

THE TITANIC TUNNEL – COMPREHENSION EXERCISE



'It's Titanic – aren't you curious? No one alive today has seen it like that.'

Emmie & Jack are on a school trip with a difference. Visiting Belfast to see where Titanic was built, they step back to 1912 and discover the great ship itself. All too soon, they find out that the way home is blocked, and Jack gets dragged off to work by one of the crew. Who is the mysterious stranger lurking in the shadows, and can they solve his time riddle to escape from the doomed ship before it is too late...?

INITIAL QUESTIONS

- 1) Look at the front cover. What do you think this story is going to be about?

- 2) What makes you think that?

- 3) Read the blurb. What genre do you think this book might be? Consider: comedy, horror, romance, history, sci-fi...

- 4) Why have you chosen this genre?

- 5) From reading the blurb, what do you think will happen to Jack and Emmie? Explain why you think this.

EXTRACT FROM THE TITANIC TUNNEL – CHAPTER 2 © GLEN BLACKWELL

Finally making up her mind, Emmie stepped towards the tunnel entrance, pausing to look up at the elaborate stone arch she had noticed above it. It seemed out of place compared to the run-down buildings on either side - there was a bit of faded glamour in the architecture, and she was intrigued to find out what lay beyond. With Jack following her, she walked down the steps slowly - her hand stroking the rough texture of the brickwork.

'It smells quite bad, doesn't it?' said Emmie, as her eyes adjusted to the gloom. There was a damp, musty aroma in the air and she didn't imagine that anyone else had been through here in a long time. As they rounded a curve in the tunnel, and the daylight coming from behind them faded further, Emmie glanced at Jack. He was chewing his lip - a sure sign that he was anxious. She reached for his hand and gave it a gentle squeeze. 'Not scared, are you?' she teased, smiling as he as he screwed up his face at her in response. 'Anyway, it's getting lighter up ahead - we must be nearly there.'

They passed through an open doorway, then Emmie suddenly stumbled and reached out for the wall to steady herself. Jack stopped, then he too felt his legs almost give way and grabbed onto Emmie. 'What's happening?' he stammered, 'I don't like this...'

'It's like the floor just moved,' answered Emmie. They looked at each other in the semi-darkness - there was a definite swaying sensation as they stood together in the damp space. 'It must just be because it's so gloomy down here - tricking our balance maybe,' Emmie wondered aloud. She felt a sudden wave of nausea in her stomach, taking her mind back to the ferry crossing earlier. 'Just give me a moment?' she said, still leaning against the wall for support.

The sick feeling eased, and they carried on - curiosity getting the better of them. As they reached the source of the light, the pair noticed that it was shining around a heavy looking wooden door which stood ajar. Jack reached for the handle, intending to pull it open.

'Wait a minute,' whispered Emmie, placing a finger to her lips and stepping forward. She peered around the door, then stepped back in surprise, her mouth wide open.

'What is it?' Jack whispered back, craning his head for a look. Emmie was still staring through the gap as Jack leaned around her and studied the scene beyond. 'What is that...?' he managed, almost as speechless as his friend.

As she tried to recover herself, Emmie stepped forward again and stared. What lay past the door was a large, elaborate space, with a grand wooden staircase in the centre. Sweeping balustrades and ornately carved decoration curved upwards, and there was a constant stream of smartly dressed people ascending and descending. A perfumed aroma wafted through the door, contrasting with the damp smell in the tunnel.

Emmie recoiled in horror as a lady in a purple dress and matching hat passed closely by and seemed to make eye contact with her, bumping into Jack in the process.

'Careful!' he said, almost forgetting that they were trying to be quiet.

'Sorry,' she replied, 'I'm sure that woman saw us peeking though.'

There was a general burble of conversation from the other side of the door, as people made their way past. Some of the voices were more constant though, as if their owners were right outside.

'Did you see Queenstown this morning?' enquired one voice, close enough that they almost felt the speaker must be next to them. 'That's the last piece of land this side of the Atlantic.' There was a muffled answer which sounded negative, and then the first voice spoke again - 'I heard we took on another hundred or so passengers - steerage mostly, so they won't be bothering us.'

The second person replied more clearly this time - 'Going to America in the hope of a better life, I suppose. I noticed us drop anchor for a few hours and wondered why - it looked like we were still at sea though.'

