

Walk the Plank!

by W.M. Akers



Walking the plank is not a fun thing to do. Here's how it works. A pirate sticks a long piece of wood off the side of his ship and makes you stand at one end. He puts his sword at your back and bellows, "Walllllk the plank!" You walk across the plank toward the water. When you run out of plank, you fall in the water. Probably there are sharks down there. The ship sails away, and that's the end of you.

The thing is, pirates never really made anyone walk the plank. This may surprise you, since it's in a lot of movies and TV shows. It's a nasty thing to do, and pirates were pretty nasty, so it *seems* like something they would do. But in fact walking the plank was imagined by Robert Louis Stevenson, a 19th-century novelist, whose most famous book is *Treasure Island*. A fictional pirate like Long John Silver might make you walk the plank, but a real-life pirate never would.

That is what was going through Tommy's mind as he stood on the end of the plank staring out at his doom. His best friend Jack stood behind him. Tommy felt the point of Jack's wooden sword digging into his back.

"I said, walllllk the plank!" shouted Jack.

"The thing is," said Tommy, "pirates never really made people walk the plank. That was invented by Robert Louis Stevenson, who-"

"I'm a pirate! Do you think I care about books?"

They were standing on the edge of Jack's tree house, which had a lot of uses. Sometimes it was a submarine. Sometimes it was a spaceship. Sometimes it was just a tree house. That afternoon, it was serving as a pirate ship. They had been pirates all afternoon, and everything was going fine until Tommy made the mistake of criticizing his captain. Jack was always the

captain, since this was his tree house. And Captain Jack's number one rule was that the crew must never question his orders.

So when the Captain ordered his first mate to hand over three chocolate chip cookies, Tommy was supposed to do so without complaint. But chocolate chip cookies were his favorite. He'd suffered through a whole boring bologna sandwich to get to them, and now that he was finished, Jack wanted to take them away. Tommy didn't care who was the captain. He stuffed all three cookies into his mouth and chewed as fast as he could. And so Captain Jack sentenced him to walk the plank.

"I'm getting tired of waiting, Mister Tommy. Walllllk the plank!"

Tommy looked at the ground. They had jumped out of the tree house tons of times, but it was easy when you had a running start. It would be harder to just walk into thin air. He could see why Robert Louis Stevenson thought this would be a scary thing. There was no way out. Unless...what would a pirate do?

Tommy didn't hesitate. He spun around as fast as he could and kicked his leg into the air. Jack's sword went flying, and before Jack knew what had happened, Tommy leapt onto the sword. He popped up and pointed it at Jack's back.

"Yaaargh!"

"What are you doing?" whined Jack.

"This is a mutiny! I'm the captain now. And I say that you have to walllllk the plank!"

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What were Jack and Tommy pretending the tree house was?

- A. a submarine
- B. an island
- C. a spaceship
- D. a pirate ship

2. What is the main conflict in this story?

- A. Jack wants Tommy to walk the plank, but Tommy does not want to.
- B. Jack wants to eat all the cookies, but Tommy wants to share them.
- C. Tommy wants to stop pretending to be pirates, but Jack does not want to.
- D. Tommy wants Jack to let him be Captain, but Jack does not want to.

3. Read these sentences from the text.

So when the Captain ordered his first mate to hand over three chocolate chip cookies, Tommy was supposed to do so without complaint. But chocolate chip cookies were his favorite. He'd suffered through a whole boring bologna sandwich to get to them, and now that he was finished, Jack wanted to take them away. Tommy didn't care who was the captain. He stuffed all three cookies into his mouth and chewed as fast as he could.

Based on this evidence, what conclusion can you draw about how Tommy felt?

- A. Tommy felt a little sad, but thought Captain Jack was being fair.
- B. Tommy felt annoyed and thought Captain Jack's order was unfair.
- C. Tommy felt calm, but thought Captain Jack's order was unfair.
- D. Tommy felt neutral and did not mind that Captain Jack wanted the cookies.

4. Tommy is afraid to walk the plank. What evidence from the text best supports this conclusion?

- A. "You walk across the plank toward the water. When you run out of plank, you fall in the water."
- B. "Tommy didn't hesitate. He spun around as fast as he could and kicked his leg into the air."
- C. "[Tommy] could see why Robert Louis Stevenson thought [walking the plank] would be a scary thing."
- D. "A fictional pirate like Long John Silver might make you walk the plank, but a real-life pirate never would."

5. What is the main idea of this story?

- A. While playing pirates, Jack orders Tommy to give him three chocolate chip cookies.
- B. While pretending they are pirates, Jack orders Tommy to walk the plank, but Tommy finds a way out.
- C. Jack and Tommy enjoy playing pretend in Jack's tree house.
- D. Although walking the plank is common in movies and TV shows, real pirates would not make someone walk the plank.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

So when the Captain ordered his first mate to hand over three chocolate chip cookies, Tommy was supposed to do so without complaint. But chocolate chip cookies were his favorite. He'd suffered through a whole boring bologna sandwich to get to them, and now that he was finished, Jack wanted to take them away. Tommy didn't care who was the captain. He stuffed all three cookies into his mouth and chewed as fast as he could. And so Captain Jack sentenced him to walk the plank.

'I'm getting tired of waiting, Mister Tommy. Walllllk the plank!'

As used in this context, what does the word "sentence" mean?

- A. a complete unit in language
- B. to order a punishment
- C. a kind suggestion
- D. to help or assist

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence.

Jack was always the captain _____ this was his tree house.

- A. however
- B. because
- C. therefore
- D. although

8. What did Tommy do that caused Captain Jack to sentence him to walk the plank?

9. How does Tommy avoid walking the plank?

10. Explain why Tommy decides to become the captain and order Jack to walk the plank. Support your answer with evidence from the text.