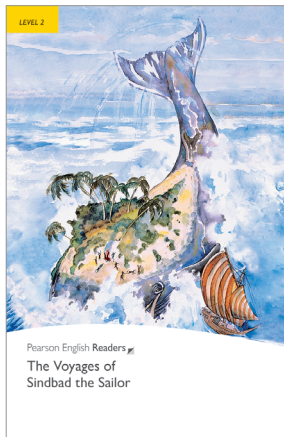


The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor

Retold by Pauline Francis



Summary

The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor contains the stories of seven voyages. All the stories, except the first and the last one, begin with Sindbad getting bored with life in Baghdad and deciding to go on a voyage. In all the stories but the last one, Sindbad makes his way to the south and the east from Basra, i.e. towards India, by trading goods. In all of the stories, something disastrous happens to end the voyage: either the ship is sunk or Sindbad is marooned on an island for some reason. In all the stories, the men he meets in adversity are kind to him and help him. In contrast, the half-men, giants and phantoms he encounters, such as the Old Man of the Sea, always seek to kill or enslave him. Most important of all for the continuation of the book, all the stories end happily with Sindbad returning to Basra and Baghdad a rich man and able to help the poor like any good Muslim. Each time he vows never to set foot on a ship again ... until the next time!

In the first voyage, Sindbad goes to sea in order to restore his fortune through trade after squandering the money his father had left him. When the ship arrives at what appears to be a beautiful island, Sindbad goes ashore only to discover that the 'island' is really a gigantic fish. The fish dives deep into the sea and the ship leaves without Sindbad. He is saved by climbing into a wooden box from the ship that he finds floating in the water. He is washed ashore on another island where, after hearing his story, the king asks him to help the merchants and sailors in his city. One day Sindbad's own ship arrives and he finds his goods are still on board, and so he is able to sell them and return to Baghdad a rich man.

In the second voyage, Sindbad sets sail again because he has become bored with his easy life in Baghdad. This time he is accidentally abandoned by his shipmates on a beautiful island. But soon he is attacked by a giant bird and finds himself in a valley surrounded by dangerous snakes. Then he notices that the valley floor is covered in diamonds! Sindbad uses some meat to attract the giant bird which flies down to carry the meat (and Sindbad with it) back to its nest. In this way, Sindbad is able to escape from the valley with many diamonds. He is rescued by merchants and then returns to Baghdad as a very rich man.

Sindbad sets off on his third voyage when he becomes bored again with life in Baghdad. Strong winds blow the ship to a strange island inhabited by yellow-eyed monkey-men. Sindbad and his fellow travellers hide in a big house but soon realise they are not safe when an enormous giant arrives and begins to eat the men one by one. They manage to escape by blinding the giant with red-hot wood. Once again Sindbad is able to return to Baghdad even richer than before.

On his fourth voyage, Sindbad and his shipmates are again shipwrecked. They are captured by cannibals who feed them a strange plant which makes them unable to think of anything but food. Sindbad realises the cannibals want to fatten the men so they can eat them so he avoids eating the plant. He is able to escape and is befriended by people who take him to their island. On the island he marries a beautiful woman, but when his wife dies the people of the island, according to their custom, drop him into a cavern with his dead wife. He finds many diamonds in the cavern and manages to escape by following an animal. Soon he is back in Baghdad, richer than ever.

Boredom once again drives Sindbad to make another voyage. This time he is shipwrecked when his ship is attacked by the giant birds because one of the merchants kills their chick. Sindbad is then enslaved by the Old Man of the Sea who rides on Sindbad's back and will not release him. He finally escapes after making the old man drunk and hitting him over the head with a big stone. Later he meets men who trade in coconuts. He learns how to gather coconuts and sells them at a very good price before returning once again to Baghdad.

On his sixth voyage, Sindbad travels to Serendip (Sri Lanka). His ship is drawn into a dark cave under a mountain. All his shipmates are killed, but Sindbad

The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor

manages to travel through the cave until he is found by the people of Serendip. He tells the story of his six voyages to the king of Serendip and is richly rewarded before sailing back to Baghdad.

On his seventh voyage, Sindbad returns to Serendip and the king gives him more beautiful things to take to Baghdad. On the journey home, his ship is attacked by pirates and Sindbad is sold to a merchant as a slave. The merchant teaches him to hunt elephants and says he will free him when he has collected the tusks of a five hundred elephants. One day an elephant leads Sindbad to the elephants' graveyard where the merchant can find thousands of tusks without having to kill the elephants. Sindbad is rewarded with many tusks, which he sells. With the money from the tusks he finds a ship bound for Basra.

Background and themes

It is thought that the Sindbad stories date from the 9th or 10th century. They form part of the compilation of eastern stories known as *The Arabian Nights*. For a thousand and one nights, the beautiful maiden Scheherazade tells stories to the King Sharyar in such a way as to capture his interest so that he will want to hear the tale continued the next evening. If she fails to keep the King interested in the stories, she will be executed in the morning.

In the Sindbad tales, the scene is set when a rich merchant (Sindbad) overhears a poor porter, who is also called Sindbad, complaining to Allah about the injustice suffered by the poor people in the world. In the tales, the rich Sindbad tells the poor Sindbad how he became rich through a series of seven incredible voyages.

In many ways, the Sindbad stories are typical of travellers' tales of ancient times. They contain references to real places and information about those places that only a true visitor could know. The stories provide real insights into history and foreign cultures, such as the observation that saddles for horses were not developed at the same time in every country. There are also descriptions of crafts and skills that Sindbad learns from the people he stays with. All the stories also contain descriptions of mercantilism. Indeed, Sindbad makes his way on these voyages by trading goods in the lands he visits.

