

Marine Biology

Frank had surfed for as long as he could remember.

A tall and thin, but athletic guy, he grew up in the sleepy beach town of Montauk, New York, at the very tip of Long Island. His parents, who owned a popular seafood restaurant on Main Street, had first put him on a board at age three or four. Some of his first memories involved sliding down a wave in the sun, seated at the front of his dad's longboard.

During the winter, Montauk had great waves. In fact, they were considered some of the best on the East Coast of the United States. But the water was so cold, a wetsuit was required. And while the waves in the summer weren't too bad, either, they were nothing compared to the waves in Southern California.

As a boy, Frank and his friends subscribed to all the big surf magazines. They dreamed of surfing big waves on the North Shore of Oahu, Hawaii, or at Teahupo'o on the island of Tahiti. Their pal Clay, who moved to Montauk from Santa Barbara, California in middle school, filled their heads with stories of surfing in his hometown.

"Sometimes the waves got as high as 20 feet!" he'd say, causing Frank and his surfing buddies to gasp. Clay, of course, had never actually surfed a 20-foot wave. But he had sat and watched as professional surfers paddled out, caught them, and rode them all the way to the shore.

At only 13, Frank saved up enough from his weekly allowance to buy a plane ticket to Los Angeles. His uncle, Jim, lived near Malibu, a small beach town north of L.A. He drove Frank out to a famous surf break near his bungalow in the hills.

Used to the small, easy waves of Montauk, Frank was intimidated by the booming surf. Standing on the beach, he could feel the pounding of the waves vibrating under his feet. He paddled out anyway. After a struggle, he

finally made it into the line-up. The other surfers in the water stared at him warily. They could tell he wasn't from California; his pale skin gave him away. But when Frank started paddling into a wave, they moved out of the way for him.

"Let's see what the kid can do," one of them said.

They all watched as Frank stood up. Almost as quickly, he was back in the water. The wave crashed over him, and sent Frank tumbling through the wake.

Frank wasn't discouraged. In fact, he was filled with optimism. As he gasped for air after the wipeout, he resolved to attend college in California. That way, whenever he wasn't studying, he could drive out to the beach and surf waves like this.

Eventually, he thought, he'd be able to handle them like Kelly Slater, the 11-time World Surfing Champion. Like anything, he thought, all it takes is practice.

So when it came time to apply to college, Frank looked only at schools bordering the ocean on the West Coast. His parents, who didn't like the idea of their son moving so far away, tried to convince him to stay closer to home.

"Parts of southern New Jersey have great waves," his dad said over pasta dinner one night.

"And don't forget the swells at Rockaway Beach," his mom added. "Ever since Hurricane Sandy, they've been getting bigger and bigger. If you went to New York University, Rockaway Beach is only 30 minutes away!"

But Frank had made up his mind. He applied to the University of California at Santa Cruz, the University of California at Santa Barbara, and Pepperdine University, which was located just a short drive from his uncle Jim's in Malibu. His grades and SAT scores were good enough that he was admitted to all three. He resorted to drawing straws.

“Pepperdine it is!” he shouted, as his mom and dad looked on from the couch. As much as they didn’t want him to be so far from home, they understood his dedication to surfing.

“Just remember: Studying before surfing,” his mom warned him. “Not everyone becomes a rich and famous professional surfer. You have to think about an actual career. After all, if you want to live near the beach when you’re older, you’re going to have to earn some money!”

“I know, Mom,” Frank said, giving her a hug. He promised to surf only once he’d finished his homework.

This proved harder than he had imagined.

After growing up in the choppy, waist-high surf of Long Island, the curling blue barrels of Southern California were a big distraction from the hard, lonely work of studying Chemistry 101 and the history of the Civil War. His first month at Pepperdine, he spent every morning surfing at world-famous beaches like Leo Carrillo and El Matador. Pretty soon, he was spending every late afternoon surfing there, too.

Due to the amount of time he spent in the ocean, he quickly befriended the local surfers from the area. A social, handsome guy as well as a talented surfer, Frank became popular in Malibu’s surfing community. While his college roommate made friends with other students, Frank found himself hanging out with people from town instead.

Needless to say, his obsession with surfing didn’t help his grades. When the waves were good, Frank would skip class to go out and ride them. And the better he got, the more he wanted to be out there.

