

Jerome K. Jerome

THREE MEN IN A BOAT



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Readers



Young Adult

Classic

Book brief

- 1 *Three Men in a Boat* published in 1889, is a funny story by English writer Jerome K. Jerome, which was an immediate success with the public and is still in print today.
- 2 It tells the story of three friends and their two-week boating holiday on the River Thames.
- 3 At first, the book was meant to be a serious travel guide talking about local history along the way. Instead, it's full of funny moments and is still fresh and modern today.
- 4 The three men are based on the writer Jerome himself, called J. in the book, and two real-life friends; George Wingrave and Carl Hentschel, called Harris in the story.
- 5 The men decide on a boat trip because they think that being surrounded by nature will help their health, but soon they understand that things can be difficult in the countryside too.

Jerome K. Jerome

Three Men in a Boat

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For Review Only

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Main Characters

Jerome

Harris is a big man and he eats a lot. He likes other people to do all the work.

Harris

This character is called J. in the book and he tells the story. He doesn't enjoy working but he likes telling others what to do.



George

George works in a bank
and he's always tired.
He likes sleeping a lot.

Vocabulary

- 1 In Chapter One J. and his friends talk about their health. Look up the words below in your dictionary and complete the text.**

tongue - throat - prescription - symptoms - make - pulse - illness

If you have a serious **1** you should ask the doctor to come to your home or go to the hospital. However if you aren't too sick you can go to the doctor's. He'll ask you to describe your **2** He may feel your **3** He may ask you to open your mouth and put your **4** out so he can look at your **5** When he has finished examining you, he'll write a **6** for some medicine. If you follow the doctor's instructions, the medicine should **7** you better.

- 2 Match the words with their definitions.**

- 1** ☐ disappointed
2 ☐ to beat
3 ☐ exhausted
4 ☐ pipe
5 ☐ rug

- a** very tired
b a thing you smoke, with a type of very little bowl at one end
c not pleased, sad
d a type of blanket, often used for a picnic
e to work, pulsate (heart)

- 3 How many words for parts of the body can you think of? Write them down. Then read pages 10-11 and see how many of your words you can find.**

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Grammar

4 Tick (✓) the correct sentence in each pair.

- 1 ☐ A We made a list but it was too long.
☐ B We made a list but it was long too.
- 2 ☐ A I didn't like the idea. George was against it too.
☐ B I didn't like the idea. Too George was against it.
- 3 ☐ A The man didn't eat because too he was sick.
☐ B The man didn't eat because he was too sick.
- 4 ☐ A We learnt our mistake when it was late too.
☐ B We learnt our mistake when it was too late.
- 5 ☐ A Harris thinks George sleeps too much.
☐ B Harris thinks George too much sleeps.

Speaking

21st Century Skills

5 The title of the book is *Three Men in a Boat*. What do you think will happen in the story? Tick (✓) one or more ideas. Discuss with a partner.

- 1 ☐ The story will be about a sea adventure.
- 2 ☐ Three friends will go on holiday.
- 3 ☐ The men will become lost.
- 4 ☐ The men will win a race.



Writing

6 Have you ever had an accident or been to hospital? Write a few sentences about the experience.

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How it Began



2 The four of us were in my room. George, Harris and I were sitting, discussing our health; Montmorency was lying on the floor.

Montmorency is J.'s dog. The story is sometimes called: *Three Men in a Boat (To Say Nothing of the Dog)*.

We all had some health problem or other. For me it was my liver*. I knew this because I had all the symptoms.

I don't often read about an illness without then finding I have the symptoms.

Once I went to the British Museum. I wanted to read about a health problem that I thought I had. Without thinking, I then started turning the pages. I read about various other illnesses. To my horror, I had them all: some only a little, some more seriously*. Now I wanted to know every illness I had. I turned back to the beginning of the book and read through in alphabetical order. There was only one I didn't have. At first I was a little disappointed that I didn't have that one too. Then I began to worry. How long did I have to live? I felt my pulse; it was very fast. Then I tried to check my heart but I couldn't find it. I felt my front, sides and back but I could find nothing. It clearly wasn't beating. I tried to examine my tongue and closed one eye to see it better. The result: I was now sure that I was seriously ill. I entered the museum happy and healthy; I left a sick man.

liver an organ of the body, situated on the right in the abdomen

seriously in a worse way

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I went to see my doctor who's a friend of mine. He gets a lot of practice, thanks to me.

