

**COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES  
FOR  
"THREE SKELETON KEY"**

**GEORGE G. TOUDOUZE**



**ELA Core Plans**

Teacher-Written Standards-Based Lesson Plans



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*Common-Core-Based Activities For*  
***“Three Skeleton Key”***

*George G. Toudouze*

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## Table of Contents

Title of Activity	Page	Common Core Standards
<p>Prereading activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• anticipation guide</li> <li>• vocabulary preview</li> <li>• informational article on lighthouses and ships</li> </ul>	5-8	<p>These activities will initiate a discussion on some of the issues and key concepts in the story.</p>
Setting	9	<p>With this activity, students are required to look back at the text and analyze the setting. They must find details that describe the place, time, and environment. Then, they must explain how certain passages and words affect the characters in the story.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CCSS7RL1,3</p>
Imagery	10	<p>This handout helps students analyze how the author creates imagery. With this activity, students will find a passage; then, using the information provided on the handout, they will explain how imagery has been created by the author.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CCSS7RL1</p>
Theme	11-12	<p>The handouts on theme can be used to teach what theme is and how a theme statement can be developed. Non-examples and examples are provided to help students understand. At the end of this lesson, students will develop their own theme statements and find a passage to support their statements.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">CCSS7RL-1,2</p>

Defending your Answers With Passages	13	This handout explains step by step how students should return to text to support an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn. It includes examples and non-examples to help the students. CCSS7RL-1
Three Skeleton Key Questions	15-17	This handout includes ten questions. Students are required to return to the text to draw conclusions and analyze various elements of the story. Many CCSS are addressed within these questions. Students determine central ideas, cite text, and analyze text. They must cite evidence to support their answers.
Three Skeleton Key Poetry	18	This activity provides a sample poem based on the story and requires students to write their own. CCSSW Anchor Standard 4
Tableau	19	This activity requires students to work in groups to develop a creative tableau and then perform it for the class. A rubric is provided. CCSSW Anchor Standard 4
Answer keys	-	

# Three Skeleton Key

## Anticipation Guide

Read each of the following statements. Place a T beside the statements that you think are true and an F beside statements that you think are false.

1. The Flying Dutchman is real. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Rats can swim. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Rats multiply quickly. \_\_\_\_\_
4. A derelict is a ship with a full crew. \_\_\_\_\_
5. It is ok to put others in danger if it means saving your own life. \_\_\_\_\_
6. Rats are solitary creatures and do not travel in hordes. \_\_\_\_\_
7. A key (sometimes spelled cay) is another word for island. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Today, all lighthouses require “keepers” – men or women who must live in the lighthouse for months and take care of the light and the lighthouse. \_\_\_\_\_
9. Foreshadowing creates suspense. \_\_\_\_\_
10. Morse code was a code made up of numbers and letters. \_\_\_\_\_

# Three Skeleton Key

## Do you know these words?

Before we read the story, see if you know some of the vocabulary words that we will encounter. Match the words to the correct definition.

phosphorescent	monotonous	edible	morose	provisions	besiegers	writhing	
derisive	vengeful	suffice	treacherous	Breton	Basque	Nero	fetid

1. putrid, foul \_\_\_\_\_
2. a person living in a mountain range in France and Spain \_\_\_\_\_
3. repetitious and uninteresting \_\_\_\_\_
4. the emperor of Rome known for his cruelty. \_\_\_\_\_
5. to provide enough \_\_\_\_\_
6. having a gloomy personality \_\_\_\_\_
7. mocking, scornful, cynical \_\_\_\_\_
8. dangerous \_\_\_\_\_
9. having or showing a strong desire for revenge \_\_\_\_\_
10. a person from Brittany- a region of Northern France \_\_\_\_\_
11. glowing \_\_\_\_\_
12. a group who harasses or oppresses \_\_\_\_\_
13. supplies, necessities \_\_\_\_\_
14. anything that is able to be eaten \_\_\_\_\_
15. squirming, twisting \_\_\_\_\_

## **Lighthouses**

Today, we have a great deal of sophisticated technology for ships to use when it comes to navigating the seas. Yet, before radar, sonar, on-ship electronics, etc. lighthouses were a major necessity. Lighthouses are towers which shine bright lights from the top. These towers serve as navigational aids and provide warnings of treacherous areas.

