

Teachers' Notes  
written by Jean Yates



# *CAPTAIN COOK'S APPRENTICE*

By Anthony Hill

## **Synopsis**

*Captain Cook's Apprentice* traces the journey of the Endeavour through the eyes of Isaac Manley, a young servant on board the ship. The journey was to record the Transit of Venus, collect botanical specimens and discover the unknown Great South Land.

In a voyage lasting three years, Isaac, the second son of a wealthy British family, experiences the brutal reality of life at sea. He witnesses floggings, storms, shipwreck, the deaths of his fellow crewmen and violent clashes with indigenous peoples. In the process, Isaac forms many strong friendships on board and a love and knowledge of the sea that leads to a long and fulfilling career as a sailor.

The voyage takes them through Madeira, Rio de Janeiro, Cape Horn, Tahiti, New Zealand, New Holland, Batavia and Cape Town where they experience many different cultures, environments, diet and climates. Each of these encounters and experiences are graphically and entertainingly described through the ideas of twelve-year-old Isaac Manley, bringing his sense of wonder, fear and intrigue to the reader. The problems encountered by Cook, as leader of the expedition and the onboard rivalry between him and Joseph Banks are brought to life, as is the petty infighting and jealousies amongst the crew.

The men of the Endeavour successfully recorded the Transit of Venus and made a number of significant scientific discoveries. Cook successfully navigated new waters and charted much previously unknown land, claiming New Zealand and New Holland as British territory.

Cook's understanding of the dangers of scurvy and his insistence on a good diet saved his men. He was also largely regarded as a fair and understanding leader, qualities that marked him as different from many other Captains of this time. Unlike previous expeditions by ships such as the Dolphin, the loss of life on board the Endeavour was minimal, until the return journey when disease claimed many lives. Isaac personifies the courage and mateship of the men on board, qualities that enabled them to survive against all odds, especially in the face of rough seas, hostile natives, disease and shipwreck.

This book would lend itself well to a cross-curriculum approach including studies within English, SOSE/Humanities, Maths and Science.

Extensive chapter notes, written by the author, can be found on the Penguin website, [http://www.penguin.com.au/PUFFIN/NOTES/f\\_notes.cfm](http://www.penguin.com.au/PUFFIN/NOTES/f_notes.cfm). Quotes from

the Chapter notes have been used throughout these Teachers' Notes. Chapter notes, and other background material, can be found on the author's website, [www.anthonhillbooks.com](http://www.anthonhillbooks.com).

## **THEMES and AREAS OF INTEREST**

- Life in late 18th century Britain
- Class structure
- Life at sea
- Language of the sea
- Danger and courage
- Discovery
- Scientific advancement
- The Transit of Venus
- Health and diet
- Geography
- Navigation
- Friendships
- Relationships with indigenous groups

## **POINTS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **Life in late 18th century Britain**

Britain in the 18th century was still very much steeped in a rigid class structure. As the second son, Isaac would not inherit and needed to find a 'gentleman's' profession. The classes within society would not have mixed, so that as a servant on board the Endeavour, Isaac had to mix with a number of people with whom he would never normally come into contact. The crew on board was like a microcosm of society in which people of all classes were thrown together. Living in close quarters, for years on end, the men on board had to form friendships and learn to work together, often to ensure their personal safety and survival.

This was also a time of great scientific discovery and enlightenment in which men of science were encouraged and funded to explore the world and to advance the discipline of Science. The British Empire was at its peak and expanding its territory into previously uncharted waters. There was great rivalry between the competing Empires of Britain and Holland.

- Describe Isaac's family life in England.
- Many references are made to the fact that as the second son, Isaac would have to make his own way in the world. What is meant by this?
- What sort of privileges would Isaac have enjoyed at home?
- Given its austerity, why would a life at sea be appealing for him?
- Even at sea the rigid social class structure is seen to exist. Make a hierarchical list of the characters on board the Endeavour, showing what class each belongs to.

- What privileges did the upper class have? (e.g. different foods, clothing, accommodation, punishments and pay).
- Isaac's master, Robert Molineaux complains '*First time I've heard of scientists on board a ship*'. (p12) Why were there so many scientists on board the Endeavour? How does this reflect the aims of the British Empire?
- Throughout the novel there are a number of references to the rivalry between Britain, Holland and France. Make a list of any references to this competition as you read.

