 Spoken Language

Discuss with a trusted partner:

- How would you cope if stranded on a desert island?
- What would you do in order to survive?
- What would be the risks and dangers?
- What would you miss most from home?
- Would you prefer a tropical desert island or somewhere cold? Why?

Reading

The Coral Island by R M Ballantyne

One of the first novels about teenagers and also for teenagers, 'The Coral Island' was published in 1858. It is the story of three boys, Ralph, Jack and Peterkin, who are shipwrecked on an island in the Pacific Ocean. Ralph is the narrator of the story. In this extract, the three boys begin to recover from the shipwreck and consider what resources they have with them on the island. As you read the extract, make notes on the way the writer shows the characters as isolated.

We now seated ourselves upon a rock and began to examine into our personal property. When we reached the shore, after being wrecked, my companions had taken off part of their clothes and spread them out in the sun to dry, for, although the gale was raging fiercely, there was not a single cloud in the bright sky. They had also stripped off most part of my wet clothes and spread them also on the rocks. Having resumed our garments, we now searched all our pockets with the utmost care, and laid their contents out on a flat stone before us; and, now that our minds were fully alive to our condition, it was with no little anxiety that we turned our several pockets inside out, in order that nothing might escape us.

When all was collected together we found that our worldly goods consisted of the following articles: first, a small penknife with a single blade broken off about the middle and very rusty, besides having two or three notches on its edge (Peterkin said of this, with his usual pleasantry, that it would do for a saw as well as a knife, which was a great advantage.); second, An old German-silver pencil-case without any lead in it; third, a piece of whip-cord about six yards long; fourth, a sail maker's needle of a small size; fifth, a ship's telescope, which I happened to have in my hand at the time the ship struck, and which I had clung to firmly all the time I was in the water, indeed it was with difficulty that Jack got it out of my grasp when I was lying insensible on the shore. I cannot understand why I kept such a firm hold of this telescope. They say that a drowning man will clutch at a straw. Perhaps it may have been some such feeling in me, for I did not know that it was in my hand at the time we were wrecked. However, we felt some pleasure in having it with us now, although we did not see that it could be of much use to us, as the glass at the small end was broken to pieces. Our sixth article was a brass ring which Jack always wore on his little finger. I never understood why he wore it, for Jack was not vain of his appearance, and did not seem to care for ornaments of any kind. Peterkin said "it was in memory of the girl he left behind him!" But as he never spoke of this girl to either of us, I am inclined to think that Peterkin was either jesting or mistaken.
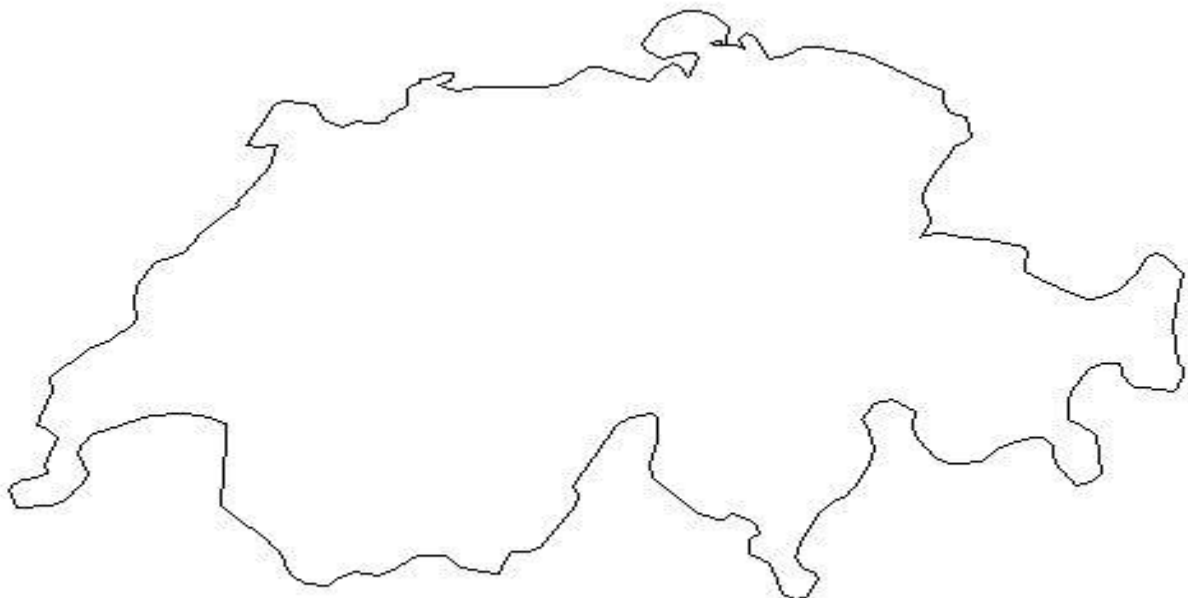
In addition to these articles we had a little bit of tinder, and the clothes on our backs. These last were as follows: - Each of us had on a pair of stout canvass trousers, and a pair of sailors' thick shoes. Jack wore a red flannel shirt, a blue jacket, and a red Kilmarnock bonnet or night-cap, besides a pair of worsted socks, and a cotton pocket-handkerchief, with sixteen portraits of Lord Nelson printed on

it, and a union Jack in the middle. Peterkin had on a striped flannel shirt, - which he wore outside his trousers, and belted round his waist, after the manner of a tunic, - and a round black straw hat. He had no jacket, having thrown it off just before we were cast into the sea; but this was not of much consequence, as the climate of the island proved to be extremely mild; so much so, indeed, that Jack and I often preferred to go about without our jackets. Peterkin had also a pair of white cotton socks, and a blue handkerchief with white spots all over it. My own costume consisted of a blue flannel shirt, a blue jacket, a black cap, and a pair of worsted socks, besides the shoes and canvass trousers already mentioned. This was all we had, and besides these things we had nothing else; but, when we thought of the danger from which we had escaped, and how much worse off we might have been had the ship struck on the reef during the night, we felt very thankful that we were possessed of so much, although, I must confess, we sometimes wished that we had had a little more.

The Coral Island: Text-focused questions

1. The opening paragraph tells the story in a non-linear order. Write the following events out in the order they actually took place: The boys put their dry clothes on; the boys took their wet clothes off in order to dry them; the boys searched their pockets for the items they had; the boys were washed ashore after the shipwreck; the boys put all of their property out upon a rock.

2. Find three pieces of evidence that the island is generally warm.

3. Ballantyne describes all of the items the boys have as their 'worldly goods'. What does the adjective 'worldly' suggest about these items and the boys' situation?

4. Ballantyne lists the items the boys have in their pockets. What is the effect of this? How does numbering each item help to give the reader an idea of the boys' situation?

5. Each item has a short description after it. What do these descriptions all have in common and how to they help to heighten the sense of isolation for the boys?

Writing

LEGEND to MAP SYMBOLS

COUNTRY
Feature   Town

desert/wasteland	
grassland	
swamp	
hills	
mountains	
cave	
political border	
road	
river	

town/village	
cities	
tower/fortress	
castle	
country capital	
windmill	
forest	
lake	
reef	
canyon	

Use the outline of the map and symbol guide to draw your own desert island. You can add your own symbols too, such as a volcano.

Once complete, use the compass image to describe the island. 'In the north, there is a dark cave, where…'