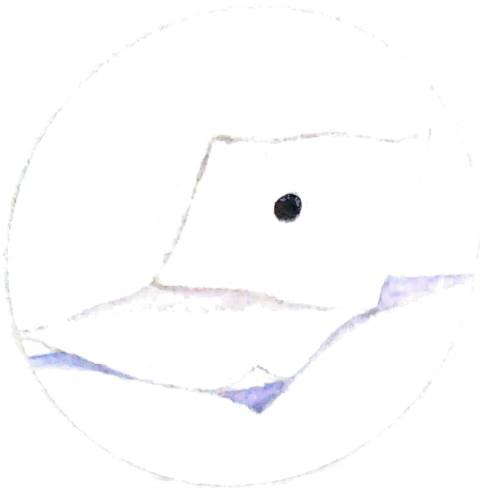


# The Black Spot

...that scares a seaman



**CONNECT** Think of a time when you were very sad or scared. Tell the class about it.

**REFLECT** What are the things that make you sad? What are the things that make you scared? List them in two columns.

**IMAGINE** A scary thing happens one evening while you are home alone. How do you deal with it? Write a short paragraph describing the incident.

## BEFORE YOU READ

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RL Stevenson (1850–1894) was a Scottish novelist and travel writer. Coming from a family of engineers, Stevenson studied engineering at University of Edinburgh. But, he spent most of his time writing or travelling. Between 1880 and 1887, he continued to spend his time in Scotland, England and France. It was during this period that he produced a bulk of his best-known novels including *Treasure Island* (1881–1882), *Kidnapped* (1886) and *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).

The Black Spot is the third chapter in the novel, *Treasure Island*. It is an important chapter for the plot of the novel as many defining events take place in it. RL Stevenson first conceived the idea of this masterpiece from a rough map of an imaginary island that he had drawn along with his stepson. He completed the first draft of the novel, containing 15 chapters, in as many days. *Treasure Island* continues to be a widely read and loved adventure book.

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## READ

My poor father died quite suddenly that evening, which put all other matters on one side. Our natural distress, the visits of the neighbours, the arranging of the funeral and all the work of the inn to be carried on in the meanwhile kept me so busy that I scarcely had time to think of the captain, far less to be afraid of him.

He got downstairs next morning and had his meals as usual, though he ate little. Singing was his favourite pastime. No one dared to cross him when he burst into a song. On the night before the funeral he was singing his ugly old sea songs. It was shocking to hear those songs. But he had grown very weak after the **stroke** and nobody messed with

him. We were all in the fear of death for him, and the doctor was suddenly taken up with a case many miles away.

The captain continued to grow weaker. He clambered up and down stairs, walked to the parlour and back again, and sometimes put his nose out of doors to smell the sea, holding on to the walls for support as he went and breathing hard and fast like a man on a steep mountain.

He never particularly addressed me. His temper was more flighty and more violent than ever. Now he drew his **cutlass** very alarmingly and kept it bare before him on the table. But with all that, he minded people less and seemed shut up in his own thoughts and rather wandering. Once, for instance, to our extreme wonder, he piped up to a different air, a kind of country love-song that he must have learned in his youth before he had begun to follow the sea.

So things passed until, the day after the funeral, and about three o'clock of a bitter, foggy, frosty afternoon, I was standing at the door for a moment, full of sad thoughts about my father, when I saw someone drawing slowly near along the road. He was plainly blind, for

**stroke:** an illness when a blood vessel in the brain bursts

**cutlass:** a short sword with a curved blade

he tapped before him with a stick and wore a great green shade over his eyes and nose; and he was **hunched**, as if with age or weakness, and wore a huge old tattered sea-cloak with a hood that made him appear positively deformed. I never saw in my life a more dreadful-

looking figure. He stopped a little away from the inn, and raising his voice in an odd sing-song, addressed the air in front of him,

'Will any kind

friend inform a poor blind man, who has lost the precious sight of his eyes in the gracious defence of his native country, England — and God bless King George! — where or in what part of this country he may now be?'

