



Sanctuary of Stone

Reading Comprehension

Materials: Sanctuary of Stone story • Comprehension Worksheet

Unit vocabulary words, as well as words students may not know, are bolded in the story.

Answer Key

Comprehension Worksheet

1. Who (or what) is the narrator of the story? What clues in the story tell you this?

*The cave. Clues include **my walls**, **my stalactites**, **my front rooms**, etc.*

2. Besides humans, what creatures use the cave?

Bats, insects and blind cavefish.

3. In the second sentence, who are the “first people”? What does the narrator mean when he (or she) says “they came to paint their dreams on my walls?”

The first people are Native Americans who painted animals and spiritual symbols on the cave’s walls.

4. How are bats important in the story?

The bats make the narrator happy, and he/she measures time by the comings and goings of the bats. The bats are an important part of the cave ecosystem.

5. What is the narrator’s relationship to the bats? Does it change?

The narrator sings in harmony with the bats; they are almost part of his/her “body.” The narrator weeps for the sufferings of the bats, but cannot help them. The narrator’s relationship to the bats does not change; he/she hurts when they are hurt and rejoices when they are happy.





6. List three ways people used the cave in recent times.

To “drink and party” during Prohibition; for cruel entertainment (the boys shooting and burning the bats); for scientific study; and for tourism.

7. What impact did human activity have on the bats?

Mostly negative, until recently. The partiers and the young men and boys killed the bats for entertainment, or because they considered them a nuisance. Also, human disturbance caused the bats to wake up from hibernation and starve. Populations in the cave declined, then rebounded somewhat, and have stabilized recently with the coming of environmentally-conscious tourists who try not to disturb the bats, and scientists who try to protect the bats by studying their habits and installing gates.

8. How does the narrator’s impression of people change over time?

Throughout most of the story, the narrator believes people are evil, since they kill bats and have no respect for nature or appreciation for the cave (“they look without seeing”). However, once scientists and environmentally-conscious tourists begin coming, the narrator warms up to them since they try not to disturb the bats and appreciate the beauty of the cave. The cave has even started a few patches of special speleothems for the tourists, and thinks some day he/she may sing with the humans like he/she now sings with the bats.



Sanctuary of Stone

By Diana M. Barber, Ph.D.
Illustrations by Kaitlyn Tye

For as long as I can remember I measured time by the comings and goings of bats. Even after the first people came to paint their dreams on my walls, the great autumn swarms of bats were my best timekeepers. My **stalactites** dripped and my **stalagmites** grew year round. Insects and their



predators constantly scurried over the great piles of **guano** left by my summer **tenants**. One of my front rooms even housed strange little fish, white and sightless. Their entire **ecosystem** was based on the summer clouds of bat mothers and their babies. But the summer bats didn't keep the years for me and they never came down to visit my **cathedral**.

In my cool depths I didn't notice the **frigid** winds or hot summer nights. It was constant, stable, safe. The **vaulted** ceilings of my cathedral were quiet and lifeless in summer. I had only my sighs and shifting air to make the crystal **speleothems** hum. I knew a year had passed when the great choruses of bats returned to the cathedral. The crystals hummed at higher **frequencies** and the bats and I would **harmonize**. When the great hall's ceiling was completely filled with patches and drifts of bats swaying and shifting, I would breathe a sigh of contentment. It would start to grow quieter, their wings would gently whisper, and the bats would start their great sleep. I don't know if they **meditated** or dreamt, but I snuggled happily under the soft furry blanket of their bodies and wished for a long winter.

I had crafted the great crystal sculptures for the amusement of my silken flyers and the beauty of their songs. How could I have known that a new people would come? They were as pale as the cavefish and they looked without seeing. At first, it was just simple explorers and adventurers fascinated by the complex world beneath their feet. Then more people came with smoking lanterns and declared ownership of the cathedral the water and I had not built for them. Little did I know there



was worse ahead.

Several autumns passed and the bats slept fitfully. They survived, but the humans changed the temperature and humidity of the cathedral just by their presence. Then the men in shiny cars, the fast talkers, came with hordes of men. They cursed every slippery step into my depths and set up great lines of men to bring in tables, chairs, gas lights, and crates and crates of liquor. Every day men with rifles came and **massacred** my winter friends in their sleep. Some escaped, but the **corpses** of my gentle friends were swept into great piles and carted off in the empty liquor crates. Then at night the humans would sing, smoke cigarettes, and shout at each other. My crystals shrieked and cracked under the strain. Delicate structures were knocked off or melted away in the heat and smoke and noise. The bats were warmed in the winter and many starved before they woke or woke early to take their chances away from the world of men.

As bad as the shooters and partiers were, I still had not seen the worst of men. Many winters after the drinking parties stopped coming, my friends started returning to the cathedral. Much fewer bats than before, but my stable temperatures and constant humidity helped them to survive and begin to recover. Unfortunately, the cathedral was still not safe. The young men and boys shattered my quiet **sanctuaries** with gunpowder and fire. Armed with flashlights they roamed my passages, destroying art it had taken me centuries to grow. I whispered warnings to my sleepers in the winter, but they could not escape. The boys sprayed kerosene on their soft, gentle bodies and lit them on fire. My walls streamed with tears, but I could do nothing. I watched my friends, a **matriarch** of 20 + years, a juvenile seeing his first winter, the sisters with such sweet voices, all screaming in agony.



The bats fled my cathedral. Its vaulted ceilings were empty of my swift friends. No more did their high delicate voices harmonize with my deep sighs and bring our crystals to life. I sang, but I sang alone. I wept, but my walls wept alone. I could hear them occasionally in a distant small cavern unknown to man, but the great swarms were gone. I lost track of time for a while. I don't know how many winters I spent alone wishing for the soft swish of my friends' return. I longed for them to close their bright eyes, wrap their wings around

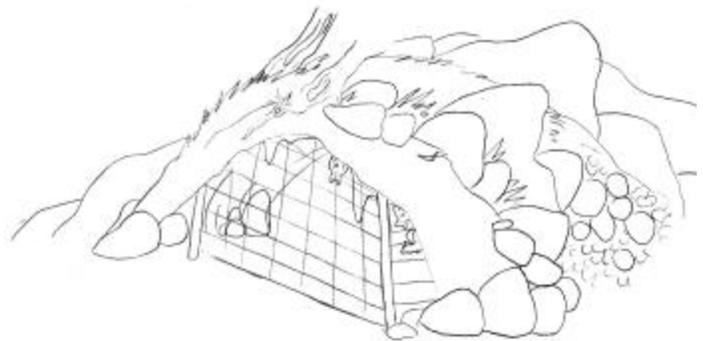


themselves and sleep their winter woes away with me, safe again in my cathedral.

Perhaps they missed me, too. I ached with joy when the first hesitant calls bounced off my cathedral's crystal-encrusted walls and made my caverns sing. The bats returned in small parties at first. Several winters came and went and the patches of bats on my ceiling began to grow again. I wondered if I would ever see the great swarms again. If my cathedral would ever fill again to **capacity**, and life would be as it was.

Humans came throughout the year and many of my friends woke too early as a result of the humans' winter visits. It was about twenty summers ago that a different sort of human came to visit. They carried clipboards and other strange instruments, but walked carefully and took only pictures. A short time later, maybe a year or two, there was a strange hammering and drilling coming from my entrances. Great gates of metal spanned the openings with gaps big enough for the bats to fly through, and only one door for people. When autumn came, the bats returned, buzzing amongst themselves about the new structure at the entry. I fretted about this new structure all winter while my charges slept their deep sleep. For the first time in decades, no humans disturbed their slumber and most of the bats made it through alive.

Now I tell time differently than I used to. I still track the comings and goings of bats and delight in the arrival of the autumn swarms. But I have new visitors, careful visitors. They come in the late spring and summer when the bats have gone. Some of the humans have been coming so often that I begin to recognize their voices. They lead groups of strangers through my passages and protect me from their clumsy feet. Sometimes when it's quiet, I think my new friends can hear me whisper in their ears. I have started a few patches of special **speleothems** for these humans and soon I think we'll sing together too. Until then, I will live in harmony with these humans, but hum with joy when my soft and gentle flyers sing with me in our sanctuary of stone.





Name _____



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2. Besides humans, what creatures use the cave?
3. In the second sentence, who are the “first people”? What does the narrator mean when he (or she) says “they came to paint their dreams on my walls?”
4. How are bats important in the story?
5. What is the narrator’s relationship to the bats? Does it change?
6. List three ways people used the cave in recent times.
7. What impact did human activity have on the bats?
8. How does the narrator’s impression of people change over time?



