

Chapter Charter: Questions to Guide Your Reading



The following questions will help you think about the important parts of each chapter.

Chapter 1

- Do you think that Karana is a responsible person? What about Ramo? How much do you think their ages affect whether or not they are responsible?
- How would you describe the relationship between the islanders and the Aleuts as the story begins?

Chapter 2

- What do the islanders do that contributes to bad feelings between them and the Aleuts?

Chapter 3

- Why might Karana's people need to know exactly when the hunters will leave?

Chapter 4

- If Chief Chowig had not argued with the hunters about payment, what do you think would have happened that day? What might have happened the next time the hunters came to the island?

Chapter 5

- Why do you think Kimki decides that the tribe should leave the island?

Chapter 6

- Why do you think Nanko teases the islanders instead of telling them the good news right away? Can you think of a time when you've done that?

Chapter 7

- The islanders are leaving their home forever on a strange ship. How might you feel if you had to move away from your home? Is there one special thing you would never leave behind, as Ramo will not leave his spear?
- Both Chief Matasaip and Karana have to make difficult decisions about going back for Ramo. The chief decides not to turn back; Karana decides to do so. Do you think either person made the right decision? What would you have done?

Chapter 8

- After Ramo dies, Karana vows to kill all of the wild dogs on the island. Does this seem fair to you?

Chapter 9

- Why do you think Karana burns down the village of Ghalas-at? Would you have made the same decision? Why or why not?
- Karana decides to disobey the law that forbids women from making weapons. Can you think of a situation in which you might have to disobey a law to save your life?

Chapter 10

- Karana undertakes a dangerous journey when she leaves the island by canoe. Why do you think she feels desperate enough to risk her life this way?

Chapter 11

- Why do you think Karana decides that she will never again leave the island unless the white men come for her?
- As Karana chooses a location for her new home, what are some of the issues she has to consider? Do you think she chooses wisely?

Chapter 12

- As Karana builds her new home, how does she protect herself from animals and from the weather? Why do you think she tries to make her life more comfortable?

Chapter 13

- Karana sees two large male sea elephants fighting. Do you think the younger or the older animal will win? Why?

Chapter 14

- What do you think is different about Karana's second home, compared with her first?

Chapter 15

- Why does Karana decide she must kill the leader of the dog pack? What changes her mind?
- Why do you think the leader of the dog pack begins to trust her, rather than wants to harm her?

Chapter 16

- Karana's life changes after she befriends Rontu. Have you ever had a pet or a human friend who has changed your life? If so, can you describe how?

Chapter 17

- When Rontu goes back to the wild dogs, Karana doesn't help him fight. Have you ever had a pet that needed your help? If so, what happened? Were you able to help it?

Chapter 18

- In this chapter, Karana describes a spring season when she is especially happy. Would you have been happy in her situation during that spring?

Chapter 19

- Why does Karana want to spear the devilfish? Why do you think she later decides never to hunt one again?

Chapter 20

- As Karana explores Black Cave, what does she discover there? How does it make her feel? If you were Karana, would you ever return to Black Cave? Why or why not?
- When the Aleuts come, what does Karana do to hide from them?

Chapter 21

- Do you think Karana is more afraid of the Aleut girl or of the hunters?

- Do you think that the Aleut girl is afraid of Karana? Why or why not?

Chapter 22

- How do we know that Karana has come to trust Tutok?
- Why do you think Karana cooks food for Tutok even though she knows Tutok is gone?

Chapter 23

- What does it mean that Karana eventually gives the otter a name, Mon-a-nee?
- Why do you think the otter did not stay in the pool?

Chapter 24

- As time passes, Karana's feelings about killing animals change. How did she once feel, and how does she feel now? Why do you think her feelings change?

Chapter 25

- Karana loses her best friend when Rontu dies. Describe how it might feel to lose a favorite animal.

Chapter 26

- Why do you think Karana tries to catch the wild dog that is Rontu's son?

Chapter 27

- Before the earthquake, what are some of the signs Karana notices that something abnormal is happening to the sea and to the island?

Chapter 28

- The author almost never uses words that describe how Karana is feeling. We can often guess, though, by how he describes what Karana is doing. From his descriptions, what do you think Karana is feeling when she first sees the ship? when she realizes that she doesn't know whose ship it is? when she hears the man calling her? when she realizes that the ship has left without her?

Chapter 29

- The white men want Karana to change into clothes like theirs. Why do you think they do this?
- Do you think Karana will have a better life after she leaves the island? What might her life be like?

Plot: What's Happening?



"I walked across the deck and, though many hands tried to hold me back, flung myself into the sea."

—Karana, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*

I *Island of the Blue Dolphins* is the story of Karana, an American Indian girl who survives alone on an island for many years.

Twelve-year-old Karana lives in the village of Ghalas-at on the Island of the Blue Dolphins. One day Karana and her six-year-old brother, Ramo, see a ship sailing toward their island. Karana is excited but uneasy.

The men of Ghalas-at race to meet the ship. Forty Aleuts and their Russian captain, named Orlov, have come to hunt sea otters. Orlov says that they will pay the islanders with jewelry and metal spearheads. Karana's father, Chief Chowig, does not trust the hunters. Still, he agrees to let them hunt. Karana's sister, Ulape, declares that one of the Aleuts is a girl, but no one believes her.

