

## The Boat

The boat had been floating on the water for years. Everyone said so. Joe's dad said that it had been there when he was a kid, and his granddad said the same. Nobody knew where it had come from or who owned it.

Lake Goodness was in the middle of a dark forest, down at the bottom of the hill that led out of the village. Joe and his friends spent most of the warm summer days climbing the stout boughs and splashing in the cool water. But nobody went near the boat. Nobody dared.

Every generation seemed to add something to the legend of the Miss Swanny, but when Joe's older brother told him the story, it chilled him to his core. Of course, he'd told his friends immediately, and they'd all spread the word. Their older brothers had told them the same thing - everyone knew the legend of the boat on Lake Goodness. People from the neighbouring villages knew about it too.

When a group of girls from the next village came to swim in the lake, they asked Joe and his friends if it was true. Joe nodded and swore on his own life that it was. The girls hadn't stuck around for long.

Even though he knew a terrible fate awaited him, there was something alluring about the small vessel. Perhaps it was the crisp white paint that never seemed to crack or peel or the tall single mast with the golden sail that fluttered in even the slightest breeze. Just looking at it, Joe could feel the crisp air blowing through his hair as he clipped across the undulating waves of the lake. Staring at it, he could almost sense the adventures that he would have if only he hopped on board and untied the rope.

It was attached to a wooden pier, maybe twenty feet long, and bordered with a rope fence. Every so often, a brave member of the group would venture across the slippery wooden planks - some of them even made it as far as the buoy that floated about three-quarters of



the way towards the boat. Nobody ever made it to the boat.

“I’m going to touch it,” Joe declared, suddenly disturbing his friends from their restful sunbathing. They’d come down to the sandy bank to play football and were taking a rest during the hottest part of the day. They looked at Joe and stared.

“No, you’re not,” said Henry. “You’re a wuss, just like the rest of us.”

“You can’t do it.” Calvin was Joe’s younger brother and believed in the legend more than anybody else. “Please don’t, Joe.”

“Guys, I’m fed up with being scared of a boat. It’s just a boat. There’s nothing to be afraid of. I’m not going to get on it. I’m just going to touch it.”

Before his friends could talk him out of it, Joe leapt to his feet and raced along the pier. He knew that if he ran, he would make it to the boat before he had the chance to talk himself out of it. But, as he approached it, it began to sing to him: a silent song that only he could hear. Suddenly, touching it wasn’t enough. He felt drawn to it, to board the boat and set sail.

As he drew closer, he knew that he was going to step aboard. There was no doubt in his mind. He wasn’t even nervous anymore, just excited. He heard his friends shout and scream as he leaned over the edge and placed his foot onto the deck of the boat, but they seemed distant, as though they were in another world.

Then, it happened. Suddenly, reality flooded back, and he realised that the legend was true. Suddenly, he realised his mistake.

## INFERENCE FOCUS

1. Write what you think the legend of the boat might be.
2. What do you think happened to Joe at the end of the story?

## VIPERS QUESTIONS

**R**

What is the name of the boat?

**R**

Who told Joe the legend of the boat?

**I**

What evidence is there that people believe the legend?

**V**

Find a phrase in the text that describes the stiff branches of the trees.

**V**

What does the word “undulating” tell you about the waves on the lake?