Before electricity, what was used to light the lamps? Well, the earliest type of lighting apparatus consisted of an open coal or wood fire, with other inflammable material. Later, various fuels and oils like whale oil were used. In the story of “Three Skeleton Key”, oil was used to light the lantern atop the lighthouse.

When this short story takes place, lights were not automated as they are today. Because of this, lighthouse “keepers” had to be hired to tend to the light. The narrator of the story “Three Skeleton Key” is a lighthouse keeper. This was no easy job. Lighthouse keepers were required to clean the glass panes of the lighthouse, which often became clouded by dark soot. They also had to make sure the lamps were filled with oil, trim the wicks, and light the lamp at sunset and extinguish it at sunrise. During a nightly watch, the keepers had to climb the stairs in the tower to check on the lamp, an often very strenuous job because some lighthouses had as many as two hundred steps. In addition to these duties, many lighthouse keepers were required to keep daily logs keeping up with things such as the weather and the amount of fuel consumed.

## **Dangers around lighthouses**

Lighthouses can warn ships of dangerous coastlines, hazardous shoals, rocks, and reefs. In “Three Skeleton Key”, the light warned of treacherous reefs. We know this early on in the story from a passage that states, “Now, ships were a rare sight in our waters, for our light was a warning of treacherous reefs, barely hidden under the surface and running far out to sea.” So, what are reefs? A reef is a ridge of jagged rock, coral, or sand just above or below the surface of the sea. If a ship were to hit a reef, it could be severely damaged, and/or cause it to flood and even sink.

## Ships referred to as feminine

Many times, inanimate objects are personified as feminine, especially those things that are dear to us. For example, the earth as mother Earth is regarded as the common maternal parent of all life. Most of the time, ships and boats use a feminine form. Likewise, early seafarers spoke of their ships in the feminine gender for the close dependence they had on their ships for life and sustenance. In “Three Skeleton Key”, ships are referred to as feminine by using the pronouns “her” and “she”. “Her lines” refers to the place where a ship was built.

## Some parts of a ship that are mentioned in the story

**mast** - A vertical round piece of timber to which the fore-and-aft sails and/or yards are attached. It is held up by shrouds on either side and stays fore and aft. It may also carry a crow's nest or other lookouts.

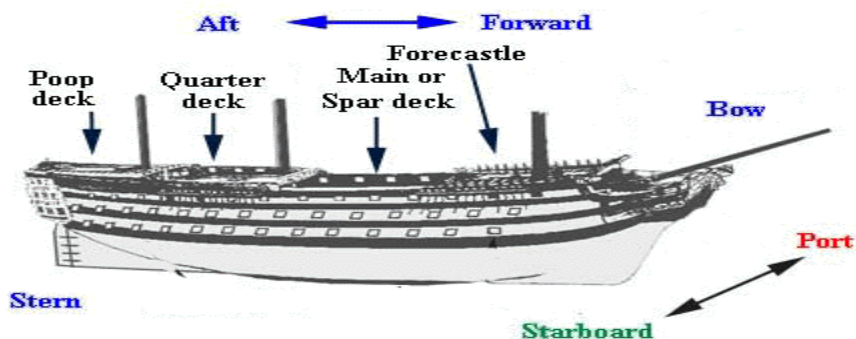
**a three master** – a sailing ship with three masts

**yard** - A long, nearly cylindrical piece of timber, tapering toward the ends, used for supporting and extending a sail to the wind

**bow, stern** - The bow is the forward end of the ship, beginning on both sides where the planks arch inwards and ending where they close at the prow. The stern, on the other hand, is the rear end of the vessel.

