

Eighth Grade Reading Students

4-13-20 / 4-17-20

Greetings, Eighth Grade,

Hope you are safe and well. Your assignment this week is the beginning of a unit on **PIRATES**. I thought you would like this because Pirates are “interesting characters”. This lesson is an introduction into “***The Life of a Pirate***”. Before you begin reading, there is a list of vocabulary words that you will come across in your reading. They are words you may not know when you see them. Complete this worksheet. Then read about pirates. At the end, I want 1 paragraph telling me why or why not you would embrace this idea of being a pirate. Have fun reading. Next week we will meet some of these “intriguing” characters.

I'll be contacting you soon.

I miss you

Mrs. Martin



Vocab. Over "A Pirates Life"

Dictatorial: _____

Totalitarian: _____

Intimidation: _____

Rationing: _____

Tactic: _____

Arbitrary: _____

Deterrence: _____

Aft: _____

Prosperity: _____

Unsheathing: _____

Oblivion: _____

A Pirate's Life



WHY A PIRATE?

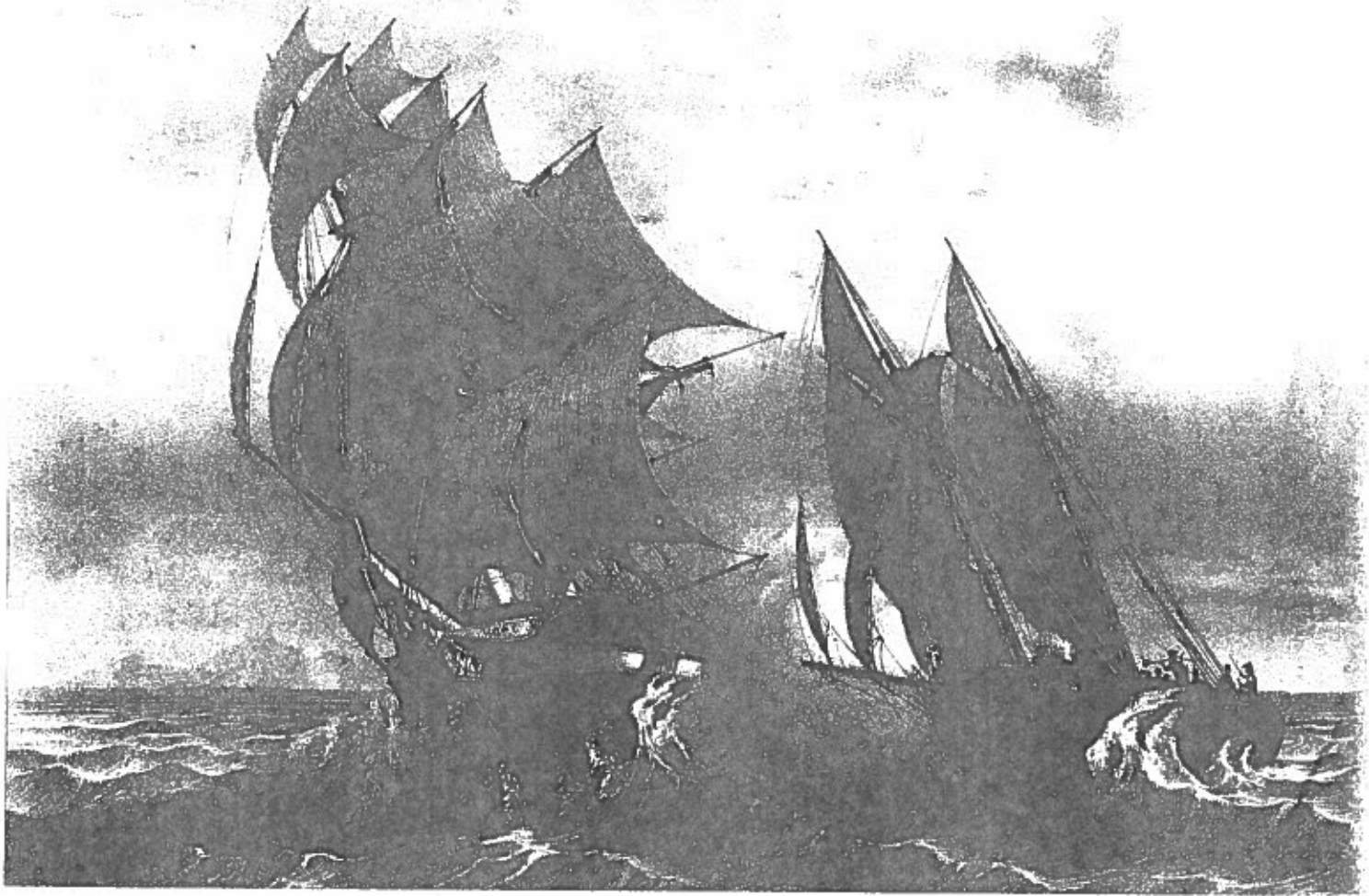
Why would someone choose a life of piracy? There certainly seem to be some common denominators in the backgrounds of most pirates. With very few exceptions, such as Bartholomew Roberts, pirates came from poor backgrounds. A life at sea offered a means of survival at a time when thousands of people literally were starving on the streets of the capitals of Europe.

