Dear NFHS Students,

Please read the texts enclosed and complete the questions on a separate piece of paper in complete sentences.

Take your time—work at your own pace--you have three weeks to complete the assignments.

We hope that you and your families are doing well, and we look forward to seeing you soon!

Be safe!

Your 10th Grade English Teachers

COMMONLIT

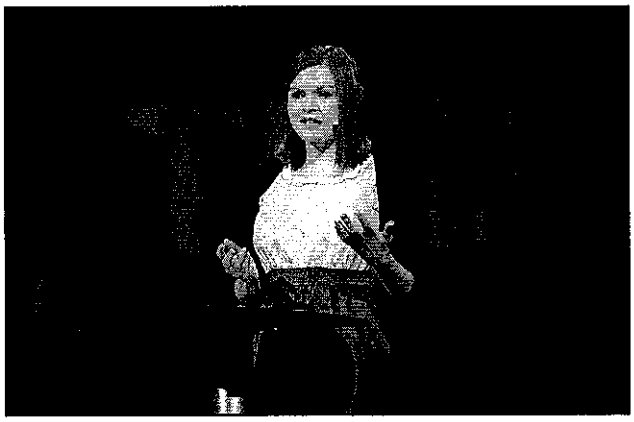
Name: _____ Class: _____

What Fear Can Teach Us

By Karen Thompson Walker
2013

Karen Thompson Walker is an American writer and the author of The Age of Miracles. *In this TED Talk, Walker discusses the connection between stories and fear and explains how fear influences the decisions we make. Walker uses the experiences of the sailors on the whaleship* Essex *to further explore the effects of fear on decision-making. As you read, take notes on the positive and negative effects of listening to fears.*

[1] One day in 1819, 3,000 miles off the coast of Chile, in one of the most remote regions of the Pacific Ocean, 20 American sailors watched their ship flood with seawater. They'd been struck by a sperm whale, which had ripped a catastrophic hole in the ship's hull.[1] As their ship began to sink beneath the swells,[2] the men huddled together in three small whaleboats. These men were 10,000 miles from home, more than 1,000 miles from the nearest scrap of land. In their small boats, they carried only rudimentary[3] navigational equipment and limited supplies of food and water. These were the men of the whaleship *Essex*, whose story would later inspire parts of *Moby Dick*.



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Even in today's world, their situation would be really dire,[4] but think about how much worse it would have been then. No one on land had any idea that anything had gone wrong. No search party was coming to look for these men. So most of us have never experienced a situation as frightening as the one in which these sailors found themselves, but we all know what it's like to be afraid. We know how fear feels, but I'm not sure we spend enough time thinking about what our fears mean.

As we grow up, we're often encouraged to think of fear as a weakness, just another childish thing to discard like baby teeth or roller skates. And I think it's no accident that we think this way. Neuroscientists[5] have actually shown that human beings are hard-wired to be optimists.[6] So maybe that's why we think of fear, sometimes, as a danger in and of itself. "Don't worry," we like to say to one another. "Don't panic." In English, fear is something we conquer. It's something we fight. It's something we overcome. But what if we looked at fear in a fresh way? What if we thought of fear as an amazing act of the imagination, something that can be as profound[7] and insightful as storytelling itself?

1. the water-tight body of a ship or boat
2. a slow, regular movement of the sea in rolling waves that do not break
3. **Rudimentary** *(adjective):* basic, not very advanced
4. **Dire** *(adjective):* extremely serious or urgent
5. a person who studies the development and function of the nervous system, which includes the brain, the spinal cord, and nerves throughout the body
6. **Optimist** *(noun):* someone who is hopeful and confident about the future
7. **Profound** *(adjective):* having or revealing great knowledge

It's easiest to see this link between fear and the imagination in young children, whose fears are often extraordinarily vivid. When I was a child, I lived in California, which is, you know, mostly a very nice place to live, but for me as a child, California could also be a little scary. I remember how frightening it was to see the chandelier that hung above our dining table swing back and forth during every minor earthquake, and I sometimes couldn't sleep at night, terrified that the Big One might strike while we were sleeping. And what we say about kids who have fears like that is that they have a vivid imagination. But at a certain point, most of us learn to leave these kinds of visions behind and grow up. We learn that there are no monsters hiding under the bed, and not every earthquake brings buildings down. But maybe it's no coincidence that some of our most creative minds fail to leave these kinds of fears behind as adults. The same incredible imaginations that produced *The Origin of Species*, *Jane Eyre* and *The Remembrance of Things Past*, also generated intense worries that haunted the adult lives of Charles Darwin, Charlotte Brontë and Marcel Proust. So the question is, what can the rest of us learn about fear from visionaries[8] and young children?

