



Year 7

AP2 Revision

Captain or Crew?

Aeolus & the Bag of

Winds

Aeolus and the Bag of Winds

Again, imagine that you are one of the crew. Now desperate for fresh water, you sail aimlessly on. So in need of water are you that you are becoming delirious and are beginning to see islands where there are none. A few days into your thirsty search the lookout cries, 'Land ahoy! ... I think...'

Unsure whether this is just another hallucination, you all strain your eyes to see what it is that has puzzled the lookout. A small dot in the distance gradually grows in size as you approach, but as it becomes clearer it also becomes apparent that this is no ordinary island.

A great wall of bronze encircles what you guess must be an island within. It appears, however, impenetrable. As your ships come to a halt before the walled dwelling, a small gate opens at the base of the fortress and a boat emerges. It appears to be a scout-boat and it makes its way towards Odysseus' ship, which is nearest the island.

Odysseus speaks to the men in the boat and it quickly becomes apparent that the exchange is friendly. The boat eventually returns to the island and Odysseus gives the signal to follow. Your ships will never fit through the small aperture in the wall, but no matter because as you near the wall, a much larger, double-doored gate parts to allow your ships' passage.

Odysseus explains that you have arrived at the house of Aeolus, the Keeper of Winds, where he lives with his family of 12, his six daughters and six sons. He further explains that you have all been invited to stay with him a while to recuperate, as his guests. Here, you will feast and rest for as long as necessary. It seems that you have found the sanctuary you so desperately needed, and in the nick of time! As you pass through the gates you see that you have entered a protected paradise.

In all, you remain here for a month. And it is indeed the case that you are able to rest and pass the time relaxing and enjoying the beautiful island. Each night you feast together around a huge table. Odysseus sits at the head of the table beside Aeolus and they talk at great length to each other.

One evening during one of their many conversations, you notice Aeolus give Odysseus a gift. It is a large leather bag tied tightly at the top. Odysseus takes it and thanks him. Over the next few days a rumour begins to circulate amongst the crew. It is speculated that in the bag is a hoard of gold and silver, but it is also rumoured that Odysseus plans not to share this gift with any of you.

The day comes for you to leave. You are all well rested and the ships are fully stocked with food and fresh water. Odysseus and Perimedes, the ship's navigator, have studied and memorised the charts of the surrounding seas and islands that are in Aeolus' possession, and they have plotted a course home. Perimedes has estimated that you shall reach your homeland of Ithaca in no more than nine days. Odysseus himself promises to sail the ships there personally and vows not to sleep until he has honoured his promise. The thought that you may see your families again in such a short time fills your hearts with warmth and joy.

As you sail and as each day passes, the rumour of the gold and silver in the bag that Aeolus has given to Odysseus does not go away. In fact, it gets worse. When Odysseus is not within earshot, the men talk more of it each day.

The ninth day arrives and, as predicted, a familiar coastline materialises over the horizon: it is the coastline that will lead you back to Ithaca at long last! Odysseus addresses all of you: 'We have come a long way indeed. Here is our home – you can see it with your own eyes. I have not slept, however, for nine days now and I am exhausted. I will need my energy for the celebrations that lie ahead so I am going to sleep awhile. Do not wake me until we reach our treasured shores. And do not lose sight of the coast. We should be home in just a few hours'. With that, Odysseus retires below deck.

Once he has fallen asleep, an argument breaks out amongst the men. It concerns the rumour that has been spreading regarding the bag of gold and silver. The argument is about whether or not to take the bag and open it while Odysseus sleeps. Eventually, the crew splits into two. Two senior members of the crew seem to have become the spokesmen for the two sides of the argument.

Perimedes represents the part of the crew that think they should trust Odysseus to decide what's best. But someone called Polus has been arguing that it is not fair that Odysseus gets to keep the treasure when all the men have endured just as much as he.

The argument slowly turns into an argument about how the ship should be ruled. Perimedes says that it is better to have a captain to rule over the men and make decisions on their behalf (what the Greeks called autocracy), while Polus argues that the people of the ship should rule themselves and that it is wrong for the people to be ruled by one man (this the Greeks called a democracy).

Eventually a vote is cast. Those that agree with Perimedes stand behind him and those that agree with Polus stand behind Polus until all have taken their places. When it is done, the greater number stand by Polus. The crew have chosen to rule themselves – to become a democracy aboard their ship. Next, they need to decide whether to take the bag or not. Again, they vote on this as before. The greater number chooses to take the bag and share its contents out amongst the entire crew equally. Perimedes protests but he is powerless to do anything to stop them and he and his supporters are restrained by some of the other crew members. The bag is taken silently from Odysseus' side. He is not roused – his slumber is deep indeed. The bag is placed on the deck of the ship and Polus unties it.

Whilst the bag is being untied you notice the familiar shapes of your homes silhouetted along the coast. You are so close that you can see the homely sign of smoke rising from the houses where your families are preparing food, quite unaware that their husbands and fathers are within sight of the shore. But no sooner have you seen your home than it is gone again.

It transpires that inside the bag there is no gold or silver. The rumour was nothing more than ... well, a rumour. Aeolus had not given Odysseus treasure. Instead, being the Keeper of the Winds and entrusted with them by the gods, he had given him a bag with the storm winds trapped inside, to ensure Odysseus' – and your – safe return. He had then sent an accompanying breeze to power the ships.

As the storm that has been imprisoned in the bag escapes, all its pent up energy is also released. The ships are corralled into the open ocean once more. The storm rages for days and only gets stronger as it rages. When the storm eventually subsides you are greeted with yet more calamity. Of the ten ships that remained of the 12 that set sail from Troy, only one still sits on top of the water, the others all having been claimed by the violent waves. What's more, you are lost at sea again. The charts that Odysseus and Perimedes viewed at Aeolus' home would only be of use when it is known where you are to start. Now, you could be anywhere.

Polus was among these lost with the other ships. Odysseus seems almost broken with disappointment and betrayal. This being so, he nevertheless turns to the remaining men and says, 'Men! It is just us now. Whatever it is you have done, my promise to bring you to your homes still holds'.

With great effort, you lift your hearts and take your positions and set sail once more into the unknown.