People came to piracy via different routes. Some began as pirates, but they were far more likely to have first seen service in the navy or the merchant marine.

Of course, there were also privateers, but there was a fine line between privateering and piracy. Technically, as long as privateers acted in strict accordance with their commissions, they were deemed to be operating within the law.

Because privateers were already experienced raiders and plunderers, and all too aware of the riches to be had, they easily could turn to piracy. In times of peace the temptation was especially strong, especially in view of the high unemployment rates back in Europe.

Nor is it difficult to understand why many sailors came to piracy through legitimate naval service. The harsh reality of maritime service was described by an eighteenth century mariner who explained the social logic of life at sea to a "green hand:"



Pirate schooner preparing to board a merchantman. Artist unknown (Snark/Art Resource, N.Y.)

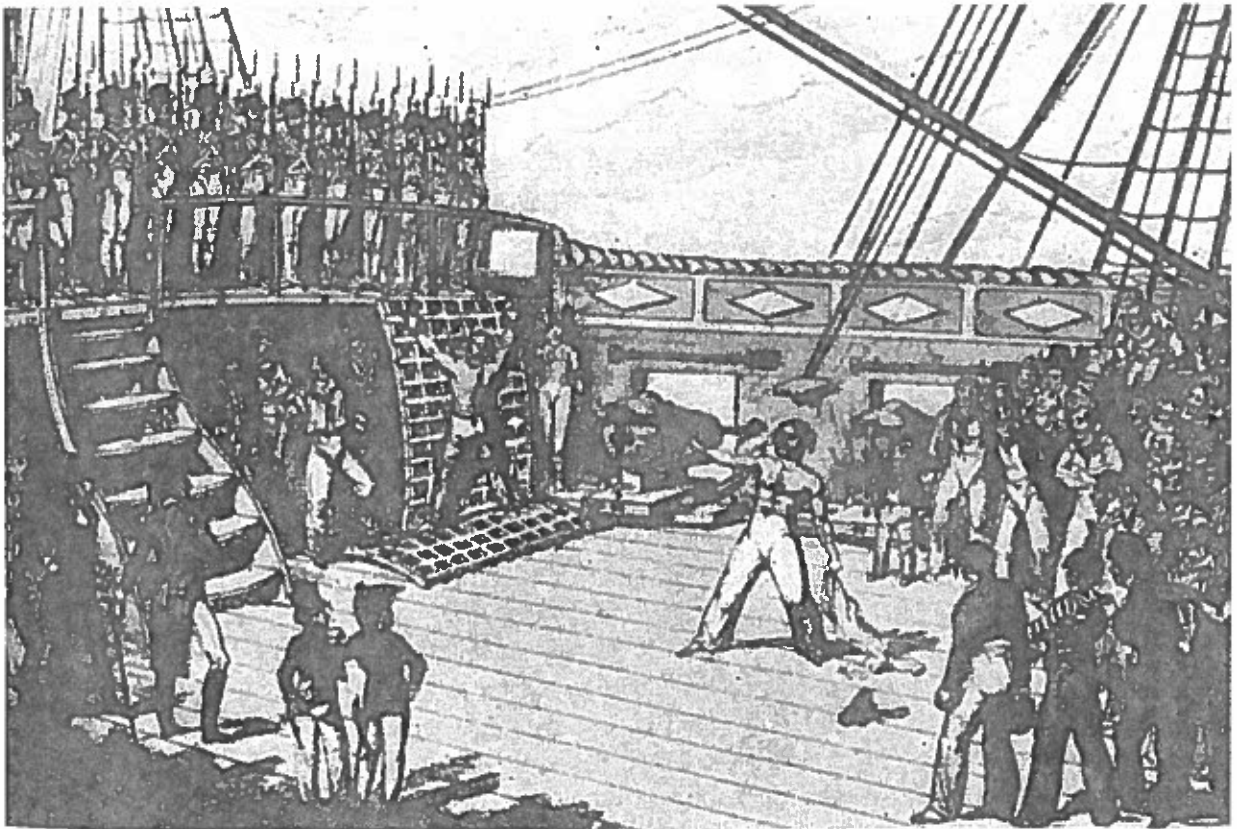
“ There is no justice or injustice on board ship, my lad. There are only two things: duty and mutiny — mind that. All that you are ordered to do is duty. All that you refuse to do is mutiny. ”