[5] Well let's return to the year 1819 for a moment, to the situation facing the crew of the whaleship *Essex*. Let's take a look at the fears that their imaginations were generating as they drifted in the middle of the Pacific. 24 hours had now passed since the capsizing[9] of the ship. The time had come for the men to make a plan, but they had very few options. In his fascinating account of the disaster, Nathaniel Philbrick wrote that these men were just about as far from land as it was possible to be anywhere on Earth. The men knew that the nearest islands they could reach were the Marquesas Islands, 1,200 miles away. But they'd heard some frightening rumors. They'd been told that these islands, and several others nearby, were populated by cannibals. So the men pictured coming ashore only to be murdered and eaten for dinner. Another possible destination was Hawaii, but given the season, the captain was afraid they'd be struck by severe storms. Now the last option was the longest, and the most difficult: to sail 1,500 miles due south in hopes of reaching a certain band of winds that could eventually push them toward the coast of South America. But they knew that the sheer length of this journey would stretch their supplies of food and water. To be eaten by cannibals, to be battered by storms, to starve to death before reaching land. These were the fears that danced in the imaginations of these poor men, and as it turned out, the fear they chose to listen to would govern whether they lived or died.

Now we might just as easily call these fears by a different name. What if instead of calling them fears, we called them stories? Because that's really what fear is, if you think about it. It's a kind of unintentional storytelling that we are all born knowing how to do. And fears and storytelling have the same components. They have the same architecture. Like all stories, fears have characters. In our fears, the characters are us. Fears also have plots. They have beginnings and middles and ends. You board the plane. The plane takes off. The engine fails. Our fears also tend to contain imagery that can be every bit as vivid as what you might find in the pages of a novel. Picture a cannibal, human teeth sinking into human skin, human flesh roasting over a fire. Fears also have suspense. If I've done my job as a storyteller today, you should be wondering what happened to the men of the whaleship *Essex*. Our fears provoke in us a very similar form of suspense. Just like all great stories, our fears focus our attention on a question that is as important in life as it is in literature: What will happen next? In other words, our fears make us think about the future. And humans, by the way, are the only creatures capable of thinking about the future in this way, of projecting ourselves forward in time, and this mental time travel is just one more thing that fears have in common with storytelling.

8. **Visionary** *(noun)*: someone who has unusual foresight and imagination
9. to overturn in the water

As a writer, I can tell you that a big part of writing fiction is learning to predict how one event in a story will affect all the other events, and fear works in that same way. In fear, just like in fiction, one thing always leads to another. When I was writing my first novel, *The Age Of Miracles*,[10] I spent months trying to figure out what would happen if the rotation of the Earth suddenly began to slow down. What would happen to our days? What would happen to our crops? What would happen to our minds? And then it was only later that I realized how very similar these questions were to the ones I used to ask myself as a child frightened in the night. If an earthquake strikes tonight, I used to worry, what will happen to our house? What will happen to my family? And the answer to those questions always took the form of a story. So if we think of our fears as more than just fears but as stories, we should think of ourselves as the authors of those stories. But just as importantly, we need to think of ourselves as the readers of our fears, and how we choose to read our fears can have a profound effect on our lives.

Now, some of us naturally read our fears more closely than others. I read about a study recently of successful entrepreneurs,[11] and the author found that these people shared a habit that he called "productive paranoia," which meant that these people, instead of dismissing their fears, these people read them closely, they studied them, and then they translated that fear into preparation and action. So that way, if their worst fears came true, their businesses were ready.

And sometimes, of course, our worst fears do come true. That's one of the things that is so extraordinary about fear. Once in a while, our fears can predict the future. But we can't possibly prepare for all of the fears that our imaginations concoct. So how can we tell the difference between the fears worth listening to and all the others? I think the end of the story of the whaleship *Essex* offers an illuminating, if tragic, example. After much deliberation, the men finally made a decision. Terrified of cannibals, they decided to forgo the closest islands and instead embarked on the longer and much more difficult route to South America. After more than two months at sea, the men ran out of food as they knew they might, and they were still quite far from land. When the last of the survivors were finally picked up by two passing ships, less than half of the men were left alive, and some of them had resorted to their own form of cannibalism. Herman Melville, who used this story as research for *Moby Dick*, wrote years later, and from dry land, quote, "All the sufferings of these miserable men of the *Essex* might in all human probability have been avoided had they, immediately after leaving the wreck, steered straight for Tahiti. But," as Melville put it, "they dreaded cannibals."