**rigging** is the mechanical sailing gear attached to the hull in order to move the boat as a whole. This includes cordage (ropes attached to the spars and sails in order to manipulate their position and shape), sails, and spars (masts and other solid objects sails are attached to).

**poop**- an exposed partial deck on the back of a ship.



**derelict** – an abandoned ship



## Three Skeleton Key

**Setting** is a combination of the time of day, the place where the scene occurs, the geographic location, and the period of history.

**Study the following chart to understand what setting may include.**

Place	Time	Environment
The physical location In the country, state, or city? Mountains? Lake? Forest? Beach? Under a bridge?	Calendar and clock times- What is the day, month, year? What is the season? Does it take place in the past, present, or future?	What are the details in the surroundings? What else is going on around the characters? Is it crowded? Isolated? Is the wind blowing? What is the weather like?

Look back at the beginning of the story at the setting. In the box below, list details that relate to the setting before the rats besiege the lighthouse. Then, tell whether the details relate to the place, the time, or the environment. One has been done for you.

Detail	Place? Time? Environment?
...off the coast of Guiana – South America	place

Now, in the box below, fill in the chart with words and sentences from the text that describe the environment in the lighthouse after the rats invade the island.

Passage, word, or sentence from story	How this affects the characters
<i>Their odor filled the tower, poisoned our lungs.</i>	The odor was so bad it made it hard for them to breathe.

# Three Skeleton Key

**Imagery** is language that creates a sensory impression within the reader's mind. It allows the reader to see, hear, feel, smell, or even taste what is happening in the story – all in the mind of course. Imagery makes the reader feel like he/she is there, in the story, experiencing the same things that the character is experiencing. **This story is full of visual imagery – imagery that allows you to picture something. Let's examine how the author creates it.**

## Three ways to create visual imagery

- **Create imagery through descriptions and sensory language.**

- Authors pay attention to detail when they write. They use words that pertain to all of our senses, not just our sense of sight. Read the following passage from the story.

Underline the details and sensory language that help you imagine the scene.

*The air was foul; even the heavy smell of oil within our stronghold could not dominate the fetid odor of the beasts massed around us. And there was no way of admitting fresh air without also admitting the rats.*

- **Create imagery with strong verbs!**

- Authors use action verbs when they want to create imagery. These words help you to imagine something happening. With a specific, strong verb, you can pinpoint exactly what is going on. Read the following passage from the story. Underline or highlight the action verbs that help you picture the action.

*All I can remember is wading through them up the stairs, striking them off as they swarmed over us; and then we found ourselves, bleeding from innumerable bites, our clothes shredded, sprawled across the trapdoor in the floor of the lantern room – without food or drink.*

- **Create imagery with figurative language and adjectives.**

- Authors use literary devices such as similes, metaphors, and personification to help them create imagery. Figurative language allows you to picture something in your mind and then relate it to something else. Adjectives describe nouns so that you can “see” them. Read the following passage. Underline the simile, metaphor and the adjectives in this passage that help you picture the scene.

*From time to time, some of the rats fought among themselves and a dark cluster would detach itself, falling into the sea like a ripe fruit from a tree. Then we would see phosphorescent streaks as triangular fins slashed the water – sharks, permanent guardians of our rock, feasting on our jailers.*

**Find another passage in this story that contains visual imagery. Complete the following chart.**

Page #	Passage	How imagery is created...sensory language, strong verbs, figurative language, adjectives

# Three Skeleton Key

## Theme

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Theme:** the story's central message; a life lesson

### Some things to remember about theme are:

- Theme is what the author wants you to remember most.
- Occasionally the theme is stated directly in the story, novel/passage.
- Most often, the theme is unstated and is revealed to the reader gradually throughout the story.
- Theme is written as a statement, not just a word.
- Different readers can have completely different theme statements. This is fine as long as each reader can support his/her idea with evidence from the story.

### Plan for understanding theme in “Three Skeleton Key”

**Step 1:** List words from the story that express the big ideas or topics from the story.  
– For example, for some stories, you may list words like *love* or *jealousy*. These two words do not work for this story, but write some that do.