'The berth is a couple of miles offshore - I heard one of the crew mention it. You could see the passengers coming aboard bobbing about in little boats on the way over.'

'Rather them than me - I'm much happier in a liner than a little boat.'

Jack looked at Emmie - 'Queenstown?' he said, 'where's that?' They had both studied Titanic extensively over the past few weeks, but Jack hadn't recalled that detail.

'Southern Ireland, I think,' Emmie replied, 'I'm pretty sure I read it was the last passenger stop.' She thought again for a moment - 'It was renamed in the 1920's, so isn't on any of today's maps - that's probably why you didn't recognise it.'

'Who are they, and what are they doing down here?' Jack asked after a pause. The size of the space beyond the door seemed much bigger than they imagined a cellar could be - it didn't really make any sense. Another second or two passed, and then an uncomfortable thought hit him - 'Is that...? No, it can't be...'

'Surely it hasn't happened again...' Emmie said slowly in reply. She peered around the door for another look - this time braving a gentle tug to widen the gap slightly. The door silently obliged, opening up a further sliver of the view beyond. Standing to the left of the staircase were groups of tables and chairs, set out in a café style, and halfway up the stairs was a large wooden carving which housed an elaborate clock. Emmie stared at it and could just make out the immortal words - RMS Titanic - stencilled on the clock face. She stepped back again and nodded slowly at Jack.

'Let's get out of here,' he tugged her arm desperately; his enthusiasm having evaporated. Jack had been the more despondent of the friends when they had found themselves stranded in the Blitz, and he wasn't about to risk not getting home again. It still seemed unbelievable that people could travel back in time, but there wasn't a better explanation for what was happening to them.

Emmie found herself walking quickly back along the tunnel behind Jack - her mind in turmoil. 'Hold on a minute,' she hissed as they rounded the corner and could see the entrance once more. 'It's Titanic - aren't you curious? No one alive today has seen it like that.'

'No.' The reply was immediate. Jack's head was down, but he had stopped and then slowly turned back to face her. His lip was quivering, and Emmie could see that he was really scared at the prospect of the unknown - yet something was drawing her back along the tunnel just as strongly as the busker's music had prompted her to investigate in the first place.

'Just another quick peek?' begged Emmie, looking Jack right in the eye. 'We'll never get this chance again - you know that. We'll just have a quick look and then come straight back.'

Jack looked away - 'What if we get stuck again?'

'It's just an open door,' came the reply. 'Once we've explored, we can turn around and come back through it.'

Screwing his eyes up, Jack nodded, and Emmie gave him a big grin. 'Come on,' she said, linking arms with him and starting back towards the door, 'it's going to be amazing!'

SLAM! The sudden noise behind them made the pair jump, echoing in the enclosed space. 'What was that?!' cried Jack, turning in the direction of the sound.

VOCABULARY

- 1) Use a dictionary to help you find the meaning of these words:

Word	What does it mean?	Use it in a sentence
Elaborate		
Sensation		
Extensively		
Despondent		
Enclosed		

- 2) For each of the sentences below, suggest an alternative to the word in bold:

'It smells quite bad, doesn't it?' said Emmie, as her eyes adjusted to the **gloom**.

She peered around the door, then stepped back in **surprise**, her mouth wide open.

Emmie **recoiled** in horror as a lady in a purple dress and matching hat passed closely by and seemed to make eye contact with her, bumping into Jack in the process.

They had both studied Titanic **extensively** over the past few weeks, but Jack hadn't recalled that detail.

'Let's get out of here,' he tugged her arm desperately; his enthusiasm having **evaporated**.

TEXT QUESTIONS

- 1) Who was more interested in exploring the tunnel – Jack or Emmie? Why?

- 2) Why do you think the floor felt like it was swaying?

- 3) When Emmie first looked through the doorway into the room with the staircase, what do you think she thought? Why? Do you think she thought what she could see was real?

- 4) Why did Jack walk back up the tunnel? What was he concerned about?

- 5) How do you think Emmie felt when the door slammed after she had convinced Jack to come back again? How would you feel in the same situation?

CREATIVE WRITING

Carry on the story – explaining what might happen next after the door has slammed behind Jack and Emmie. Try to write at least a side of paper or a whole page in your exercise book.

You might like to consider how Jack and Emmie feel, as well as what they actually do. Might they meet some other characters?

There is some space below to plan what you are going to write:
