The Children of the *Bounty*

Many people dream of living on a remote tropical island where there are no cars and no crime. For the people of Pitcairn Island, this dream is their reality. Until 1789, Pitcairn was uninhabited. In that year, Fletcher Christian arrived at and settled on this tiny island in the South Pacific. With him were eight other mutineers from the *Bounty* and eighteen Tahitians. By the late 1800s the island’s population had grown to over two hundred. Today, the number has dwindled to fewer than fifty. However, the island’s governing council is not greatly concerned about the declining population. It receives thousands of *queries* from people all over the world who would like to live there. Nevertheless, it rarely issues the official entry document called “Licence to Land.” Pitcairners have no wish to be swamped by an *influx* of new residents.

Life on Pitcairn is easygoing. The inhabitants enjoy *balmy* weather all year round, and the island has plenty of water. Sweet potatoes, melons, bananas, and coffee are among the crops grown in its fertile soil. The older inhabitants spend most of their time fishing, growing vegetables, and making wooden carvings and woven baskets.

Because life changes little from day to day, visits from ships passing by on their way from the Panama Canal to New Zealand are eagerly awaited. The island’s steep cliffs and lack of harbors make it impossible for ships to come to land; they must anchor about a mile offshore. When a ship arrives, islanders *congregate* at the town landing in Adamstown, the island’s only town. There they watch the launching of the forty-foot longboat that goes out to meet the ship to replenish supplies and to sell *mementos*. During rough weather, when the longboat is pitching wildly, those on board have a formidable task getting from the boat to the deck of the ship by rope ladder. Only the most *agile* attempt it.

The crews on these passing ships are eager to buy the carvings and baskets made by the islanders. *Intricately* carved replicas of the *Bounty* are popular items. They can sell for several hundred dollars or more, depending on the skill of the carver. The ships’ visits are *sporadic*; weeks or even months go by without one. For this reason, the Pitcairners take advantage of these visits to trade fish, fruits, and vegetables for canned goods and *staples*, such as flour and sugar, that they cannot provide for themselves. Everything
obtained from passing ships is allotted equally among the island's families. In this way, no one lacks the necessities.

This tropical paradise, however, is not for everyone. Young people often feel frustrated by the lack of opportunity. Many of them wish to exchange what they regard as the humdrum existence on the island for what they believe will be more exciting lives in the outside world. Not only do they find limitations in jobs unappealing, but they also complain that life on Pitcairn offers few diversions. Dancing is forbidden, and there is no television. Any display of affection, such as holding hands in public, is regarded as unseemly. The island's ruling council has passed laws banning such behavior. While many young people leave, some return later, unable to cope with the tumult of the modern world.

Pitcairn, a volcanic speck of rock less than two square miles in area and inhabited by only nine families, has a fascination for the outside world out of all proportion to its size. It has been the subject of no fewer than 2,500 books and articles. One reason, of course, is obvious—its dramatic past, a past that began on an April morning in 1789 when Captain Bligh was rudely awakened to discover that Fletcher Christian, abetted by mutinous crew members, had seized control of the Bounty.

Answer each of the following questions in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a vocabulary word from the lesson's word list, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.

1. Why are there no heating bills on Pitcairn?

2. Why hasn't there been an influx of tourists to Pitcairn?

3. What is the meaning of staples as it is used in the passage?
4. Why do you suppose the ships’ visits are **sporadic**?

___________________________________________________________________

5. Name two activities that Pitcairn teenagers might find **humdrum**.

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6. In what ways might teenagers from Pitcairn Island find life in a U. S. city **tumultuous**?

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7. According to the passage, what is the content of a lot of the mail sent to Pitcairn?

___________________________________________________________________

8. How do the islanders make sure no one lacks necessary food?

___________________________________________________________________

9. What is the meaning of **diversions** as it is used in the passage?

___________________________________________________________________

10. Why is it inaccurate to say that few Pitcairners are interested in a ship’s arrival?

___________________________________________________________________

11. Why is showing affection in public banned by Pitcairn’s governing council?

___________________________________________________________________

12. Why is a carving of the *Bounty* considered a suitable **memento** of Pitcairn?

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13. What determines the price of an **intricately** carved model of the *Bounty*?

___________________________________________________________________
14. How many of those who originally sailed to Pitcairn with Christian had helped him with the mutiny?

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___________________________________________________________________

15. Why would it be inaccurate to say that any of the islanders could be sent out on the longboat to board the ship?

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**FUN & FASCINATING FACTS**

- We usually use the adjective **balmy** to refer to conditions of climate or weather (a *balmy* day; a *balmy* breeze). But *balmy* has a secondary, slang meaning of “odd or peculiar in behavior.” An alternative spelling for this meaning is *barmy*, which has an interesting origin. *Barm* is the yeasty foam that rises to the top of certain alcoholic beverages as they are being brewed. A connection was made between this substance and odd or peculiar behavior. A person acting strangely was described as *barmy*. Confusion then occurred between two quite separate and distinct words. The result is that a person acting oddly can be described as *balmy* or *barmy*. A gentle breeze, however, can only be *balmy*, not *barmy*.

- The Latin verb *fluere* means “to flow” and forms the root of **influx**, “a flowing or pouring in.” Other words formed from this root include *fluid*, “any substance that flows”; *fluent*, “able to write or speak in a flowing, easy way”; *fluctuate*, “to move back and forth or up and down in a wavelike or flowing manner”; *flux*, “a flowing movement,” also “a state of constant change”; and *confluence*, “a flowing together, as of two streams or rivers.”