**Step 2:** Think about what the characters in the story do and say that relate to the topics you listed above.

**Step 3:** Come up with a statement of the author's point or message based on one or more of your big ideas.

**Step 4:** Find passages and/or quotes from the story that support your theme statement.

# Three Skeleton Key

## Theme

Some words from the story that express the big ideas or topics from the novel....

**survival, hope, fear, determination**

Non-Examples of theme	Example of theme
<p><b><u>NON-Example:</u></b> Do not quit your job or anything else just based on what happened to you.  <b>Why is this NOT an effective theme statement?</b></p> <p><b><u>NON-Example:</u></b> <i>Don't underestimate rats.</i>  <b>Why is this NOT an effective theme statement?</b></p> <p><b><u>Non-Example:</u></b> Those men had to fight rats!  <b>Why is this NOT an effective theme statement?</b></p>	<p><b><u>Example:</u></b> No matter how bad the situation seems or how outnumbered one may be, there is always hope for survival.  <b>Why is this an effective theme statement?</b></p>

Now, write another theme statement for this story – one in your own words. Then, find one line from the story to support your theme statement.

My theme statement for this story	A passage to support this statement

## Defending Your Answers with Passages

Often you will be required to return to the text to find a passage that “supports your answer”. When doing this, you must be careful in choosing the passage, and make sure it actually supports your answer.

**Sample Question:** The narrator repeatedly refers to the lighthouse as a prison. Why is this an appropriate metaphor? Support your answer with two details from the text.

**Incorrect Student Response:** The lighthouse was a prison because the three main characters were trapped in there. The rats covered the entire outside of the lighthouse, and they could not even open a window. They eventually chewed through the window seals and came into the lighthouse too. It was a nightmare for them, so it was like a prison.

**What is wrong with this response?**

**Incorrect Student Response:** The metaphor which compares the lighthouse to a prison is effective because the three men were trapped inside, and it was horrible just like prison. The rats were very vicious. For example, the text says, *When cargo does not suffice, the rats attack the crew, sometimes eating them alive.* Later in the story, the narrator describes the rats as having a keen sense of smell when he states, *Thousands of heads rose, felt the wind, and we were scented, seen!*

**What is wrong with this response?**

**Correct Student Response:** The metaphor which compares the lighthouse to a prison is effective because the three men could not escape from the horrendous situation inside of the lighthouse. They were trapped, just as prisoners are trapped. At one point, the narrator relates, *And there we were, sealed alive in our own light, prisoners of a horde of starving rats.* When in prison, one loses privileges, even simple ones like the right to open a window for fresh air. In the story, the lighthouse keepers are surrounded with “foul” air and the narrator tells us, “...there was no way of admitting fresh air without also admitting the rats.” The lighthouse was definitely like a prison.

## Practice Answering Constructed Response Questions

### Constructive Response Question Tips:

1. Read through the question two times.
2. Underline all of the things the question is asking you to do.
3. When you begin your answer, reword the question.
4. As you write your answer, make sure that you answer every part of the question.
5. Support your answer by “pulling out” something from the text.
6. Provide a wrap-up sentence at the end to conclude your response.

### Let’s look at this process together and practice what we have learned:

**Passage:** One day Shan led her three friends on an escapade through the woods on a pretend treasure hunt. Exhausted from walking, the group decided to take a break. Pieces of bark began to fall to the ground as the four kids sat on an old log. Suddenly, Shan heard a humming sound. Before the group knew what was happening, armies of yellow jackets were swarming around them. Without hesitation, the kids threw their water canteens to the ground and took off running. Branches slapped their faces and briars scratched their arms and legs as they tore through the woods looking for escape. The bees dug their needle sharp stingers into their flesh over and over, making it even harder to run. They could hear the screams behind them and the buzz of the bees in their ears, but their legs kept pumping.

**Question:** Locate one example of descriptive language and one example of sensory language and explain how they were used.

