

**Lesson One, Handout Two**

**What to do:** Read the following adapted passage from R.H. Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*. Ask students to answer the questions that follow in their sea journals.

**ONLY THE FIRST NIGHT: RICHARD HENRY DANA**

My daydream was suddenly interrupted by an order from the officer to trim the yard. I could see by the looks the sailors cast to windward, and the dark clouds that were fast coming up, that we had bad weather to prepare for.

However, as it was not my watch I lay bellow. I now began to feel the first discomforts of a sailor's life. The compartment in which I lived was filled with coils of line, spare sails, old rope, and provisions which had not been stowed away.

Moreover, there had been no berths built for us to sleep in, and we were not allowed to drive nails to hang our clothes upon.

Now the sea had risen and the vessel was rolling heavily and everything was thrown about in grand confusion. As the sailors say there was a "hurrah's nest", "everything on top and nothing at hand."

A large hawser had been coiled away upon my sea chest. My hat, boots, mattress and blankets had all rolled to the opposite side and were jammed and broken under the boxes and coils of rigging. To top it all we were allowed no light to find anything.

I was beginning to feel strong symptoms of sea-sickness, and giving up all attempts to collect my things, I lay down upon the sails expecting every moment to hear the cry "all hands on deck." I shortly heard the rain drops falling outside, thick and fast. The men had their hand full apparently, for I could hear the loud and repeated orders of the mate, the trampling of feet, the creaking of blocks, and all the accompaniments of the coming storm.

In a few minutes the slide on the hatch was thrown back and the loud cry of "all hands on deck!" greeted my ears.

When I got outside a new scene was before me. It was pitch dark, and the little brig was lying over nearly on her side. The heavy sea was beating against her bow with a noise and force of a sledgehammer. Waves came over the rail and crashed upon the deck drenching us. The topsail lines had been let go and the canvas flapped wildly with the cracking sound of thunder. The wind was whistling through the rigging, loose ropes flying about.

I was dreadfully sick with hardly the strength to hold on to anything. And this was my condition when I was ordered aloft for the first time. We had to bring in sail or else the canvas would be ripped to shreds. How I got up the mast and on to the yard I will never know. I could not have been much help as I was busy holding on with all my strength. I was sick several times before I left the yard.

Soon all was secure aloft and we were allowed once again to go down bellow. My condition was not helped by the state of our compartment. The motion of the ship had stirred-up the stale water at the bottom of the hull creating a terrible stench.

I had often read the sea stories of others, with their terrible trials, but I felt that none of them had been worse than mine. For in addition to all these evils, I could not help but remember that this was only the first night of a two years' voyage.

**Journal Reflection:**

- Imagine being one of Dana's crewmates, write a letter home telling the story of your departure.

**Vocabulary:**

**hawser:** heavy line often used to tie the ship to a dock.

**lay bellow:** to go to one's berthing area or living quarters

**line:** rope used in the rigging.

**mate:** officer in charge of the crew, often the second in command on the ship.

**provisions:** the ship's foodstuff

**stowed:** stored away.

**trim the yard:** To change the angle of the yard, the beam from which the sails hang. This is done when there is a shift in the direction of the wind.

**windward:** the direction from which the wind is blowing.