[10] So the question is, why did these men dread cannibals so much more than the extreme likelihood of starvation? Why were they swayed by one story so much more than the other? Looked at from this angle, theirs becomes a story about reading. The novelist Vladimir Nabokov said that the best reader has a combination of two very different temperaments,[12] the artistic and the scientific. A good reader has an artist's passion, a willingness to get caught up in the story, but just as importantly, the readers also needs the coolness of judgment of a scientist, which acts to temper and complicate the reader's intuitive reactions to the story. As we've seen, the men of the *Essex* had no trouble with the artistic part. They dreamed up a variety of horrifying scenarios. The problem was that they listened to the wrong story. Of all the narratives their fears wrote, they responded only to the most lurid,[13] the most vivid, the one that was easiest for their imaginations to picture: cannibals. But perhaps if they'd been able to read their fears more like a scientist, with more coolness of judgment, they would have listened instead to the less violent but the more likely tale, the story of starvation, and headed for Tahiti, just as Melville's sad commentary suggests.

10. Karen Thompson Walker's first novel
11. a person who organizes and operates a business
12. **Temperament** *(noun):* a person's characteristic attitude, mood, or behavior
13. **Lurid** *(adjective):* causing horror or disgust

And maybe if we all tried to read our fears, we too would be less often swayed by the most salacious among them. Maybe then we'd spend less time worrying about serial killers and plane crashes, and more time concerned with the subtler and slower disasters we face: the silent buildup of plaque in our arteries, the gradual changes in our climate. Just as the most nuanced[14] stories in literature are often the richest, so too might our subtlest fears be the truest. Read in the right way, our fears are an amazing gift of the imagination, a kind of everyday clairvoyance,[15] a way of glimpsing what might be the future when there's still time to influence how that future will play out. Properly read, our fears can offer us something as precious as our favorite works of literature: a little wisdom, a bit of insight and a version of that most elusive[16] thing — the truth. Thank you. (*Applause*)

14. containing many small and subtle details
15. the ability to see or know about things outside of the range of ordinary observation, such as predict future events
16. **Elusive** ***(adjective):*** difficult to find, catch, or achieve

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following best identifies a central idea of the text?
   A. While stories are usually based on fiction, fears are based on facts and allow us to adequately prepare for threatening situations.
   B. Fears operate through the imagination much like storytelling does, and we can learn from our fears just as we can learn from stories.
   C. Because the human mind is naturally attracted to dramatic narratives, the most elaborate fears usually draw the most attention.
   D. Basing decisions off of a fear or a story can have disastrous consequences for ourselves and others, as neither are based on fact.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?
   A. "at a certain point, most of us learn to leave these kinds of visions behind and grow up. We learn that there are no monsters hiding under the bed, and not every earthquake brings buildings down." (Paragraph 4)
   B. "just as importantly, we need to think of ourselves as the readers of our fears, and how we choose to read our fears can have a profound effect on our lives." (Paragraph 7)
   C. "Terrified of cannibals, they decided to forgo the closest islands and instead embarked on the longer and much more difficult route to South America." (Paragraph 9)
   D. "Maybe then we'd spend less time worrying about serial killers and plane crashes, and more time concerned with the subtler and slower disasters we face" (Paragraph 11)

3. PART A: Which of the following statements best describes how fear impacted the Essex sailors' decision to sail south, according to the text?
   A. The fear of death led the sailors to choose the option that they believed would offer the highest chance of survival.
   B. The sailors' fear of cannibalism overshadowed their sound judgment, so they refused to sail to nearby islands.
   C. The sailors decided to sail south because that was the only option that did not arouse any fear.
   D. The sailors invented stories instead of analyzing their situation, and they chose to sail south because that was the best story.

4. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A?