**Student Response:** “Pieces of bark began to fall to the ground” is an example of descriptive language.  
“The bees dug their needle sharp stingers into their flesh” is an example of sensory language.

What is wrong with this response?

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How should the response be written?

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# Three Skeleton Key

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions using the story to help you.

1. How does the island get its name?

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2. How did the three men conclude that *Cornelius De Witt* had not been abandoned and the crew had been killed by the rats? Return to the text to find your answer.

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3. What was the purpose of the narrator including the well-known story about the terriers(dogs) being eaten by the rats?

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4. Which of the following sentences from the story best shows how sickened the three men were by the rats?

- a. Their teeth grated as they pressed against the glass of the lantern room, where they could plainly see us, though they could not reach us.
- b. Their odor filled the tower, poisoned our lungs, and rasped our nostrils with a pestilential, nauseating smell.
- c. All the while we could hear the enraged scraping of claws against the stone and glass, while the chorus of cries was so loud that we had to shout to hear one another.
- d. The next six days and seven nights, our only distraction was watching the rats whose holds were insecure fall a hundred and twenty feet into the maws of the sharks...

5. The three men wait until the ninth night to keep the light off, and even then, the story said they debated all the ninth day. Why did the narrator, Le Gleo, and Itchoua have to debate over not lighting the lantern the ninth night?

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6. Explain how the sharks help the three lighthouse keepers in this story. How is this ironic?

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7. Choose one character from the story. Think about the actions and words of this character throughout the story. List one word that describes this character. Then, support your answer with two details from the story.

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8. When reading a story, good readers picture the action in their minds. Choose one portion of the story to illustrate. Go back and reread this portion to refresh your memory of the details. Draw your picture in the box below. Do your best work, even if it means using “stick people”. Under your picture, write a **short caption** about this part of the story.



9. Explain what happens to each of the characters at the end of the story.

Narrator:

Le Gleo:

Itchoua:

10. What can you conclude about the narrator in the last two paragraphs?

# Three Skeleton Key

Write a poem about this story. A sample poem is below. Make your poem at least five lines long, and give it a title. You may choose to have it rhyme, or you may write a free verse poem.

Three Skeleton Key  
An island entrapped us three;  
The writhing rats enthroned,  
The lighthouse theirs to roam.  
Three Skeletons were no more  
For at the end there were four.

Rough Draft

# Three Skeleton Key

A **tableau** is a living picture that captures a moment. You will create a group tableau. This means that you will create a frozen scene from this story. You will stand in a line in front of the class and one by one “come to life”, say a line from the story while showing emotion and/or actions that fit that line, and then freeze again. Then, the person beside you will “come to life”, say his/her line and then freeze again until the entire group is done.

## **Follow the directions below to prepare for your dramatic presentation:**

1. Choose some dialogue, a moment, or situation from the story for your group to portray. Make sure you choose a significant passage or line. If you wish, each person in the group may choose his/her own line(s), which do not have to be in the same passage. For example, person one in the group may choose the line, *Itchoua pointed, and following his finger, we saw a big three-master, with all sail set, heading straight for the light.* The second person in the group may choose the line, *The rats of the sea are fierce, bold animals.* While these lines are not on the same page, they are still related.
2. Once each person in the group has chosen a line or two or three, decide how each person will “come to life” and portray this line. You will memorize the line and say it out loud, but as you do so, you should include facial expressions, and movements or gestures when possible. For example, for the line *The rats of the sea are fierce, bold animals*, the speaker would perhaps have a look of anger on his/her face and raise his/her hands up high in a claw-like position.
3. Once everyone in the group has decided on a line, facial expressions, and motions to accompany that line, practice performing the tableau. Everyone in the group should stand frozen. Put your heads down so you are not tempted to smile or laugh. The first person in line will begin by lifting his/her head, saying and acting out his/her line. Once this line has been brought to life, that person will freeze right where he/she is, and the next person will “come to life.”
4. Now, before you perform your tableau for the class, you must first write something for your teacher. 😊 Write a paragraph explaining the significance of your chosen piece to act out. Why did you choose it? What is significant about it? Why is it memorable?
5. Good Luck!