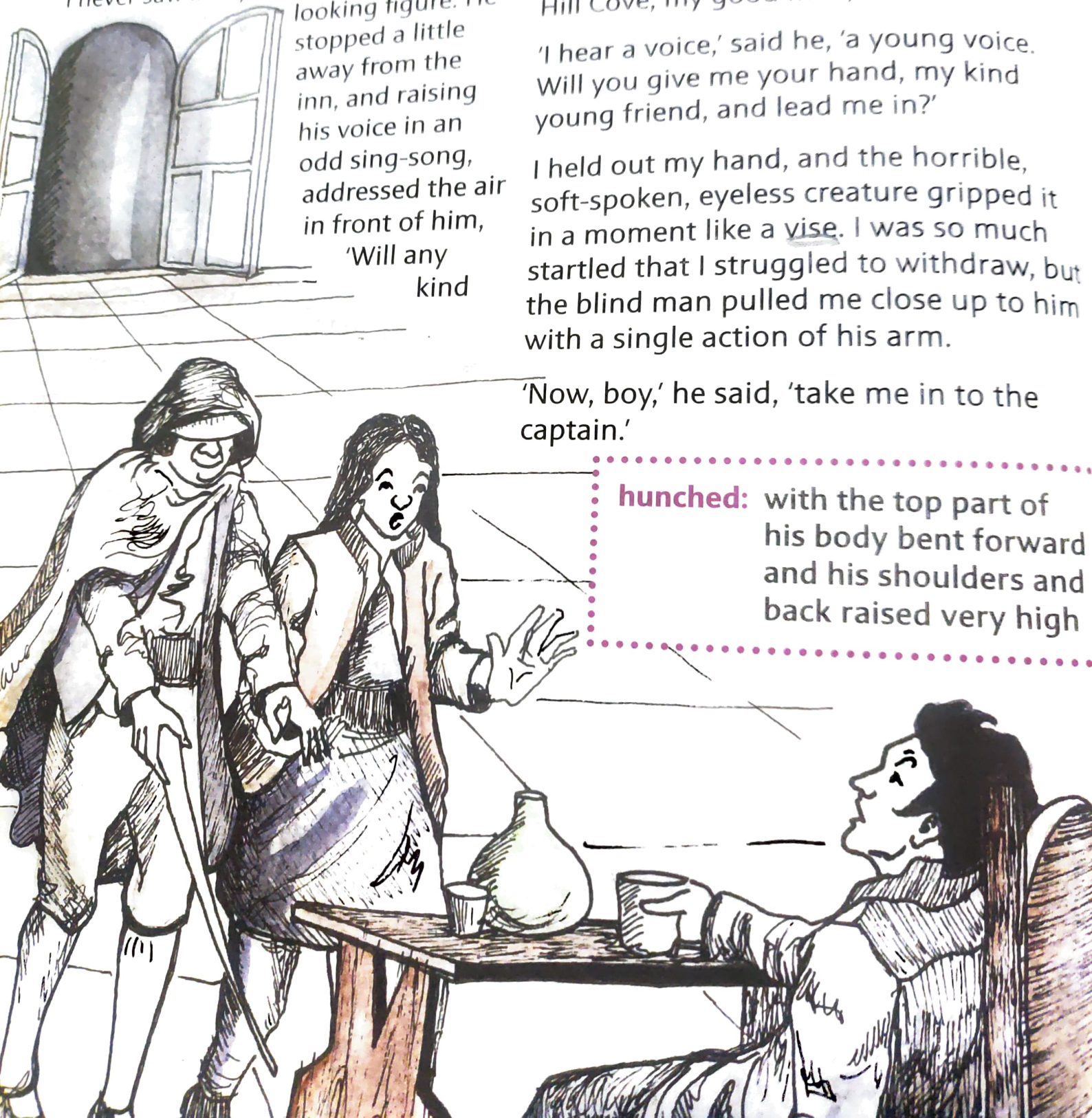
'You are at the Admiral Benbow, Black Hill Cove, my good man,' said I.

'I hear a voice,' said he, 'a young voice. Will you give me your hand, my kind young friend, and lead me in?'

I held out my hand, and the horrible, soft-spoken, eyeless creature gripped it in a moment like a vise. I was so much startled that I struggled to withdraw, but the blind man pulled me close up to him with a single action of his arm.

'Now, boy,' he said, 'take me in to the captain.'

**hunched:** with the top part of his body bent forward and his shoulders and back raised very high



'Sir,' said I, 'upon my word I dare not.'  
 'Oh,' he sneered, 'that's it! Take me in straight or I'll break your arm.'

And he gave it, as he spoke, a wrench that made me cry out.

'Sir,' said I, 'it is for yourself I mean. The captain is not what he used to be. He sits with a drawn cutlass. Another gentleman—'

'Come, now, march,' he interrupted; and I never heard a voice so cruel, and cold, and ugly as that blind man's. It cowed me more than the pain, and I began to obey him at once, walking straight in at the door and towards the parlour, where our sick old captain was sitting. The blind man clung close to me, holding me in one iron fist and leaning almost more of his weight on me than I could carry. 'Lead me straight up to him, and when I'm in view, cry out, 'Here's a friend for you, Bill.' If you don't, I'll do this,' and with that he gave me a twitch that I thought would have made me faint. Between this and that, I was so utterly terrified of the blind beggar that I forgot my terror of the captain, and as I opened the parlour door, cried out the words he had ordered in a trembling voice.

The poor captain raised his eyes, and at once, all colour went out of his face and left him staring sober. The expression of his face was not so much of terror as of mortal sickness. He made a movement to rise, but I do not believe he had enough force left in his body.

