

UNIT 2

READING COMPREHENSION 1

Reading text

¹ For anyone who has seen *Pirates of the Caribbean* or read Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, the **lure** of lost treasure ships **laden** with gold, silver, precious jewels, and priceless antiquities will take them back to the colonial period of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Spanish and Portuguese explorers conquered the Americas and sailed back to Europe with their bounty. If it's big treasure you're after, however, you might turn your attention to the lost treasure ships of the twentieth century. Between the two world wars, luxury liners, armored warships, merchant **vessels**, and freighters carried more than 700 tons of gold from war-torn Europe to safe havens in North America. Many, like the RMS *Titanic*, RMS *Lusitania*, and HMS *Edinburgh*, met with enemy attack or natural catastrophe and sank to the bottom of the sea. To this day, few treasure ships have ever been recovered.

² Of the estimated three million shipwrecks scattered over the ocean floor, only the most commercially attractive ones have captured the attention of treasure hunters and salvors. The most legendary is the *RMS Titanic*. On April 14, 1915, the 882-foot, 46,392-ton luxury liner **collided** with an iceberg and sank on its maiden voyage from Southampton, England, to New York City. Of the 2,223 people on board, 1,517 died in the tragedy. Lost but not forgotten, the *Titanic* and its treasures began to attract potential salvors in the 1960s, but it was not until the 1980s that Texas millionaire Jack Grimm undertook three separate expeditions, only to find no trace of the ship's **remains**.

³ On September 1, 1985, a French-American project located the *Titanic*, and in 1987, with the use of the submersible *Nautilus*, salvors recovered an abundance of artifacts. A total of 5,500 objects were brought up from the **wreck**, including personal belongings of the passengers and crew, memorabilia, collectibles, porcelain, furniture, fixtures, ship parts, and **miscellaneous** articles of more value to historians, archaeologists, and museum visitors than to fortune seekers. *Titanic: The Artifact*

Exhibition, the largest display of recovered artifacts from the ship, is on permanent display at the Luxor Hotel in Las Vegas, Nevada. In addition to more than 300 objects, the exhibit features stories of the passengers and a full-scale reproduction of the liner's Grand Staircase. Other expeditions, a few of which are listed in the table below, have been more rewarding than the discovery of the *Titanic*.

⁴ As adventure some as it may seem, the hunt for treasure ships has always faced major challenges. Until the 1950s, treasure hunters had difficulty locating shipwrecks that lay thousands of meters deep in dark and dangerous waters. At the turn of the century, failure often resulted from the hit-and-miss process of dragging wire nets and lines from two or more ships across the seafloor until they caught on something. In 1918, the joint English-French Anti-Submarine Detection Investigation Committee (ASDIC) located enemy submarines by sending out sound pulses through the water. This revolutionary technique was used to locate the *Lusitania*, which sank off the coast of Ireland after a German U-boat attack on May 7, 1915. Echo-sounding **evolved** by the 1960s into sonar, which became a standard feature of marine navigation. In addition to side-scan sonar, searchers can now employ sub-bottom profilers to image objects buried beneath layers of sediment. Modern satellite global positioning systems (GPS) can accurately determine the location of a lost ship in an area as small as 500 square miles.

⁵ Once a ship has been located, divers are sent to access the wreck, but their safety and success depend on suitable equipment. Pioneer divers had to wear heavy canvas suits, a copper helmet, lead boots weighing 40 pounds each, and lead weights of 16 pounds to **counteract** buoyancy. They could safely reach a maximum depth of only 200 feet. The time they could spend under water and the speed at which they could surface without suffering from the "bends" were severely limited. In the 1940s, renowned French oceanographer Jacques Cousteau and associate Émile Gagnan developed the Aqua-Lung, or oxygen tank. This improvement in diver safety and mobility made diving more popular and treasure hunting more **feasible**.

⁶ Cousteau also contributed to the development of saturation diving, which allowed divers to live and work from a protected sea habitat. Using a small manned submarine called a submersible, divers are able to **withstand** external pressure at depths up to 20,000 feet and to work under water for up to three days. Originally developed for scientific and military purposes, submersibles are equipped with robotic

arms to recover objects and to investigate areas of a wreck that would otherwise pose physical peril to divers.

⁷ Although advanced technology has made it easier for treasure hunters to find, access, investigate, and even raise sunken ships, there is no guarantee of success. A ship of interest can lie amid other wrecks, making it impossible to detect or distinguish. With the passage of time, sand and mud cover wreckage and the forces of nature **erode** and decompose steel, iron, wood, and other materials. Rugged, shifting terrain, as well as adverse marine and weather conditions, increase the risks of disaster to search crews.

⁸ The exact nature and value of a ship's cargo is often **subject to** a great deal of speculation. Since records were not always kept, particularly in wartime, the details of a ship's cargo could be anybody's guess. Even if treasure hunters have deep-enough pockets and a broad time horizon to go on their quest, they have a good chance of ending up with no legal claim to their booty. Laws governing the ownership of shipwrecks and their contents and the right of salvage are complex, and no international agreements exist. Opponents of commercial salvage condemn these attempts as the **desecration** of graves, while some archaeologists argue that these sites should be preserved in their virgin state.

⁹ Despite the many obstacles, there are adventurers who cannot resist the lure of lost treasure. It is the sea, however, that remains in possession of these **doomed** vessels, and the sea is reluctant to give them up.