## ACTIVITY

There were many skilled people on the Endeavour. Investigate and describe some of the roles such as botanical artist, cook, navigator and surgeon. There were also a number of unskilled men on board. Consider the role of a master's servant, his chores, the sort of life he led and his chances of advancement.

- Write a job advertisement to recruit for one of the crew on the Endeavour.

## Life at Sea

Men on board ships such as the Endeavour were on board for many months at a time, often going weeks without seeing land. Life at sea was hard, dangerous, boring and uncertain. Members of the crew did not know each other before they set out and often had different agendas for being part of the expedition. Discipline was very strict, food was often bad and there was a great deal of inequality. Sickness was a common problem and, with limited medical facilities, often resulted in death. The seas were unpredictable and previously uncharted, therefore even the most experienced on board had little idea of what to expect. The unknown destination also presented different challenges. The men lived with constant fear.

- Describe the physical layout and conditions on board the Endeavour (p11).
- Life on board the ship was quite harsh and men were frequently flogged for what we may consider to be small misdemeanours. Make a list of the different punishments that were handed out (flogging, standing in the rigging (p161), withholding of rations etc).
- Why was the discipline on the ship so strict?
- Make a list of the incidents on the voyage that were heavily punished.
- What dangers did the men face and how did they learn to cope with their fears?
- Many references are made to the fact that it was common for men to go mad on long voyages. Why might this be the case?

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## ACTIVITY

You are the Captain of the Endeavour and one of your crew has committed a crime.

- What crime has been committed and what punishment will you give?

## Health and Diet

One of the things for which Captain Cook is well known is his determination to eliminate the dreadful effects of scurvy. His understanding of diet was ahead of its time and indeed saved his crew where others had failed.

*Scurvy. The physician James Lind wrote in 1753 on the value of citrus in preventing scurvy, but little notice was taken at first. Cook helped show that, apart from sauerkraut, the real antiscorbutics were fresh food, greenstuffs, and above all citrus. Once this was understood, every British ship carried lemons and limes – hence the term ‘Limeys’ (Brown, Rodger pp 100-103, Beaglehole Life pp 135-6).*

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*Sauerkraut. Literally ‘sour cabbage.’ A European dish of sliced fresh cabbage, salted and fermented by various lactic acid bacteria. It keeps well and retains much of its Vitamin C, an important factor in overcoming scurvy during long sea voyages. Cook received the Copley Medal in 1776 for demonstrating its efficacy. See Cook Journal 13 April 1769 for his psychology in getting the crew to eat it.*

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- Captain Cook was determined to ensure that his men did not suffer from scurvy. What is scurvy? How does Cook try to overcome this problem and is he shown to be successful? Why is this significant?
- What food sources were on board the Endeavour? (pigs, hens, bullock, goats, biscuits, wine etc)
- What foods were they able to find at the different countries they visited? Why would they have been so excited by the produce they found in Tahiti?
- Make a list of all of the produce that they found at: Madeira (p29), Tahiti, Rio and New Holland ((p163; pp183-189)
- Why had there been such a high death rate on board the Dolphin?
- What is ague? Why was Batavia riddled with ague? Describe the living conditions of Batavia (p214) and explain why these would cause a breeding ground for diseases such as this.
- Make a list of the medicines and medical equipment that were on board the Endeavour.
- What is laudanum and what was its medicinal use?

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## ACTIVITY

What would the men on board the Endeavour have eaten? Imagine that you are the cook. Prepare a menu for the day's meals. Try to follow Captain Cook's instructions regarding solutions for avoiding scurvy.

## Language of the Sea

One of the challenges the crew faced was that ships have a very unique language. Many of the men on board would not have been familiar with these terms, just like Isaac. Not only are the words themselves unfamiliar to us, but they also have unusual pronunciations. Throughout the book, Anthony Hill draws our attention to these and includes explanatory notes and the correct pronunciation. (For example studdingsails: stu'n's'ls p62).

They also encountered language difficulties when talking with the natives they encountered from the different countries.

- Make a list of the terminology, expressions or behaviours that are unique to sailing (e.g. recaulked, forecourse, larboard etc)
- What impact has the inclusion of the seafaring language had on the interest and authenticity of the story?
- Make a list of the words learned from the natives encountered on the voyage that have now found their way into the English language (e.g. tatu tattoo; tapu taboo etc)

## Discovery

The Endeavour was sent on a voyage of scientific discovery, to measure the Transit of Venus and recording new flora and fauna, in part funded by Joseph Banks himself. However, James Cook, the navigator and explorer and, ultimately, the Captain of the ship, had the task of discovering the Great South Land and mapping previously uncharted waters. As a result there were tensions on board caused by their competing and sometimes incompatible interests (pp149-151).