   A. "The time had come for the men to make a plan, but they had very few options... these men were just about as far from land as it was possible to be anywhere on Earth." (Paragraph 5)

   B. "To be eaten by cannibals, to be battered by storms, to starve to death before reaching land. These were the fears that danced in the imaginations of these poor men" (Paragraph 5)

   C. "When the last of the survivors were finally picked up by two passing ships, less than half of the men were left alive, and some of them had resorted to their own form of cannibalism." (Paragraph 9)

   D. "perhaps if they'd been able to read their fears more like a scientist, with more coolness of judgment, they would have listened instead to the less violent but the more likely tale, the story of starvation" (Paragraph 10)

5. How does paragraph 3 contribute to the author's argument?

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. In what ways do our fears prepare or fail to prepare us for future events? How much do you agree with Walker's argument about the effects and the value of fear? When might fear negatively impact a person's decisions?

2. When have you feared something that was unlikely to happen? How did it influence your actions? How does it feel now to look back on the fear you experienced?

3. In the context of the speech, how does fear drive action? How are people influenced by fear when making important decisions? What types of fears are they more likely to listen to? Cite evidence from this text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.

"The Pedestrian" (1951)
by Ray Bradbury

To enter out into that silence that was the city at eight o'clock of a misty evening in November, to put your feet upon that buckling concrete walk, to step over grassy seams and make your way, hands in pockets, through the silences, that was what Mr. Leonard Mead most dearly loved to do. He would stand upon the corner of an intersection and peer down long moonlit avenues of sidewalk in four directions, deciding which way to go, but it really made no difference; he was alone in this world of A.D. 2053, or as good as alone, and with a final decision made, a path selected, he would stride off, sending patterns of frosty air before him like the smoke of a cigar.

Sometimes he would walk for hours and miles and return only at midnight to his house. And on his way he would see the cottages and homes with their dark windows, and it was not unequal to walking through a graveyard where only the faintest glimmers of firefly light appeared in flickers behind the windows. Sudden gray phantoms seemed to manifest upon inner room walls where a curtain was still undrawn against the night, or there were whisperings and murmurs where a window in a tomb-like building was still open.

Mr. Leonard Mead would pause, cock his head, listen, look, and march on, his feet making no noise on the lumpy walk. For long ago he had wisely changed to sneakers when strolling at night, because the dogs in intermittent squads would parallel his journey with barkings if he wore hard heels, and lights might click on and faces appear and an entire street be startled by the passing of a lone figure, himself, in the early November evening.

On this particular evening he began his journey in a westerly direction, toward the hidden sea. There was a good crystal frost in the air; it cut the nose and made the lungs blaze like a Christmas tree inside; you could feel the cold light going on and off, all the branches filled with invisible snow. He listened to the faint push of his soft shoes through autumn leaves with satisfaction, and whistled a cold quiet whistle between his teeth, occasionally picking up a leaf as he passed, examining its skeletal pattern in the infrequent lamplights as he went on, smelling its rusty smell.

"Hello, in there," he whispered to every house on every side as he moved. "What's up tonight on Channel 4, Channel 7, Channel 9? Where are the cowboys rushing, and do I see the United States Cavalry over the next hill to the rescue?"

The street was silent and long and empty, with only his shadow moving like the shadow of a hawk in midcountry. If he closed his eyes and stood very still, frozen, he could imagine himself upon the center of a plain, a wintry, windless Arizona desert with no house in a thousand miles, and only dry river beds, the streets, for company.

"What is it now?" he asked the houses, noticing his wrist watch. "Eight-thirty P.M.? Time for a dozen assorted murders? A quiz? A revue? A comedian falling off the stage?"

Was that a murmur of laughter from within a moon-white house? He hesitated, but went on when nothing more happened. He stumbled over a particularly uneven section of sidewalk. The cement was vanishing under flowers and grass. In ten years of walking by night or day, for thousands of miles, he had never met another person walking, not once in all that time.

He came to a cloverleaf intersection which stood silent where two main highways crossed the town. During the day it was a thunderous surge of cars, the gas stations open, a great insect rustling and a ceaseless jockeying for position as the scarab-beetles, a faint incense puttering from their exhausts, skimmed homeward to the far directions. But now these highways, too, were like streams in a dry season, all stone and bed and moon radiance.

He turned back on a side street, circling around toward his home. He was within a block of his destination when the lone car turned a corner quite suddenly and flashed a fierce white cone of light upon him. He stood entranced, not unlike a night moth, stunned by the illumination, and then drawn toward it.