'What's the matter this time, J.?' he asked.

'Nearly everything, my friend. Nearly everything,' I told him sadly*. 'I'm sure I don't have long to live.'

He examined me and looked in my ears, eyes and throat. Then he wrote a prescription. I put it in my pocket without looking at it and went straight to the chemist's. He looked at the prescription and gave it back to me. I was very surprised.

'I can't help you. I don't sell food and this isn't a hotel,' he said. I read the prescription: steak and beer every six hours, a long walk every morning, bed at 11 p.m. and the advice not to read things I didn't understand.

Returning to my liver problems, I had all the symptoms. And I had one more than the others: I didn't enjoy working. I've always had this condition*. When I was a child my parents and teachers didn't know I was ill; they thought I was lazy. They hit me around the head to cure* me. It's strange but it often worked. Doctors have learnt more over the years and we now know it's an illness.

We spent half an hour or more describing our health problems. I told George and Harris how I felt in the morning. Harris described how he felt when he went to bed. George decided to show us how he felt during the night. It was a very fine show. Personally* I don't think there's anything wrong with George; he imagines* it.

Then Mrs Poppets came in.

'Are you ready to eat?' she asked. We smiled sadly. We weren't very

sadly in a sad way
condition problem, illness
cure make better

personally in my opinion
imagine think that something is real

hungry but we knew we must try. We sat down at the table and did our best to eat something. After half an hour or more I lost interest in my food. I didn't want any cheese. Clearly I wasn't myself.

Afterwards, we filled our glasses, took out our pipes and returned to our talks.

'What we need is a rest,' said Harris.

'And a change,' added George. I agreed.

'What about going to a nice quiet place in the countryside?' I asked.

'A nice quiet place in the countryside? Boring!' Harris said. 'That's for old people!' He preferred the idea of a sea trip. I was against it. I remember my sister's husband went on a trip from London to Liverpool. When he arrived in Liverpool he immediately sold the return part of his ticket.

Then another fellow* I knew went on a trip for a week around the coast*. He paid for all his meals at the start. However, he was too sick to eat until the last day. No, the sea is fine for a month or more but not for a week. I was worried about George. Maybe he could be sick. George was against a sea trip too. Not for himself, of course. He was worried about Harris and me.

'I don't get seasick,' Harris said, 'and I don't understand people who do.'

'Let's go up the river,' George said. 'The fresh air and work will be good for us. We'll sleep well too.'

'Anything that makes you want to sleep more is a bad idea. It could be dangerous. There are only twenty-four hours in a day, after all. How can you possibly sleep more, George?' Harris said.

fellow man

coast the part of the land near the sea



Plans are made

However, Harris thought a river trip was a good idea and so did I. We were both surprised that the idea was George's. He doesn't normally* have good ideas. The only one who wasn't happy about it was Montmorency. But we were three against one and so it was agreed.

We took out a map and planned our trip. We decided to leave on the Saturday. Harris and I agreed to collect the boat in the morning and take it up the river to Chertsey to meet George. George works – or perhaps it's better to say sleeps – at the bank every day during the week from ten to four o'clock. On Saturdays he finishes at two o'clock.

Chertsey is a town about 29 km southwest of central London. It dates back to the 12th century and was one of the oldest market towns in England.

Next we discussed camping. George and I both thought camping an excellent idea. We could see the scene clearly. The moon is in the sky, the three of us are smoking our pipes and chatting after a pleasant meal. Afterwards we go to bed and sleep under the stars.

'What if it rains?' Harris asked. There's no poetry* in Harris. However, his question came at the right moment. Camping in the rain isn't nice.

It's raining hard; you're wet and there's water in the boat too. You find a place to camp. Two of you try to put up the tent but it's more difficult in the rain. The tent is heavier and the grass very wet. You finally put up your end. Then your friend pulls his end and the tent falls down. You shout at him and pull at the tent. He shouts too and pulls back. The third man then returns from the boat.

'What are you two fools* doing?' he asks. 'Come on, I'll help you.'

At last the tent is up. You have a wet supper: rainwater in everything. Your pipes are too wet to smoke. You go to bed, cold and

normally usually
poetry a form of writing where lines often rhyme

fool idiot, but the meaning is not so strong

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wet. During the night you dream an elephant is sitting on you. You wake up and know something is wrong. You hear your friends shout. The tent has fallen on you all. In the morning you all have a cold and are angry.