***“Three Skeleton Key”***

**Tableau Rubric**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Possible Points</b>	<b>Points Earned</b>
Participated effectively with group	20	
Voice was loud enough to be heard by the entire “audience”.	20	
Facial expressions and/or gestures were incorporated.	20	
Written analysis was completed with few (if any) errors in conventions.	20	
Written analysis included a thorough explanation of the chosen line.	20	
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100</b>	

Three Skeleton Key  
Answer Key

This activity should foster beneficial conversation before reading the story. 😊

## Three Skeleton Key

### Anticipation Guide

Read each of the following statements. Place a T beside the statements that you think are true and an F beside statements that you think are false.

1. The Flying Dutchman is real. False – The Flying Dutchman is a legendary ghost ship that is doomed to sail the seas until Judgment Day.
2. Rats can swim. True – Rats are great swimmers.
3. Rats multiply quickly. True a pair of brown rats can produce as many as 2,000 descendants in a year if left to breed unchecked.
4. A derelict is a ship with a full crew. False a derelict is an abandoned ship.
5. It is ok to put others in danger if it means saving your own life. This is a matter of opinion, but should spark interesting discussion.
6. Rats are solitary creatures and do not travel in hordes. False Rats are very social creatures. They stay together in families, and sometimes “families” become colonies with hundreds of rats.
7. A key (sometimes spelled cay) is another word for island. true
8. Today, all lighthouses require “keepers” – men or women who must live in the lighthouse for months and take care of the light and the lighthouse. False Today, most light houses use solar-charged batteries and have a single stationary flashing light sitting on a steel skeleton tower.
9. Foreshadowing **creates** suspense. true
10. Morse code was a code made up of numbers and letters. False Morse code was made up of dots and dashes.

# Three Skeleton Key

## Do you know these words?

Before we read the story, see if you know some of the vocabulary words that we will encounter. Match the words to the correct definition.

phosphorescent	monotonous	edible	morose	provisions	besiegers	writhing	
derisive	vengeful	suffice	treacherous	Breton	Basque	Nero	fetid

1. putrid, foul **fetid**
2. a person living in a mountain range in France and Spain **Basque**
3. repetitious and uninteresting **monotonous**
4. the emperor of Rome known for his cruelty. **Nero**
5. to provide enough **suffice**
6. having a gloomy personality **morose**
7. mocking, scornful, cynical **derisive**
8. dangerous **treacherous**
9. having or showing a strong desire for revenge **vengeful**
10. a person from Brittany- a region of Northern France **Breton**
11. glowing **phosphorescent**
12. a group who harasses or oppresses **besiegers**
13. supplies, necessities **provisions**
14. anything that is able to be eaten **edible**
15. squirming, twisting **writhing**

**Setting** is a combination of the time of day, the place where the scene occurs, the geographic location, and the period of history.

**Study the following chart to understand what setting may include.**

Place	Time	Environment
The physical location In the country, state, or city? Mountains? Lake? Forest? Beach? Under a bridge?	Calendar and clock times- day, month, year? Season? Past, present, future?	What are the details in the surroundings? What else is going on around the characters? Is it crowded? Isolated? Is the wind blowing? What is the weather like?

Look back at the beginning of the story at the setting. In the box below, list details that relate to the setting before the rats besiege the lighthouse. Then, tell whether the details relate to the place, the time, or the environment. One has been done for you.

Detail	Place? Time? Environment?
...off the coast of Guiana – South America bad reputation of the island a small slippery rock light keepers were isolated in lighthouse Sharks patrolled the island. End of June Long ago (late 1800s) when lighthouse keepers tended the light and before electricity	place  environment place environment  environment time time

Now, in the box below, fill in the chart with words and sentences from the text that describe the environment in the lighthouse after the rats invade the island.

