominous</i> <p>What does <u>ominous</u> mean?</p> <p>Why do you think Camilla uses this word?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The strange woman bared her sharp teeth and hissed</i> <p>What can you infer from this description?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think the woman is able to drink saltwater? • How has the relationship between Moxie and the woman changed since they first met? • <i>I wasn't always a relic</i> <p>What is a <u>relic</u>?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does <u>dronning</u> mean? • Where do you think Camilla wants to take the woman? | <p>As Camilla, write a diary entry about meeting the strange woman in the cave.</p> |
| Eleven | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did Grandpa Peter die? • Why does Camilla think it is vital that they move the strange woman? • <i>Her face was serene</i> <p>What does <u>serene</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It's like nature wants us to do this.</i> <p>What evidence is there on page 114 that this is true?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Ailsa sometimes feels like she is Moxie's shadow? • Why is the woman scared to leave the cave? | <p>Write about a time when you did something difficult, or maybe even a little bit dangerous, because you felt it was the right thing to do.</p> |
| Twelve | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Slightly dilapidated</i> <p>What does <u>dilapidated</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does Uncle Nod think King Canute tried to hold back the tides? • Why do you think Uncle Nod tells Ailsa the story of King Canute? • How does Ailsa describe the seal? • Who does Uncle Nod describe as being like, 'two peas in a pod'? • What do you think Ailsa saw in the water? | <p>Find out more about King Canute. When and where did he live? What did he achieve in his reign?</p> |

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| Thirteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was making Ailsa gag slightly as she entered the lighthouse? • How was the lighthouse, beginning to feel like the cave? • <i>It was at once fresh and putrid. It was rot and new life</i> <p>Why has the writer chosen to use antithesis (opposite/contrasting words) to describe the smell?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hefring says that Camilla has, '<i>steel in her nerves</i>'. <p>What does this metaphor suggest about Camilla?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>She fell silent, lost in her reverie</i> <p>What does this mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is one of the names that Hefring has been called in the past? | <p>Find out more about mermaids, selkies, sirens or nymphs.</p> <p>Create a scrap book page (or a digital page) about one of these mythical creatures.</p> |
| Fourteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why had much of the coastline been cordoned off? • <i>It was like it was coming from her mum, surrounding her, drowning her</i> <p>Why has the writer chosen to use this metaphor to describe the sadness in Mum's room?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the weather in this chapter reflect what Ailsa is feeling? • Find evidence in the text that The Billow Maidens could be aggressive. • Which aspect of the sea has Hefring been named for? • Ailsa thinks that Hefring really is a Billow Maiden. Do you agree? Why or why not? | <p>Draw or paint a picture of The Billow Maidens based on the description in this chapter.</p> <p>How does the description of the Billow Maidens compare with the description of Hefring in chapter 2?</p> |

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| Fifteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What kind of storm do the fishermen believe to be brewing? • <i>But Camila stifled a sob</i> <p>What does <u>stifled</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>If you know a friend you can fully trust, go often to their house; grass and brambles grow quickly, upon the untrodden track.</i> <p>What do you think this quote from Odin, repeated by Camilla, means?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>And my dad says we're the wolves</i> <p>What evidence is there in the text that the Galachs behave like wolves?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>All words are borrowed</i> <p>Do you agree with this statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Uncle Nod offer the girls at the end of the chapter? | <p>With a partner, act out the argument between Ailsa and Camilla. Set a timer and after two minutes, swap roles, so that you end up arguing both points of view.</p> |
| Sixteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the name of the card game that Camilla learns to play? • Why does Camilla prefer Nod and Bertha's house to her own? • What are <u>stalagmites</u> and <u>stalactites</u>? • <i>Ailsa saw the same sea that had churned for millennia</i> <p>What does this tell us about the sea?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What type of language has the writer used to describe Hefring's song? • How would you describe the relationship between Hefring and the girls at this point in the story? | <p>Create your own 'song of the sea'. Compose a piece of music using instruments or write a poem describing the sea.</p> |

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|-----------|--|---|
| Seventeen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It's like a pirate's treasure trove up there</i> <p>How does this simile help the reader to picture the loft?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>It was sturdier than the first, coated in thick leather, with iron bands around its edges. A couple of large padlocks kept it locked tight.</i> <p>What do you think this trunk contains?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In Greek mythology, who was the god of the sun? • According to Greek mythology, why are ravens black? • Where has Uncle Nod taken Ailsa's mum? • What connection is the writer making between ravens and Ailsa's mum? | <p>Create an information page, or a poster, about the role ravens play in different mythologies, based on what you have learnt from this chapter.</p> |
| Eighteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why do you think Ailsa gets so cross with her aunt? • <i>I'll put some hot chocolate on, and we can get changed out of these wet things</i> <p>Describe the role that cocoa plays in this story.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The rain had abated for the moment</i> <p>What does <u>abated</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How has the lighthouse changed? • What is your impression of the hospital? • What can you infer about the private conversation between the doctor, Nod and Bertha? | <p>Ailsa has to travel by ferry to reach the hospital. Look at some maps of Scotland. Where do you think the island might be? Find out the names of some remote Scottish islands and the size of their populations.</p> |
| Nineteen | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The front door was warping slightly</i> <p>What does <u>warping</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Life is the answer. We can only live if we are strong and we can only be strong if we live it</i> <p>To what extent do you agree with this statement?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you think a sea-skin is? • Who stole Hefring's sea-skin? • Where does Ailsa think the sea-skin is? • What evidence is there that Camilla is feeling determined at the end of the chapter? | <p>Design and make a model lighthouse based on the descriptions on page 186 and 192.</p> |

