

# Stranded at Sea

The incredible survival of 11 sailors shipwrecked in enemy-held territory during World War II

## About the Story

Lexile: 880L

For qualitative complexity factors, go to Scope Online.

**Learning Objective:** to explore key ideas and details in a narrative nonfiction article

**Key Skills:** interpreting text, key ideas and details, inference, text structure

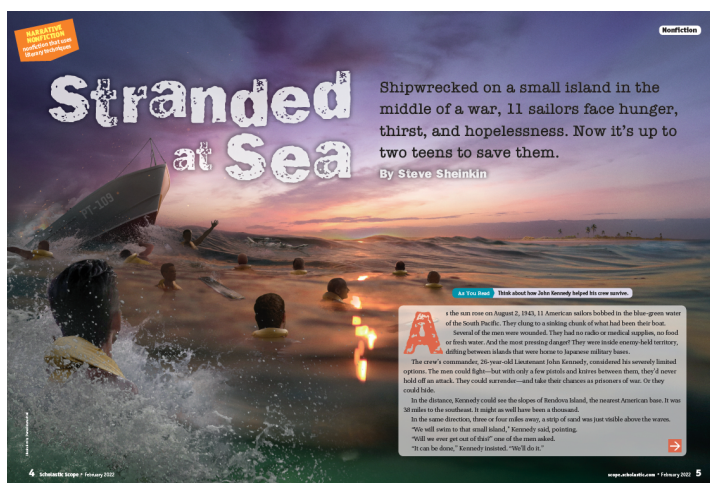
**Essential Questions:**

- What does it take to survive?
- What makes a good leader?
- What are the consequences of war?

**Standards:**

The article and lesson support these Common Core anchor standards: R.1, R.2, R.3, R.4, R.5, R.7, W.3, W.9, SL.1, L.4, L.5, L.6

For more standards information—including TEKS—go to Scope Online.



## Your Teaching Support Package

Find your full suite of support materials at [scope.scholastic.com](https://scope.scholastic.com).

### Audio:

- Author read-aloud
- Text-to-speech

### Video: Behind the Scenes

### Vocabulary Slideshow

### Differentiated Articles:

- Lower-Lexile version
- Spanish language version

### Connected narrative nonfiction from the Scope archives:

- "Trapped in a Cave"
- "Lost in the Woods"
- "The Children's Blizzard"
- "The Race Against Death"
- "Disaster in Space"

### Skill Building Activities to print, project, or share digitally:

- Preparing to Write: Kennedy's Heroism
- Close Reading and Critical Thinking
- Vocabulary: Definitions
- Video Discussion Questions
- Nonfiction Elements
- **Core Skills Workout:** Summarizing\*, Text Features, Text Structures
- Quiz\*
- Contest Entry Form

\*Available on two levels



# Step-by-Step Lesson

Close Reading, Critical Thinking, Skill Building

## 1. Preparing to Read

15 minutes

### Watch the Video (10 minutes)

- Watch the **Behind the Scenes** video, in which author Steve Sheinkin talks about his writing and research process. Have students respond to the **Video Discussion Questions** (available in your Resources tab) in small groups or pairs.

### Preview Vocabulary (5 minutes)

- Project the **Vocabulary Slideshow** on your whiteboard. Review the definitions and complete the activity as a class. Highlighted words: *bow*, *intercept*, *marooned*, *pampered*, *port*, *retching*, *skippers*, *supply barge*. (Optionally, share the slideshow link directly to your LMS and have students preview the words and complete the activity independently beforehand.) The audio pronunciations of the words and a read-aloud of the definitions are embedded on the slides.

## 2. Reading and Discussing

45 minutes

- Have a volunteer read the As You Read box on page 5 of the magazine or at the top of the digital story page.
- Read the article once as a class. (*Differentiation: Share the **lower-Lexile version** or the **Spanish version** of the article.*) Optionally, have students listen to Steve Sheinkin read his article aloud while they follow along. The **audio read-aloud** is located in the Resources tab in Teacher View and at the top of the story page in Student View.
- Divide students into groups to read the article again and respond to the following close-reading questions.

### Close-Reading Questions

(15 minutes)

*The following questions can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. In the introduction, author Steve Sheinkin writes of Rendova Island, “It was 38 miles to the southeast. It might as well have been a thousand.” What does he mean? (interpreting text) Sheinkin means that whether Rendova Island was 38 miles away or 1,000 miles away, the situation for the crew of PT 109 would be equally dire. Sheinkin is emphasizing that there was no way the men would be able to reach Rendova Island, the closest American base, because it was simply too far away.
2. Sheinkin writes that Kennedy towed McMahon “toward the tiny island he could only pray was uninhabited.” Why would Kennedy hope for the island to be uninhabited? (key ideas and details, inference) PT 109 was sunk inside enemy-held territory, drifting between islands that were home to Japanese military bases. For this reason, anyone the crew might have encountered on the island was likely to be not a friend, but a foe—either the Japanese or someone aligned with the Axis powers who might take the Americans as prisoners of war or attack them.
3. How does the section “A Real Big Night” contribute to the article? (text structure) The section “A Real Big Night” establishes the setting and context for the events described in the introduction. It not only helps readers understand why American sailors were in the South Pacific conducting such an operation, but also foreshadows why the operation would not go according to plan: darkness.
4. Sheinkin writes that the Solomon Islands of the South Pacific were “one small corner of the vast global conflict that was World War II.” What does this line help readers understand about World War II? Where else is this idea supported in the article? (interpreting text, key ideas and details) This line helps readers understand that World War II was an intense conflict that involved virtually every part of the world. This idea is also supported by the newspaper headline and photo that depict Japan’s bombings of Hawaii and Guam. Additionally, in the section “War Hero,” Sheinkin writes that though the story of PT 109 appeared in American newspapers, it was “swamped by other news as the Allies fought their way to victory in World War II.”

### Critical-Thinking Question

(5 minutes)

*The following question can be shared in printable or interactive form.*

1. What dangers did the PT 109 crew face while shipwrecked? What enabled them to survive? Answers will vary, but students may say that it was the crew’s grit and ability to problem-solve, along with chance or luck, that helped them survive. Nine of the men used a plank

from the wreckage of PT 109 to help them swim to a distant island. For the long swim, Kennedy made a rope out of MacMahon's life vest and held it in his teeth to tow the wounded man to the island. Once on the island, the crew had no food or water. They dug in the sand for fresh water to no avail, so they licked water droplets from leaves and then swam to a second island, where they found a few coconuts. At night, Kennedy and Ross swam out to deep and dangerous waters in hopes of getting closer to where a boat might pass that they could signal to. They also swam to nearby islands looking for food and water. This leadership and determination likely played a key role in the group's survival. Perhaps most important, chance allowed them to cross paths with Gasa and Kumana, receive life-saving nourishment, and get a message via coconut shell to Rendova that allowed them to be rescued.

### 3. Skill Building and Writing

30 minutes

- Have students complete **Preparing to Write: Kennedy's Heroism**. This activity will help them organize their ideas in preparation for the writing prompt on page 10 in the printed magazine and at the bottom of the digital story page.

Connected narrative nonfiction from the *Scope* archives about survival:

- ["Trapped in a Cave" \(November 2021\)](#)
- ["Lost in the Woods" \(September 2020\)](#)
- ["The Children's Blizzard" \(February 2019\)](#)
- ["Race Against Death" \(October 2018\)](#)
- ["Disaster in Space" \(December 2016/January 2017\)](#)