



SHACKLETON'S ENDURANCE

AN ANTARCTIC SURVIVAL STORY

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Recommended for 10 to 14 year olds

Summary

Adrift on the Antarctic pack ice with no means of escape and no hope of rescue, Ernest Shackleton and his men are surely doomed.

In August 1914, Ernest Shackleton and his men set sail for Antarctica, where they plan to cross the last uncharted continent on foot. In January 1915, his ship, the *Endurance*, becomes locked in pack ice. Later, it sinks without a trace.

To survive, Shackleton and his crew of twenty-seven men must undertake a trial even more extreme than their planned crossing of the frozen continent. Their aim is to make it home against tremendous odds, with only lifeboats to cross the heavy seas of the South Atlantic – and the life-saving power of Shackleton's extraordinary leadership skills.

Author Style

Although thoroughly researched and historically accurate, the real strength of *Shackleton's Endurance* lies in its exciting novelistic approach. Dialogue, detailed descriptions and scene-setting, an omniscient narrator (who gives us interiority i.e., taking us inside the characters' consciousness) and descriptions of the action from all angles combine to create a remarkably moving and suspenseful story.

Themes

Antarctica, explorers, leadership and courage.

Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Before Reading

Spend a lesson in your school library to research answers for the following questions:

- What was the 'Heroic Age of Antarctic Exploration'?
- What was Ernest Shackleton's objective when he started his expedition in 1914?
- How did the Mechanical Age of Antarctic Exploration in the 1920s differ from the 'Heroic Age'?

Type in the words, 'Frank Hurley and Endurance' in Google Images and you'll find an array of images to decorate your classroom.

English

- What does the word endurance mean? What message does the Shackleton family motto, 'By Endurance We Conquer' (page 121), convey about them? Why do you think Shackleton named his ship the *Endurance*? Why do you think Joanna Grochowicz chose to name her book *Shackleton's Endurance*?
- Why do you think Joanna Grochowicz chose to use present tense to tell this highly dramatic story? How might the use of past tense have changed the story for you?
- What did the 'flashback' entitled Mick (page 57) tell you about Ernest Shackleton's personality? [Hint: the last line, 'Ernest sighs. He supposes it's just as well. He can't yet swim.' (page 58) is an early example of Shackleton's impatience – in this case to get to sea before learning to swim – and explains why he set sail for Antarctica against the advice of the whalers on South Georgia much later.]
- Find another example of a flashback and describe why you think the author decided to include it at that point of the story.
- '...if I am in the devil of a hole and want to get out of it, give me Shackleton every time.' said fellow explorer Apsley Cherry-Garrard in his book, *The Worst Journey in the World*.

Shackleton is often mentioned as a person who exemplified good leadership in times of great stress. Make a list of things he did that you think show good leadership and helped his men endure the physical and mental challenges they faced.

Extension question

“It is the only thing to do for we must get to the Pole, come what may...’ Shackleton’s pencil hovers over the last words in his diary. Come what may? To reach the pole and die, or abandon their quest and survive? His gaze falls on his tent mates, Wild and Adams and Marshall, as they commit their own words to paper in the cold night. He crosses out the last part. It’s not worth dying.” (page 144)

- Compare Ernest Shackleton’s attitude with Robert Falcon Scott’s during the ill-fated *Terra Nova* expedition in 1910-13.
- Should this book be categorised as fiction or non-fiction? Give specific reasons in your answer.

Humanities and Social Sciences/Geography

Answer the following questions about Antarctica:

- What is the difference between an iceberg and floe?
- What is a lead (sea ice)?
- What is a glacier?
- How warm and cold does it get in Antarctica?
- How much rain falls annually in Antarctica?
- Can animals live in Antarctica?
- How many people live in Antarctica today?
- Does one country ‘control’ Antarctica?
- What is the primary reason for people to live in Antarctica today?

Humanities and Social Sciences/History

Ernest Shackleton set sail for Antarctica on 8 August, 1914. What significant event also happened in August 1914? How did this event impact on Shackleton’s later attempts to save his men?