Many captains ruled their ships along precisely these lines. They were aided in their efforts by the fact that once a ship had sailed beyond the confines of a port it was nearly impossible for anyone or anything to control the captain's actions. The ship was a world unto itself in which the captain had formal powers over the labor process, the dispensing of food, the maintenance of health, and the general social life on board ship. Such

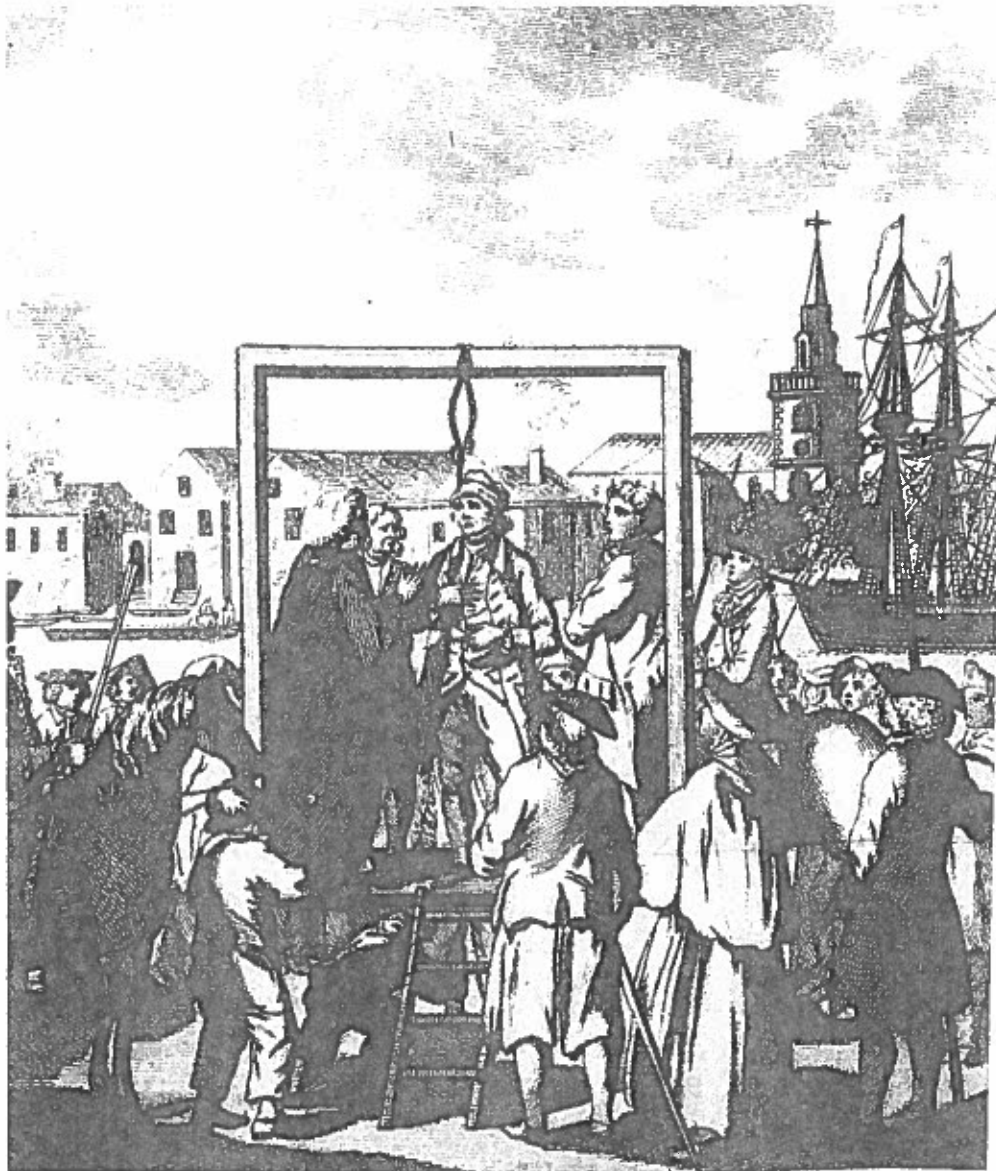
formal and informal controls invested the captain with near-dictatorial powers and made the ship the equivalent of a totalitarian state.

One of the main enforcers of the principle of obedience, an essential component of the captain's authority, was the cat-of-nine-tails, the legendary emblem of maritime brutality. The captain's armory might also be well stocked with canes, ropes, belts, sticks, and numerous other objects that could be made to function as weapons.

