

Stone Cold



Learning objective

- By the end of the lesson, you will have completed a reading assessment.
- L.O. To complete a reading assessment based on an extract from Stone Cold

Reading assessment 1

You will be given an extract from Robert Swindell's *Stone Cold*. The part of the novel describes the night that Link and Ginger spend on the canal boat owned by the man known to the homeless people as "Captain Hook"

You have to read the extract and answer the question using quotations where necessary. You will be assessed on how accurate and detailed your answers are.

Have you ever seen that famous diagram of a slave ship – slaves crammed like sardines into every square centimetre of space? Well, that's what it was like on the boat me and Ginger ended up on.

We'd parted with our six quid on the tow path, where Probyn had his office in one of those yellow plastic watchman shelters. He didn't look like Captain Hook. He was sitting on a folding canvas chair wearing wellies, a waxed jacket, a muffler, a knitted cap and gloves with the fingers cut out. He had a smooth, pink complexion and pale eyes and looked about thirty-five. When he smiled, as he did when he grabbed our dosh, he showed very small, very even white teeth. He stuffed the notes into a bulging wallet which he returned to an inside pocket. I was wondering why some guy hadn't mugged him for this when I heard a low growl and saw a Rottweiler the size of a horse gazing out from between his feet. Probyn showed his teeth again. 'Don't even think about it, kid,' he purred. He must've been a mind reader or something. Then he pointed to the nearest of his boats, moored for and aft to bollards on the bank. 'That one,' he said. 'Mind the gap'.

I've told you it looked like a slave ship. What I haven't said is that it stank like one too. You went through a through a narrow door and it hit you - the stench of too many damp, unwashed bodies, too much lingering flatulence. There were three steps down and then you were falling over sleepers, looking for a space in the poor light from a paraffin lamp which dangled unlawfully from the deckhead. We found a sliver of unoccupied floorspace and bedded down, drawing grunts and curses from those we kicked and elbowed in doing so.

One thing, though – it was certainly warm, and you weren't straining your ears all the time listening for potential assailants. The boat rocked very gently on the water, and once you stopped noticing the smell the whole thing was quite pleasant. It's amazing how resilient wooden planks feel after lying night after night on stone.

1. Link says 'He didn't look like Captain Hook'. Why do you think Probyn's nickname is Captain Hook?

2. Why doesn't anyone steal Probyn's money?

3. How do you know that the boat is full of people?

4. Look at the second paragraph where it says "Probyn showed his teeth again. 'Don't even think about it, kid,' he purred". What is the effect of the descriptive verb "purred"?

5. How does the author create a sense of Probyn being more interested in money than helping the homeless? You should comment on:

- *His physical description (the way he looks)*
- *The verbs used to describe his actions*
- *The conditions in the boat*