

Excerpt 1 from Coral Island by R.M. Ballantyne - All groups

Ralph, Peter and Jack had been washed ashore on Coral Island after their sail ship, The Arrow, smashed against a coral reef in a great storm. The Arrow had sunk without trace and the three friends were the only survivors. Several months later, they were still stranded on the island.

Jack and I were searching for shellfish in the rock pools, and Peter was sunning himself on the rocks. Since being attacked by sharks, Peter was terrified of water. He kept out of the sea as much as he could and refused to dive.

Suddenly, we heard him shout, "A sail!" He was pointing excitedly. At first, we thought he was playing one of his games but this morning, he was not joking.

"Come on Ralph!" Jack cried, and the two of us raced up the rocks to get a better view. On the horizon, a dark smudge was moving rapidly towards us. "Is it a sail or a cloud?" Jack wondered. We had often seen storms blow up suddenly from distant clouds.

"It is a sail!" I exclaimed, and we danced together on the rocks, soon joined by the excited Peter.

I'm sure the thought of home filled all our minds as we watched the vessel sail towards us.

"Wave so they see us!" cried Jack, and we waved and shouted, sure of our rescue at last. To our delight, we saw the crew beginning to lower a rowing boat as if they meant to land. Then a little cloud of white smoke rose from the ship's side.

Before we could begin to guess the meaning of this smoke, a cannon-shot came crashing through the bushes, carrying away several trees. It was then that we spotted the flag on the ship's main mast. With feelings of terror, we saw that it was black, with a Death's head and cross bones upon it: the skull and cross bones.

"Pirates!" we gasped together.

"Come on," Jack said urgently. "We must hide. If they capture us, we'll be forced to walk the plank."

Jack was our leader, and we followed him without argument. Behind us, the rowing boat had reached the shore. The crew leapt overboard and rushed across the white sands in pursuit. There were five of them, and they fired shots after us, their bullets thudding into the tall coconut trees.