Passage, word, or sentence from story	How this affects the characters
Their odor filled the tower, poisoned our lungs  Sealed alive in our own light Numbers clinging to the walls, piled on the balcony Sharks -Permanent guardians of our rock Fetid odor Raging cries of the rats Sickening, strangling odor of their bodies	They could hardly breathe.  They felt trapped. The sharks created an eerie presence. The odor was sickening, and surely made them nauseous. The cries made it hard for them to hear one another.



## Three Skeleton Key

Name key

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Answer the following questions using the story to help you.

1. How does the island get its name?

Three Skeleton Key earned its name from the story of three convicts who wrecked on the island. These three convicts died of hunger and thirst, and when found, the only thing remaining was their bones. It was rumored that their three skeletons haunted the island, thus the name – Three Skeleton Key.

2. How did the three men conclude that *Cornelius De Witt* had not been abandoned and the crew had been killed by the rats? Return to the text to find your answer.

According to the story, the men knew the Cornelius De Witt had not been abandoned because all of the lifeboats “were all in place”.

3. What was the purpose of the narrator including the well-known story about the terriers(dogs) being eaten by the rats?

The narrator included this story to show just how powerful and vicious these sea rats were. This also foreshadows later events.

4. Which of the following sentences from the story best shows how sickened the three men were by the rats?

- a. Their teeth grated as they pressed against the glass of the lantern room, where they could plainly see us, though they could not reach us.
- b. Their odor filled the tower, poisoned our lungs, and rasped our nostrils with a pestilential, nauseating smell.
- c. All the while we could hear the enraged scraping of claws against the stone and glass, while the chorus of cries was so loud that we had to shout to hear one another.
- d. The next six days and seven nights, our only distraction was watching the rats whose holds were insecure fall a hundred and twenty feet into the maws of the sharks...

5. The three men wait until the ninth night to keep the light off, and even then, the story said they debated all the ninth day. Why did the narrator, Le Gleo, and Itchoua have to debate over not lighting the lantern the ninth night?

According to the story, lighting the light in the lighthouse is the “greatest breach” of their service. This means it is the most important thing that they do. It is important because without the light, ships are at danger. They had to debate this because they knew they would be risking other people’s lives to save their own, and they needed to make sure that was okay to do.

6. Explain how the sharks help the three lighthouse keepers in this story. How is this ironic?

The sharks help the lighthouse keepers because they eat the rats. The sharks help to eliminate their enemy, the rats. This is ironic because sharks are usually viewed as man’s enemy, not a helper.

7. Choose one character from the story. Think about the actions and words of this character throughout the story. List one word that describes this character. Then, support your answer with two details from the story.

Sample answer:

The narrator of Three Skeleton Key can be described as mysterious. He is hard to figure out, and he does not seem to show much emotion throughout the story. Despite their horrible and desperate situation, he sticks to the facts of the story. Even when he is describing the terrible fate of his two co-workers, his attitude seems aloof. He states, “Well, LeGleo’s mind had cracked and he was raving mad. They sent him back to France and locked him up in an asylum, the poor devil! Itchoua died within a week; a rat’s bite is dangerous in that hot, humid climate, and infection sets in rapidly.” As you can see, the narrator seems mysteriously unattached to his comrades.

8. When reading a story, good readers picture the action in their minds. Choose one portion of the story to illustrate. Go back and reread this portion to refresh your memory of the details. Draw your picture in the box below. Do your best work, even if it means using “stick people”. Under your picture, write a short caption about this part of the story.

Make sure students include a caption under their picture.

9. Explain what happens to each of the characters at the end of the story.

Narrator: After they fumigate the lighthouse, the narrator returns to the lighthouse to resume his service there.

Le Gleo: LeGleo’s “mind cracked” and he was sent to an asylum

Itchoua: died within a week of leaving the lighthouse

10. What can you conclude about the narrator by the last two paragraphs?

Sample answers: He is strange. He is mysterious. He is fearless.

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