

Reading Comprehension — The Voyage of the First Fleet

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The Voyage of the First Fleet

In May 1787, eleven small ships set sail from England on one of the longest and most dangerous voyages of their time. Their destination was the other side of the world: the land we now call Australia. This was the First Fleet.

On board were more than a thousand people. Many of them were convicts — prisoners who had been found guilty of crimes, often small ones such as stealing food. Instead of prison in Britain, they were being sent far away to build a new settlement. With them sailed sailors, soldiers, and a few families.

The journey was gruelling. For more than eight months, the ships crossed vast oceans, battered by storms and baking in the heat. Food ran low and turned stale, fresh water was precious, and disease spread in the cramped, dirty conditions below deck. Remarkably, most of the people on board survived.

In January 1788, the Fleet finally reached the shore at Sydney Cove. The commander, Captain Arthur Phillip, raised the British flag and the new colony began.

But this same arrival had a very different meaning for the Aboriginal peoples who had lived on the land for tens of thousands of years. For them, the ships marked the beginning of the loss of their land and a way of life. The story of the First Fleet, like much of history, looks very different depending on who is telling it.

Questions

1. In what year did the First Fleet set sail? (1 mark)
2. How many ships were there? (1 mark)
3. Who were many of the people on board? (1 mark)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 3 meaning "extremely hard or exhausting." (1 mark)
5. Give two reasons the voyage was so difficult. (2 marks)
6. What did Captain Arthur Phillip do when the Fleet arrived? (2 marks)
7. Why did the arrival mean something very different to Aboriginal peoples? (2 marks)
8. Summarise the voyage in order: who set out, the journey, and the arrival. (3 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. 1787.
2. Eleven.

3. Convicts (prisoners), along with sailors, soldiers and some families.

4. "gruelling."

5. Any two: storms; heat; food ran low/stale; precious fresh water; disease in cramped, dirty conditions.

6. He raised the British flag and the new colony began.

7. They had lived there for tens of thousands of years; the arrival began the loss of their land and way of life.

8. Who: over a thousand people, many convicts, plus sailors, soldiers and families. Journey: 8+ months across oceans, storms, heat, disease, but most survived. Arrival: reached Sydney Cove in 1788, flag raised, colony began.