## NOTE

Have an enlarged copy of the map (pp viii-ix) of Cook's route in a prominent position in the classroom.

- Locate each of the countries the Endeavour visited on a modern map. Make a list of towns visited and their contemporary names.
- Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro were important cities on the trade routes. Research why.
- Cook describes the discovery of the East Coast of New Holland as '*not a great discovery, I know, but of some service to navigation and human knowledge*'. (p151). Does history agree with this sentiment?
- Make a list of the significant findings (including scientific and botanical discoveries) on the voyage of the Endeavour (see especially pp249-250).

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## The Transit of Venus

*Transit. Cook 3 June. The Transit occurs in pairs, eight years apart, separated by approximately 120 years. It occurred in 1761 and 1769, 1874 and 1882, 2004 and will again in 2012. Astronomers calculated the Earth's distance from the Sun using the principles of parallax – i.e. by measuring the slight apparent shifts in the track of Venus across the Sun as seen from different parts of Earth. Hence the importance of the Tahiti sighting (see Lomb).*

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- What would the observations from the Transit of Venus enable scientists to do?(p71)
- Why was it essential for this work to be carried out on this voyage? (p71)
- Why was the Transit of Venus such an important scientific discovery?
- How would this discovery aid explorers?
- What natural occurrence distorted the readings?(p83)
- Cook feared that their findings would be too inaccurate. How were his fears later proven unwarranted? (p84)

## Geography

Describe the people and the landscape of each of the countries Endeavour visited.

- Madeira (p27)
- Rio (pp42-50)
- Tahiti (pp68-101)
- Ra'iatea (pp102-104)
- New Zealand (pp113-151)
- New South Wales (pp154-206)
- Batavia (Jakarta) (pp211-222)
- Cape Town (pp230-235)

For much of the voyage Endeavour was sailing in uncharted territory.

- What dangers would this have potentially presented?

## ACTIVITY

Write a letter from Isaac to his mother describing his surroundings at one of these places.

## Relationships with Indigenous people

On board the Endeavour were Tupaia (a priest of Oro) and his attendant, Taiata. These men were used as translators and diplomats to assist relationships with the natives encountered on the voyage. Tupaia also had an excellent knowledge of the seas around Tahiti which Cook relied upon (p102). They were, however, expected to be able to communicate with people from all countries and cultures, a problem once they sailed beyond Polynesian waters.

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- How important were Tupaia and Taiata to the success of the voyage?
- Discuss the racial relationships and attitudes on board the Endeavour.
- Did these attitudes change over time? Consider the deaths of Tupaia and Taiata (pp217-219).
- Comment on how the natives in each country received the men of the Endeavour.
- Why did the Australian Aborigines fear that the men on board Endeavour were spirits of the dead (p190)? How would this have affected their initial reaction and subsequent relationship?

Consider the statements:

- ‘Why, Isaac wondered as he had at New Zealand and at Botany Bay, why does it always have to end like this?’ (p195)
- ‘Cook was as much bound by his native traditions as were the Guugu Yimithirr’ (p193)
- Why did encounters with natives so often end up hostile?

## CHARACTERS

### Isaac Manley

*Isaac joined Endeavour 17 June. Beaglehole Life (p 139) gives Isaac’s age as 12, but this is incorrect: he was 13 years and three months. It is unclear how Isaac got a place on the ship but his father had connections with the Royal Navy. For example, in 1790 Isaac wrote to the Secretary of the Admiralty, Sir Philip Stephens, My father desires his compts [compliments]. Stephens had begun his career at the Navy Office, near the Customs House where Isaac’s grandfather was a Commissioner. Service with an officer was a not uncommon way for young gentlemen to enter the Royal Navy.*

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- What sort of person is Isaac shown to be? Make a list of evidence from the novel to support this interpretation.
- What role does Isaac initially play on board Endeavour? Despite his home life and social status, Isaac does not feel that this position is above him. What does this reveal about Isaac?
- What qualities does Isaac display that see him promoted to the role of Midshipman? (p225)
- Do you think Isaac changes on his two year journey on board Endeavour? Give evidence to support your opinion.
- Why did the author choose to write from the perspective of Isaac Manley, rather than a more prominent member of the voyage?