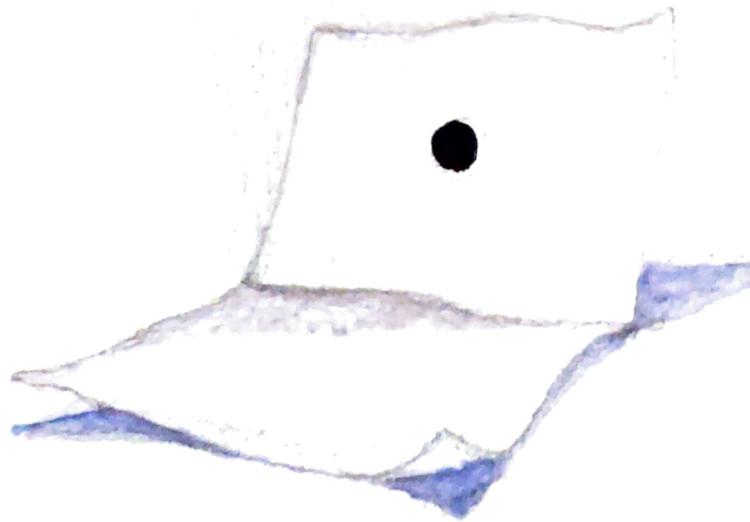
'Now, Bill, sit where you are,' said the beggar. 'If I can't see, I can hear a finger stirring. Business is business. Hold out your left hand. Boy, take his left hand by the wrist and bring it near to my right.'

We both obeyed him to the ~~letter~~ <sup>letter</sup>, and I saw him pass something from the hollow of the hand that held his stick into the palm of the captain's, which closed upon it instantly.

'And now that's done,' said the blind man; and at the words he suddenly left hold of me, and with incredible accuracy and **nimbleness**, skipped out of the parlour and into the road, where, as I still stood motionless, I could hear his stick go tap-tap-tapping into the distance.

It was some time before either I or the captain seemed to gather our senses, but at length, and about at the same moment, I released his wrist, which I was still holding, and he drew in his hand and looked sharply into the palm.

**nimbleness:** the quality of being quick in movement



He had a card in his palm. On one side of the card, there was a big black spot. It was a symbol much feared by the pirates. The captain knew it meant either **deposition** or death. On the other side, the card bore a message.

'Ten o'clock!' the captain cried. 'Six hours,' and he sprang to his feet.

Even as he did so, he **reeled**, put his hand to his throat, stood swaying for a moment, and then, with a peculiar sound, fell from his whole height face foremost to the floor.

I ran to him at once, calling to my mother. But haste was all in vain. The captain had been struck dead by

thundering **apoplexy**. It is a curious thing to understand, for I had certainly never liked the man, though of late I had begun to pity him, but as soon as I saw that he was dead, I burst into a flood of tears. It was the second death I had known, and the sorrow of the first was still fresh in my heart.

**deposition:** the act of removing somebody from power or a position

**reeled:** moved in an unsteady way

**apoplexy:** the sudden loss of the ability to feel

## CONSOLIDATE

### A1. Answer these questions.

1. Why did the narrator scarcely get time to think of the captain?
2. How would the captain spend his time after the stroke?
3. What did the blind beggar say he would do to the narrator if the latter didn't take him to the captain?
4. What was drawn and written on the card? How did the captain react upon reading the card?
5. *It was the second death I had known, and the sorrow of the first was still fresh in my heart.* Whose deaths is the narrator talking about? Why was the sorrow of the first death still fresh in the narrator's heart?



### A2. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *He got downstairs next morning and had his meals as usual, though he ate little.*
  - a. Who is the speaker?
  - b. Who is 'he' mentioned in the above sentence?
  - c. Why did 'he' eat little? What had happened to him?

2. *I was standing at the door for a moment, full of sad thoughts about my father, when I saw someone drawing slowly near along the road.*
- Why was the speaker full of sad thoughts about his father?
  - Where was the speaker when the above incident occurred?
  - Describe the person who was drawing slowly near along the road.
3. *Lead me straight up to him, and when I'm in view, cry out, 'Here's a friend for you, Bill.'*
- Who said these words and to whom?
  - Who was 'Bill'?
  - What would the speaker have done if he were not taken to Bill?

### A3. Think and answer.

- Why do you think all colour went out of the captain's face the moment he saw the blind beggar?
- Why do you think the narrator burst into a flood of tears when the captain died?

### A4. Learn Interesting Terms

We already know who a **narrator** is. The excerpt you have just read has been narrated by Jim Hawkins, a young boy who works at his family's inn.

**Do you think the story would have been different had it been narrated by the captain? What would the captain have talked about more?**

## CREATE

B. Read these sentences.

- Will you give me your hand, my kind young friend, and **lead** me in?
- Lead** exposure is harmful for health.

The words highlighted in the above sentences are spelled the same, pronounced slightly differently and have very different meanings. They are homographs.

**Homographs** are words that have the same spelling, slightly different pronunciations and entirely different meanings.