Cruelty was widespread and passed as the rule rather than the exception. Some blood curdling accounts exist. One such deposition tells of a John Pattison, foremast man on the *Unity*, who, while sailing to the West Indies in 1708, failed to remember a chore. He was seized "by the hair of his head" by Captain Matthew Beesley. The captain then forced his head "under the 2nd gun on the Larboard side" and beat him with "a great Roap . . . so long and in such a barbarous and cruel manner that . . . Pattison for some time after was scarcely able to lift his head." Beesley, Pattison deposed, "would then have certainly murdered or crippled" him "had not the Gunner or some other persons cryed out Shame on it" and



Flogging was the chief method of enforcing discipline in the merchant fleet and the Royal Navy. Etching by George Cruikshank. From *Old Ship Prints* by E. Keble Chatterton, 1825.



A pirate on the scaffold at Execution Dock. Artist Unknown (National Maritime Museum, London).

thereby “prevented him.” On the occasion of other beatings Beesley caused “almost a pinte of Blood” to flow from Pattison’s nose.

Some of the beatings given sailors by captains were vicious almost beyond belief. Captain William Newcomin in 1733 beat John Jones with a stone mug and “broke four of his teeth quite out of his head.” James Conroy testified in 1707 that his captain, a Mr. Wherry, “caught him fast by the Nose with his left hand and thrust” into his “left Eye and with his right hand struck three Blows on his said thumb and in that manner willfully, designedly and maliciously maimed and put out” his eye.

Cruelties such as these represented a tactic of authority central to maritime discipline — intimidation. Authority at sea was intensely personal, which in turn was the very basis of intimidation. Undoubtedly, the men described previously were used as examples to the rest of the crew. Even Captain Woodes Rogers, later a revered figure, had one seaman “severely whipt before the Whole Company as a Terror to the rest.”

It is impossible to know how many sailors were murdered, primarily because the existing records are profoundly incomplete.

Responsibility for the rationing of food was an important part of the captain’s near-dictatorial control over the ship. Withholding sustenance from the crew was used as a means of discipline, and was especially important in the merchant navy, since any money saved on this account increased the profitability of the voyage for the owners. Although the captain was enjoined by law “to provide his seamen aboard ship with good food and living conditions,” such injunctions were often disregarded.

Another means of punishment was confinement. Seamen were often chained either in a dark hold, or on deck with no protection against inclement weather.

These were the tactics most frequently employed in a system of authority best described as violent, personal and arbitrary. It is little wonder then, that when faced with the chance to “turn pirate” many sailors welcomed the opportunity. After enduring such cruelty, the thought of



Pirates drinking, *Pirate's Own Book*, 1837

having a vote in the government of a ship, which was the custom among pirates, must have seemed like a dream come true. So harsh were the conditions of the life of an honest seaman that the possibility of being captured as a pirate and the prospect of hanging offered little deterrence.

ELECTING A CAPTAIN

The captain of a pirate crew had the great aft cabin to himself, but any man on board had the right to enter the cabin at any time, take a drink from the captain's supply of rum, and even swear at him. In fact, these privileges were rarely used, and it was usual for the pirate captain to be treated with a great deal of respect.

When a pirate captain was chosen there was usually some ceremony surrounding his taking "office." After the company had elected him, the quartermaster or another of the men's leaders would make a speech wishing him prosperity and a long and healthy term. He would then be led in a formal procession to the great cabin and requested to have a seat at the head of the table. The quartermaster would join him as representative of the entire ship's company. Unsheathing a sword, he would present this to the captain, accompanied by a brief statement to the following effect, "We hereby commission you to lead us. May you bring us and yourself good fortune!"

At the end of the ceremony the hands would fire all guns. The captain would then invite the senior men of the crew to dine with him. The rest of the crew would proceed to get roaring drunk, except for the musicians, who were typically forced men — serving on the ship against their will. They had to remain sober and keep playing until their audience drifted into a deep and soundless oblivion.

"FORCED" MEN AND WALKING THE PLANK

Once a prize had been taken and her cargo seized and inspected the pirates would turn their attention to dealing with the crew. Young men, likely to be strong and good sailors, would be interviewed by the captain or quartermaster, and asked to sign the ship's articles. To be invited to join the crew in this manner was really just a formality. There was not much real choice involved. Even if a man refused, he was usually "forced" to serve, and there was better feeling if he joined his captives voluntarily. The one benefit, and it was a major one, to being "forced"

OPPOSITE — Walking the Plank. Howard Pyle.



was that if the ship were captured and the pirate crew put in irons, the "forced" men could claim their freedom as having been unwilling participants in all of the crimes perpetrated by the ship.

As for those who refused to serve and were not worth being "forced," they were sometimes made to walk the plank, though it was considered a favor to be shot rather than to endure the cruelty of the long walk into the abyss. Walking the plank, in which the victim was blindfolded and forced to walk on a board thrust out from the ship's side, was the source of amusement and sport. Pirates would place wagers on whether or not the victim would make it to the end of the plank or would lose his footing and fall off before reaching the end. In either case, of course, he fell into the water and drowned, or was eaten by sharks.

This practice of walking the plank was considered a punishment of death.