### James Cook

*One of the world’s greatest navigators. Born 1728 at Marton, Yorkshire, son of a Scottish farm labourer. At 17 he was apprenticed to a Staithes grocer, but subsequently transferred to a Whitby coal-shipper, the Quaker John Walker, where Cook learned his seamanship. In 1755 he joined the Royal Navy, and*

received high praise for his survey of the St Lawrence River in Canada during the Seven Years War. His later survey of Newfoundland and observation of an eclipse brought him to the attention of the Royal Society, the Admiralty, and his appointment as Lieutenant to command Endeavour.

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- What sort of a leader is James Cook shown to be? What evidence is there to support this interpretation?

Consider the following:

- p22 '*Lieutenant Cook was more sympathetic. He'd been a Master himself before given command of Endeavour.*'
- p130 Cook's distress at the shooting of the thieving native
- p136 '*Cook rarely bore a grudge - and many used the lash a lot more than he did.*'
- p188 '*the turtle feast was divided equally between every man and boy as Cook always insisted.*'
- p201 '*...however fearful he may have felt, as Captain he gave his commands as always with control, decision and example.*'
- Why did Cook insist that all officers and non-commissioned officers on board Endeavour were able to navigate? (p36)
- Cook has a good understanding of men. For example, when the men refused to eat the fresh food, he comes up with an interesting way to trick them into eating it. What did he do and what does this reveal about his character? (p38)

### Joseph Banks

Banks was born in London into a wealthy family, on 13 February 1743. From an early age, his declared passion was natural history, and in particular, botany. After inheriting his family's fortune in the early 1760s he was able to pursue this passion to the full. When Captain Cook's 1768 expedition to Tahiti for astronomical observations was planned, Banks obtained permission from the Admiralty to join the venture.

- Why was Banks on board Endeavour?
- Why would he have funded much of the journey himself?
- Who made up the team accompanying Banks?
- As 'landlubbers' what aspects of the voyage did they find most difficult?
- How are their attitudes shown to be different from those of the seafaring men?
- Why did Banks have greater power than Cook? (p149)
- Why was Joseph Banks more highly celebrated upon the Endeavour's return than Cook and his men? (p249)

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## ACTIVITY

There are a number of minor characters in the story, all of whom add interest to the story (e.g. Charles Green the astronomer; Robert Molineux, the Master; Nick Young; Isaac Smith and Forby Sutherland).

- Choose one of these characters and create a character profile from the information given in the book.
- Consider: what would his role have been on board the ship; what were his attitudes and friendships towards his fellow crewmen; how would he have reacted to the voyage's discoveries etc.

## ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES

### Research:

- the voyage of the Dolphin led by Captain Wallis.
- one of the key scientists on board the Endeavour e.g. Joseph Banks, Charles Green, Dr Daniel Solander etc.
- Jeanne Baret, the first known woman to circumnavigate the world (p75)
- the Transit of Venus

### Writing:

In the character of one of the men on board the Endeavour, write a series of journal entries during your voyage.

Write (and deliver) a eulogy for Captain James Cook, Joseph Banks or Isaac Manley.

### Mapping:

Mark the following landmarks on a map of New Zealand (pp112-150):

Young Nick's Head	Mercury Bay	Queen Charlotte
Poverty Bay	Whitanga River	Sound
Hawkes Bay	Hauraki Gulf	Te Wai Pounamu
Cape Kidnappers	Waihou River	(Greenstone Waters)
Cape Turnagain	Bay of Islands	Te Ahi no Maui
Tologa Bay	North Cape	(Maui's Fire)
Bay of Plenty	Cape Maria van	Maui's Canoe
The Crossing Place	Dieman	Cook Straight
of Kupe	Taranaki (Mt Egmont)	Joseph Banks' Island
Purangi River	Meretoto (Cannibal	Murderer's Bay
Mahanakino	Bay)	

- On a map, trace the earlier voyage made by Abel Tasman in which he discovered New Holland.

On a map of New Holland, mark the following:

Mt Dromedary	Port Sutherland	Cape Byron
Pigeon House	Port Jackson	Mount Warning
Botany Bay	Port Stephens	Moreton Bay

Sandy Cape  
Bustard Bay

Magnetic Island  
Cape Tribulation

The map on page 106 shows the known world prior to Cook's expedition. Mark in Cook's new discoveries.

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