- Why were European nations interested in exploring the Antarctic in the late 19th and early 20th centuries?
- Is the age of exploration over? Consider this: in 2020, President Trump committed the United States to establishing a sustainable settlement on the moon by 2028, with the goal of mining for resources. In a whole-class discussion encourage students to compare and contrast this 21st century plan with Antarctic exploration more than a century ago. Encourage students to consider:
 - What drives us today to want to explore space? Are these the same motivations that drove Europeans to explore Antarctica?

- What would you need to take with you to establish a sustainable settlement on the moon? How might your list differ from what Shackleton took with him on his *Endurance* Expedition?
- What sort of personality would you need to have to be able to work on the moon? What sort of people would you not want on such an expedition? How do these traits match up with the people you read about in *Shackleton's Endurance*?
- Was it ethical to explore Antarctica when so many lives were put at risk and so many dogs and ponies died in the various voyages? Will it be ethical to explore space in the future?

Health and PE

'The Boss does not like talk of scurvy. It's as if the word itself is enough to conjure up the deadly menace that has stalked mariners and explorers for centuries.' (page 131)

- What is scurvy and how is it avoided?

'Now that their supply of flour is almost exhausted, improvisation has become a standard feature of their meals. Sustained by an increasingly meaty diet, their poor bodies cry out for any form of carbohydrate.' (page 126)

- Why are carbohydrates an important element in our diets and what happens when they are lacking?
- Make a list of the challenges faced by Shackleton and his men on the ice floe and after. Divide this list into physical and mental challenges. Which is the more difficult in your view: physical or mental?

About the author

Joanna Grochowicz is a polar historian and author. Fast-paced and exquisitely written, her novels of early exploration reveal in fascinating detail the human aspirations and tragedies that have shaped our understanding of the polar regions. Drawing on diaries, letters and expedition narratives from archives and personal collections around the world, Grochowicz brings to light new and often overlooked elements of the heroic age of exploration. Realistic portrayals of historical figures and the interplay of personalities lend her work a grittiness and authenticity that is not often present in historical writing for children and young adults.



In the author's own words

'Perhaps best known of all polar heroes, Ernest Shackleton is a man greatly admired by generations of armchair adventurers, leadership gurus and endurance athletes. But how many young readers know the full story of Shackleton's Trans-Antarctic Expedition, the terrifying adventure with the happiest of endings?

'In many ways, this should have been the first Antarctic tale I tackled as a writer – after all, it was the story that initially sparked my interest in exploration as an eight-year-old girl. I remember my father showing me Frank Hurley's dramatic photograph of Shackleton's ship beset in the ice, its mast and rigging like a dazzling white skeleton silhouetted against the polar night. It was like a ghost ship. What was it doing in the ice? And what of the crew? Whatever happened next? I wanted to find out!

'The story of *Endurance* is epic in every way, but Ernest Shackleton is a fascinating individual in his own right. Here is a leader who is able to simultaneously instil confidence, inspire camaraderie and command respect. Relentlessly positive with an optimism that is infectious, Shackleton is the sort of person you would want in your corner when facing a battle against the cruel Antarctic elements.

'A veteran of Captain Scott's 1902 *Discovery* expedition to Antarctica, Shackleton had already attempted to reach the South Pole during his 1908 *Nimrod* expedition before embarking on *Endurance* in 1914 for his third journey south. The explorer was for a time the holder of the 'furthest south' record, but showed incredible restraint and strength of character when he turned back with a mere two degrees of latitude to go. 'Better a live donkey than a dead lion' was his view!

'*Endurance* was his greatest fight and he did not lose a single man who accompanied him, although there were three deaths associated with the expedition among the men who made up the Ross Sea party. Returning to civilisation, Shackleton was never the same again. His all-consuming obsession with Antarctica and the stress of having so many men's lives dependent on his leadership had exacted a heavy toll on his physical and mental health.

'Strangely for a man so determined and capable, he never achieved a successful outcome from any of his ambitious schemes. This has not dampened people's enthusiasm for learning about him and his exploits. If anything, it makes him appear all the more human and compelling. Besides, he survived – surely that is the surest sign of success!'

– Joanna Grochowicz