“This is all I ever wanted out of life,” he told his new friends one night, as they roasted marshmallows around a bonfire on the beach. They smiled and nodded. They knew exactly what he meant. Several of them had dropped out of college to become what they called, “full-time surfers.”

Then one day he got a call from his advisor, a professor of marine biology, whose class Frank had skipped on many occasions.

"I'm looking at your attendance record here, Frank, and it's not pretty," Professor Blankfein began. "Over the last month, you've missed more than half of your scheduled classes. From my conversations with your professors, you're in danger of failing three out of four of your classes. Is there a problem I should know about?"

Frank was silent on the other line. He didn't know what to say. He was fully aware that he hadn't been showing up to class. But the fact that he might flunk out of college in his first semester, sent a chill through his body. It reminded him of the feeling of jumping into the sea in Montauk in mid-February. Having finally tasted the waves of Malibu, he certainly didn't want to return to those meager, freezing waves.

"I'm sorry, Professor Blankfein," Frank said, at last. "I don't know what's come over me. It's just, the waves out here...I think I've become obsessed with them."

Frank heard his marine biology professor laugh on the other line.

"I sympathize," he said. "I grew up surfing in New Jersey. Why do you think I work at Pepperdine, in the field of marine biology? I created a career that allows me to be in the water as much as I want. If you're serious about the ocean, you should start thinking about a career in marine biology."

Frank thanked his professor and hung up the phone. The thick marine biology textbook on his desk suddenly seemed full of possibility.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does Frank like to do?

- A Frank likes to study.
- B Frank likes going to seafood restaurants.
- C Frank likes to surf.
- D Frank likes taking the SAT.

2. What is the conflict that Frank has to deal with in college?

- A going surfing versus going to class
- B studying chemistry versus studying history
- C hanging out with his roommate versus hanging out with his friends
- D talking to his advisor versus talking to his parents

3. Frank enjoys surfing.

What evidence from the passage supports this statement?

- A Frank's parents own a popular seafood restaurant in New York.
- B Frank has an uncle named Jim who lives in a town north of L.A.
- C Frank is worried that he might flunk out of college in his first semester.
- D In his first month of college, Frank goes surfing every morning.

4. Why does the marine biology textbook seem full of possibility to Frank at the **end of** the story?

- A He realizes that a career in marine biology may allow him to spend his life around the ocean.
- B He is easily distracted from the hard, lonely work of studying the history of the Civil War.
- C He is a social, handsome guy who becomes popular in Malibu's surfing community.
- D When applying to college, Frank looks only at schools bordering the ocean on the West Coast.

5. What is this story mostly about?

- A what growing up in Montauk, New York is like
- B a trip a young man takes to California when he is 13
- C a young man who is obsessed with surfing
- D the steps involved in applying to college

6. Read the following sentence: "Needless to say, his **obsession** with surfing didn't help his grades."

What does the word **obsession** mean?

- A homework
- B weakness
- C a very strong interest in something
- D a very strong dislike of something

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Frank keeps skipping class; _____, Professor Blankfein gives him a call.

- A for example
- B as a result
- C namely
- D even though

8. What does Professor Blankfein tell Frank he should start thinking about?

9. Why does Professor Blankfein tell Frank he should start thinking about a career in marine biology?

10. Should Frank drop out of college to become a full-time surfer or stay in college to study marine biology? Explain your answer with evidence from the passage.

Teacher Guide & Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 890

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Suggested answer: Professor Blankfein tells Frank he should start thinking about a career in marine biology.

9. Why does Professor Blankfein tell Frank he should start thinking about a career in marine biology?

Suggested answer: Professor Blankfein tells Frank he should start thinking about a career in marine biology because it would allow him to be in the ocean as much as he wants.

10. Should Frank drop out of college to become a full-time surfer or stay in college to study marine biology? Explain your answer with evidence from the passage.

Suggested answer: Students may argue for either option, as long as their answers are supported by evidence from the story. Those arguing that Frank should become a full-time surfer may point out that Frank considers surfing more important to him than anything else. "‘This is all I ever wanted out of life,'" he says. Conversely, students may argue that staying in college to study marine biology will serve Frank better in the long run. As his advisor indicates, such a career would allow Frank to be in the water as much as he wants.