And yet, the stories are peopled by impossible half-men/half-animals, giants and enormous birds. This is the 'here be dragons' element with which ancient cartographers

completed the outer edges of their maps. This comes from either exaggeration or from ignorance of the real fauna of exotic lands.

Sindbad himself may be a historical character. Some say he was not from Baghdad at all, but from Sohar on the north-eastern coast of Oman. However, it is more likely that the stories of his exploits come from Arab sailors of the period, with the fantastical additions provided by the writer or perhaps by the original story-teller himself. It is probably no coincidence that the Sindbad stories date from the golden age of Arab geography, when maps to the East were constructed from the tales of sailors who had actually been to India and China.

Discussion activities

Before reading

- Discuss:** Put students into small groups. Ask each student to think of an exotic place they have never been. Would they like to go there? Have them write down three reasons why they would/would not like to go to their chosen place. Then have the students discuss their choices.
- Pair work:** Put the students into pairs. Student A describes a journey he or she has made to Student B. Pre-teach vocabulary items so that the students can answer the following questions in their descriptions: *When did they travel? Where did they travel? How did they travel? Who did they meet during the journey? What did they do when they arrived there?* After this initial stage, ask one student to recount his partner's journey to the rest of the class, changing just one fact. Have the rest of the class try to guess which part of the story is untrue. Continue around the class for as long as the exercise holds the students' interest.

The First Voyage, pages 1–7

Before reading

- Guess:** Ask students to look at the picture on page 3. Working in small groups have them describe the picture and then try to guess what is going to happen. Write the student's suggestions up on the board.

After reading

- Check:** Students check to see if any of their predictions were correct.
- Pair work:** Ask the students to work in pairs and to think of a suitable title for the first story. Then elicit all the titles and have the students decide which one is the best.
- Read carefully:** Working individually, students write a short summary of the first voyage, using the title chosen in exercise 5.

The Voyages of Sindbad the Sailor

The Second Voyage, pages 7–13

Before reading

- 7 **Discuss:** Put the students into small groups to discuss the following question: *Why would a rich man like Sindbad want to set off on another voyage? What would you do if you were in Sindbad's position?*

After reading

- 8 **Role play:** Put the students into groups of three. Ask them to look at the picture on page 11 and to describe what is happening. Ask them to look at the merchants. How do they feel? Ask the students to imagine a conversation between the three merchants as they look at Sindbad covered in blood. Now ask them to play out the conversation in front of the class.

The Third Voyage, pages 13–19

Before reading

- 9 **Guess:** Ask students to describe the picture on page 16. Ask them to answer the following questions: *Who are the people in the picture? What are they doing? How do they feel?* Then ask them to predict what is going to happen next. Write the suggestions on the board.

After reading

- 10 **Research:** Sindbad escapes by building a shelter and then a boat from wood he finds floating in the sea. For homework, ask the students to use the Internet or other resources to find out about some real-life survival stories of victims of shipwrecks or plane crashes. Have the students present their findings orally to the whole class in a subsequent lesson.
- 11 **Write:** Working individually, have students write a short summary of a true survival story.

The Fourth Voyage, pages 20–25

Before reading

- 12 **Discuss:** Dictate or write the following statements on the board: *Sindbad is shipwrecked. Sindbad is captured by cannibals. Sindbad marries a rich and beautiful woman. Sindbad's wife dies and he is buried alive with her in a cavern. Sindbad is attacked by snakes. Sindbad finds gold in the cavern. Sindbad returns to Baghdad a rich man.* Have the students discuss whether the things described in each sentence are going to happen in the story.

After reading

- 13 **Check:** Students check their answers to question 12.
- 14 **Role play:** Put the students into pairs. Have them write a dialogue between Sindbad and the king when Sindbad's wife dies. Sindbad tries to convince the king not to bury him alive with his dead wife. The king is very sorry but explains why he cannot change the rules of his society.

- 15 **Discuss:** In the fourth voyage Sindbad discovers a number of surprising or even shocking cultural differences (such as a husband being buried alive with his dead wife). Ask the students to think of things in their own culture which they think visitors might be shocked or very surprised about.

- 16 **Write:** Students imagine that Sindbad is not buried alive with his wife. They write an alternative ending to the story and must find another reason why Sindbad returns to Baghdad a rich man.

The Fifth Voyage, pages 25–30

Before reading

- 17 **Role play:** Sindbad is talking to his friends in Baghdad before setting off on yet another voyage. He wants to go on another voyage, but his friends want him to stay in Baghdad. Put the students into small groups. One student in each group plays Sindbad. The others play Sindbad's friends.

After reading

- 18 **Discuss:** On page 29, Sindbad gets the old man drunk. He throws him to the ground and we can read 'He could not get up again'. Then Sindbad kills him by hitting him over the head with a big stone. *Was Sindbad right to kill the old man?*
- 19 **Read carefully:** Students re-read the story and think of a suitable title. Students vote on the best one.

The Sixth and Seventh Voyages, pages 30–38

After reading

- 20 **Pairwork:** Ask students to work in pairs and to think of a suitable title for each voyage. Each pair reports back to the whole class. Write the suggestions up on the board and ask the class to choose the best titles.
- 21 **Role play:** Ask students to work in pairs. Student A is Sindbad, student B is a person from Baghdad who does not believe Sindbad's stories of his last two voyages. Student A must try to convince student B that the stories are true.
- 22 **Discuss:** Working in small groups, students discuss the following question: *Is it right to kill animals for their fur or their tusks?*

After reading

- 23 **Discuss:** Put the students in small groups and have them discuss the following questions: *Which is your favourite Sindbad story? Why? Which is your least favourite Sindbad story? Why? In what ways are all seven voyages similar?*
- 24 **Write:** Working individually, students write a short summary of one of Sindbad's seven voyages.