When the Aleuts are done hunting, they argue with the islanders about payment. The Aleuts and the islanders fight on the beach,

and many island men die. The tribe is devastated. "There was no woman who had not lost a father or a husband, a brother or a son."

The new tribal chief, Kimki, travels across the sea to find a new place for the tribe. After he leaves, Matasaip becomes chief.

A year later, another ship sails into the harbor. Kimki has sent the white men and their ship to bring the tribe to their new home.

A storm is coming, so the islanders hurry to board the ship. Ramo has forgotten his treasured fishing spear and wants to go back for it. Karana says no, but Ramo disobeys her. As the ship sails out to sea, Karana sees Ramo alone on the island. She begs Chief Matasaip to go back for him. "We cannot wait for Ramo," he says. "If we do, the ship will be driven on the rocks." The chief promises to come back for him on another trip. "He will be safe," he says.

Karana does not believe him. She dives back into the sea and swims to shore. She hugs Ramo and promises that they will be rescued soon.

Sadly, there will be no rescue for Ramo, who is soon killed by wild dogs. Karana vows that someday she will kill the dogs that killed her brother.

After Ramo's death, Karana decides that she can no longer live in the village of empty huts that remind her "of all the people who

were dead and those who were gone.” She burns each house in the village until “there were only ashes left to mark the village of Ghalas-at.”

Karana makes a new home on a large rock. There she is safe from the dogs, though they follow her when she leaves the rock. She needs weapons to kill the dogs but she is afraid to disobey her tribe’s law, which states that women are not allowed to make weapons.

Karana looks everywhere for weapons but finds none. She decides that she must disobey the tribe’s law. She makes a spear and then a bow and arrows. Feeling more secure with her weapons nearby, Karana begins to enjoy her new life. Still, she waits for the ship to return for her and always “at dawn, as light spread across the sea, my first glance was toward the little harbor of Coral Cove.”

After the dogs threaten her again, Karana decides to leave the island by canoe. She is not really afraid, she says, for whatever might happen to her means “far less than the thought of staying on the island alone, without a home or companions, pursued by wild dogs, where everything reminded me of those who were dead and those who had gone away.”

Karana paddles out to sea, but the old canoe is leaking and starts to split apart. Karana realizes that she must turn back to the island, though she is uncertain if she will make it. When a swarm of dolphins swims near her canoe, they lift her spirits and give her the strength to paddle home.

Grateful to be alive, Karana settles into life on the island. She builds a home on the headland and furnishes it. She makes new, stronger weapons to hunt the wild dogs. She plans to kill a sea elephant for its sharp teeth, which she can use as spear points. Instead, she witnesses a terrible fight between two sea elephants that leads to one of the sea elephants' death.

Karana stumbles and badly injures her leg as she watches the fight. She hides from the wild dogs in a cave and, after she recovers, makes it into a second shelter.

Karana makes spear points from the teeth of the dead sea elephant and hunts the wild dogs. She wounds the leader of the pack, a big dog that she thinks must have come with the Aleuts. When she follows the wounded dog into the brush, she is surprised to find that she does not want to kill him, though she is not sure why. She nurses the dog back to health and, when he is better, names him Rontu.

Next, Karana decides to fix one of the tribe's old canoes. As she does so, Rontu plays nearby. Now Karana realizes how lonely she had been before she "had Rontu to talk to." Karana and Rontu use the canoe to explore the island's caves, where they hunt a giant devilfish and find ancient figures her ancestors once made.

Then one day the Aleuts return. This time, Karana sees for herself that they have a girl with them. Though Karana hides, the Aleut girl discovers her. Slowly the two become friends.

The girls visit together for many days before the Aleuts leave. Afterward, Karana listens to the many familiar sounds of the island. "But suddenly," she says to herself, "as I thought of Tutok, the island seemed very quiet."

Karana goes down to the beach and sees the dead and dying otters the Aleuts have left behind. She is able to save one otter, who becomes her friend Mon-a-nee. As time passes, her pet birds, Tainor and Lurai, have two baby birds, and Karana nurses an injured young gull. Karana decides that she will never kill another otter, cormorant, seal, dog, or sea elephant again. Even if her tribespeople were to come back and laugh at her, she would not change her mind.

Rontu dies, but Karana soon catches and tames a wild dog that is Rontu's son and names him Rontu-Aru.

Karana barely survives an earthquake that strikes first at sea and then on the island. She loses all her food, weapons, and canoes. As she is piecing together a new canoe on the beach one day, she sees a ship on the horizon. Karana hides, not knowing at first if the men on board are dangerous Aleuts or rescuers. By the time she realizes they are rescuers, the men have left. She is alone again on the island.

Two years later, the same ship returns. Karana knows that this time she will leave on the ship. She carefully prepares, dressing in her finest clothes and jewelry. The white men greet Karana in a strange language. Though she doesn't understand what they

are saying, the words are sweet to her. “They were the sound of a human voice. There is no sound like this in all the world.”

As the ship sails for the mainland, Karana says to the reader, “For a long time I stood and looked back at the Island of the Blue Dolphins.” She thinks of all the animals she has left behind “and of all the happy days.” Dolphins accompany the ship far out to sea. Her little birds chirp and Rontu-Aru sits beside Karana as she sails toward her new life.

Thinking about the plot

- Why do the islanders and the Aleuts fight?
- How does Karana become stranded on the Island of the Blue Dolphins?
- What are the greatest dangers Karana faces, and how does she respond to them?
- How is Karana rescued?