We decided to camp when the weather was good. When it was wet we planned to sleep in hotels or pubs. Now we only needed to decide what to take with us. However, Harris was bored. He wanted to stop for the night. George and I agreed.

The next evening we met again. Harris wanted to make a list. Then he told George and me to get a pen and paper and write everything down. He's always ready to offer to do a job when other people do all the work.

He's like my old Uncle Podger. When he did a job around the house all the family worked. For example, I remember one time when he put up a picture on the wall. Uncle Podger took off his jacket and gave it to his wife to hold. Then he started work. He sent everybody to get the things he needed. One of the boys went to get the hammer*. Another got a chair for Uncle Podger to stand on. The girl got a ruler and a pencil. Finally, with all the family watching, Uncle Podger climbed onto the chair.

'Pass me the picture, Tom!' he said. 'Be careful now!' He held the picture against the wall to decide the right place.

'Pass me the hammer, Arthur!' He took it, hit his finger and fell off the chair. Hours later the picture was on the wall (badly) and all the family were exhausted except Uncle Podger. He stood and looked happily at his work.

Yes, Harris will be exactly like him when he's older! We started to



make a list of things to take. It very quickly became too long. Then George said:

‘We’re doing this all wrong. We shouldn’t think about the things we’d like to take with us. We should think about the things we can’t leave at home.’

He was right, of course. And not only about our trip on the river. So many of us have too many things. All we really need are a few simple things and good friends.

‘We won’t take a tent,’ he said, ‘we can cover the boat. It’ll be easier and more comfortable too.’ It was a good idea and Harris and I agreed.

‘We’ll all need a rug. Then we should take a lamp, some soap, toothbrushes, a hairbrush and towels for swimming.’

People always make plans to swim when they go to the sea or go on the river. When I’m in London I like the idea of swimming in the sea before breakfast. I like it less when I’m actually there. My bed seems so warm and comfortable. I prefer to stay in it until breakfast time. However, I sometimes get up at six o’clock and go down to the beach. I’m always disappointed. It’s windy and cold and the sea is far away. When I finally get into the water it’s very cold. The sea pulls me out. I think I’m going to die and try hard to swim back. Then, when I’m sure it’s the end, my feet feel the bottom. The water is only two feet* deep! No, I think the idea of a morning swim is a lot nicer when you’re far away.

We talked about swimming on our trip.

‘There’s nothing better than waking up and jumping into the river for a swim,’ George said.

‘Yes. And you really enjoy breakfast afterwards,’ Harris added.

feet measurement, one foot is 30 cm

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‘I don’t think it’s possible for you to enjoy it more. You always eat a lot,’ said George.

‘But think George! It’s much better for us to have Harris clean and fresh. The cost of extra food is a small price to pay,’ I said. He thought for a moment and quickly agreed. In the end we decided to take three towels – one each.

We then started to discuss clothes.

‘Two suits each will be enough,’ George said. ‘We can wash them in the river.’

‘Have you ever washed your clothes in the river?’ we asked.

‘Not exactly,’ he said, ‘but I know some fellows who have done it. It’s not hard.’

Harris and I were fools: we believed him. We learned our mistake later, when it was too late.



Stop & Check

1 Answer the questions.

1 Who's J.'s doctor?

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2 Why couldn't the chemist help J.?

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3 Who brought their supper to them?

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4 Where did Harris want to go?

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5 Which day did they decide to leave?

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6 Where does George work?

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7 How many suits did they decide to take?

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Vocabulary

2 Which words go together? Match a verb with each noun.

1 ☐ put up

a a list

2 ☐ turn

b a trip

3 ☐ have

c advice

4 ☐ write

d a cold

5 ☐ make

e a page

6 ☐ go on

f an idea

7 ☐ have

g a prescription

8 ☐ give

h a tent

Writing **A2 KEY**

3 This is part of a note you receive from George.

*I don't remember our plans. Can you send me a note with all the details?
George*

Write a note to George. Write 25 words or more. Tell him:

- What day you're meeting
- What time you're meeting
- To bring something

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Pre-Reading Activity • Chapter Two

Speaking

4 Work with a partner. Ask and answer these questions.

- 1 What do you have for breakfast?
- 2 What's your favourite food?
- 3 What do you take with you when you go on holiday?
- 4 Who packs your suitcase?
- 5 Do you like travelling by train?