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| Twenty | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The hospital squashed it all. The bright corridor carried no songs</i> <p>How does this description make you feel?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ailsa's mum has been asleep, or barely awake, all throughout the story so far. Can you make any links between her character and other characters from different stories? • <i>My Dad says their days are numbered</i> <p>What do you think this means?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Mr Galach believe about fishing? • <i>I don't know what the right thing is</i> <p>Describe a time when you were unsure about what the right thing was.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do you think the writer wants you to feel when Camilla is struggling to make her decision? | <p>Consider the dilemma that Camilla is facing. Make a list of reasons why she should steal the sea-skin and another list of reasons why she shouldn't. As a group hold a debate or create a conscience alley to explore the opposing points of view.</p> |
| Twenty-one | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the writer raise anticipation on pages 212-214? • How do the girls manage to open the trunk? • <i>The inside of the trunk was cavernous and nearly empty</i> <p>Write a definition of the word <u>cavernous</u>. Why do you think the writer has chosen to use this word here?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does the writer use descriptive language to create a vivid picture in your mind of the sea-skin? • Why is Mrs Galach surprised to see Ailsa at her house? • Look at pages 218 and 219. How can you tell that Uncle Nod is feeling anxious? | <p>Use a range of materials to create a collage representing the sea-skin.</p> |



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| Twenty-two | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Find evidence on pages 221-222 that the lighthouse is starting to rot. <i>The change was sudden</i> <p>What is the effect of this short sentence?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> List five ways in which Hefring changes, once she is reunited with her sea skin. How did Ailsa feel when she was bathed in Hefring's brightness? How does the writer use personification to describe Hefring's song? Why do you think the girls did not speak very much as they walked home? | <p>Re-write the end of this chapter from Hefring's point of view. Describe how she feels as she walks into the sea with her sea-skin.</p> |
| Twenty-three | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Why do you think Ailsa slept peacefully, despite the storm? What is <u>subsidence</u>? What happened to the Galach's house during the storm? Who has been arrested by the police? Why do you think Camilla is staring dead ahead in the car? How did you feel when you read that Ailsa's mother was sitting at the kitchen table? | <p>Look back through the story and find examples of where the writer has foreshadowed the collapse of the Galach house. (Look at pages 41, 84, 103-104, 142, 150-151, 231-232)</p> |
| Twenty-four | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How does the writer describe Mum's appearance on page 240? Why do you think Ailsa imagines that her mum <i>almost had talons, sores and scales</i>? How does the description of how Mum smells (page 241) create an emotional response in the reader? Why does Mum need to sit in the shade? <i>Standing in the sunshine as it cascaded in through the open window</i> <p>What does <u>cascading</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> What do you think has caused Mum's incredible transformation? | <p>As Doctor Arbuthnot, write a medical report describing the incredible transformation in his patient's health and explain why you think she has improved so quickly.</p> |

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|-------------|--|--|
| Twenty-five | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What does Ailsa help her mum with? • <i>Not till they salvage what can be salvaged down at the docks</i> <p>What does <u>salvage</u> mean?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Has anything else been 'salvaged' in this story? • Do you agree that '<i>there is no better teacher than experience?</i>' • What can you infer from page 253, about how Camilla is feeling, while she is sitting on the wall? • How does Moxie help to break the tension between Camilla and Ailsa? | <p>The sun is an important motif in this story. It is represented as being dangerous but also beautiful and healing.</p> <p>Make a list of ways in which the sun is dangerous and another list explaining the benefits of sunshine.</p> <p>Alternatively, write a poem about the sun using personification.</p> |
| Twenty-six | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where does the picnic take place? • What do you think Ailsa has learnt from Hefring? • What do you think Camilla is hoping for in the future? • <i>It woke her own song up</i> <p>What do you think Ailsa means by this?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • List three things you think Ailsa is grateful for. • Common themes in this story include: mythologies, dreams, the power of nature, vulnerability, strength, transformation, authenticity and sadness. <p>Pick one theme and explain its importance in the story.</p> | <p>Design an alternative book cover for the <i>Billow Maiden</i> and write your own blurb for the book.</p> |