A metallic voice called to him:

"Stand still. Stay where you are! Don't move!"

He halted.

"Put up your hands!"

"But-" he said.

"Your hands up! Or we'll Shoot!"

The police, of course, but what a rare, incredible thing; in a city of three million, there was only one police car left, wasn't that correct? Ever since a year ago, 2052, the election year, the force had been cut down from three cars to one. Crime was ebbing; there was no need now for the police, save for this one lone car wandering and wandering the empty streets.

"Your name?" said the police car in a metallic whisper. He couldn't see the men in it for the bright light in his eyes.

"Leonard Mead," he said.

"Speak up!"

"Leonard Mead!"

"Business or profession?"

"I guess you'd call me a writer."

"No profession," said the police car, as if

"The Pedestrian" (1951)
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talking to itself. The light held him fixed, like a museum specimen, needle thrust through chest.

"You might say that, " said Mr. Mead. He hadn't written in years. Magazines and books didn't sell any more. Everything went on in the tomblike houses at night now, he thought, continuing his fancy. The tombs, ill-lit by television light, where the people sat like the dead, the gray or multicolored lights touching their faces, but never really touching them.

"No profession," said the phonograph voice, hissing. "What are you doing out?"

"Walking," said Leonard Mead.

"Walking!"

"Just walking," he said simply, but his face felt cold.

"Walking, just walking, walking?"

"Yes, sir."

"Walking where? For what?"

"Walking for air. Walking to see."

"Your address!"

"Eleven South Saint James Street."

"And there is air in your house, you have an air conditioner, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"And you have a viewing screen in your house to see with?"

"No."

"No?" There was a crackling quiet that in itself was an accusation.

"Are you married, Mr. Mead?"

"No."

"Not married," said the police voice behind the fiery beam, The moon was high and clear among the stars and the houses were gray and silent.

"Nobody wanted me," said Leonard Mead with a smile.

"Don't speak unless you're spoken to!"

Leonard Mead waited in the cold night.

"Just walking, Mr. Mead?"

"Yes."

"But you haven't explained for what purpose."

"I explained; for air, and to see, and just to walk."

"Have you done this often?"

"Every night for years."

The police car sat in the center of the street with its radio throat faintly humming.

"Well, Mr. Mead," it said.

"Is that all?" he asked politely.

"Yes," said the voice. "Here." There was a sigh, a pop. The back door of the police car sprang wide. "Get in."

"Wait a minute, I haven't done anything!"

"Get in."

"I protest!"

"Mr. Mead."

He walked like a man suddenly drunk. As he passed the front window of the car he looked in. As he had expected, there was no one in the front seat, no one in the car at all.

"Get in."

He put his hand to the door and peered into the back seat, which was a little cell, a little black jail with bars. It smelled of riveted steel. It smelled of harsh antiseptic; it smelled too clean and hard and metallic. There was nothing soft there.

"Now if you had a wife to give you an alibi," said the iron voice. "But-"

"Where are you taking me?"

The car hesitated, or rather gave a faint whirring click, as if information, somewhere, was dropping card by punch-slotted card under electric eyes. "To the Psychiatric Center for Research on Regressive Tendencies."

He got in. The door shut with a soft thud. The police car rolled through the night avenues, flashing its dim lights ahead.

They passed one house on one street a moment later, one house in an entire city of houses that were dark, but this one particular house had all of its electric lights brightly lit, every window a loud yellow illumination, square and warm in the cool darkness.

"That's my house," said Leonard Mead.

No one answered him.

The car moved down the empty river-bed streets and off away, leaving the empty streets with the empty side-walks, and no sound and no motion all the rest of the chill November night.

Bradbury, Ray (1920-), is an American author best known for his fantasy stories and science fiction. Bradbury's best writing effectively combines a lively imagination with a poetic style.

Collections of Bradbury's stories include The Martian Chronicles (1950), The Illustrated Man (1951), The October Country (1955), I Sing the Body Electric! (1969), Quicker Than the Eye (1996), and One More for the Road (2002). His novel Fahrenheit 451 (1953) describes a society that bans the ownership of books. His other novels include Dandelion Wine (1957), a poetic story of a boy's summer in an Illinois town in 1928; and Something Wicked This Way Comes (1962), a suspenseful fantasy about a black magic carnival that comes to a small Midwestern town. He has also written poetry, screenplays, and stage plays.