

TOEFL iBT® Online Prep Course | Activity 3

Reading



Reading > Lesson 3: Inference Questions > Exercise 3.2

DIRECTIONS: Read the passage and the inference questions that follow. Mark the choice that best answers each question.

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For as long as ships have carried cargoes worth stealing, there have been pirates willing to steal them. From about 1660 to 1725, the crime of piracy was a major problem in American waters. Pirates were seafaring armed robbers, both a nuisance and threat to merchant ships. Interestingly, pirates in the West Indies were called buccaneers, because the first

nuisance and threat to merchant ships. Interestingly, pirates in the West Indies were called buccaneers, because the first of them were men of questionable reputation from the mountains who cooked their meat by slow-smoking it. To cook by this method is to "boucaner" in French; the term became generalized in noun form to refer to any pirate.

The commercial wars of the 1600s attracted men to maritime robbery. To save money on naval expenditures, France, Holland, Spain, and England commissioned privateers, well-armed privately owned ships. Privateers, for a percentage of the profits, were licensed to attack the enemy's merchant fleet. Privateering was so lucrative that when peace treaties were signed, some privateers found it difficult to give up the trade. They went on to steal from ships without regard to the flag their victims flew. In 1701, the British punished Captain William Kidd, a New Yorker, for piracy. Just a few years earlier, they had issued him the privateer's Letters of Marque and Reprisal--a letter of marque gives permission to cross into another country's territory to take a ship; a letter of reprisal authorizes taking the captured vessel to the home port of the capturer.

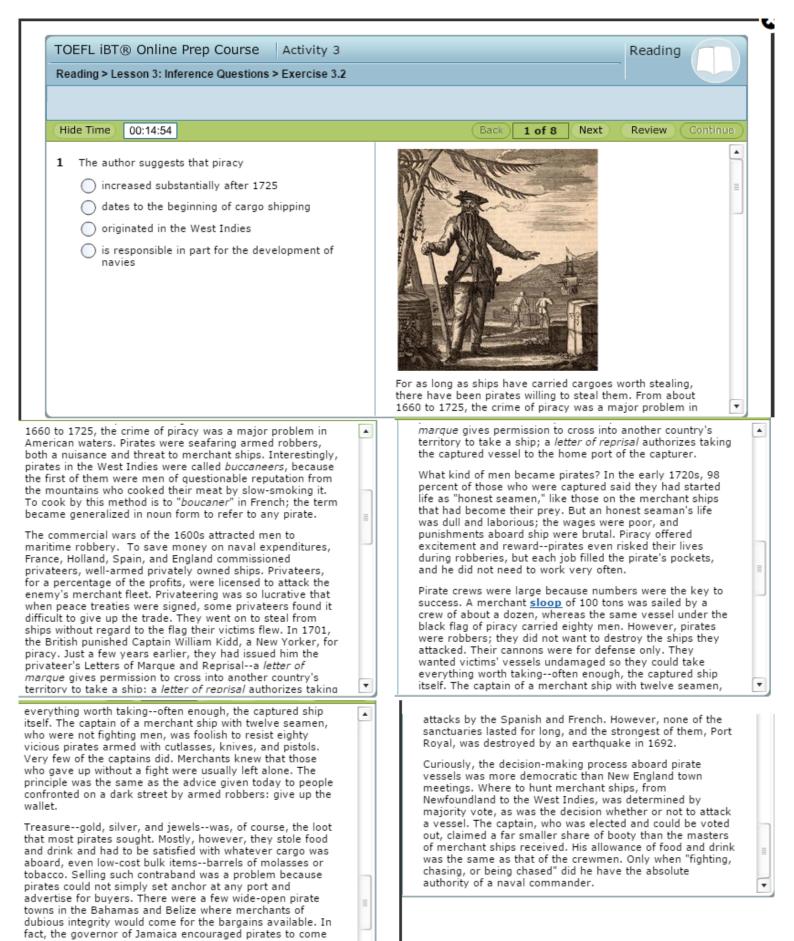
What kind of men became pirates? In the early 1720s, 98 percent of those who were captured said they had started life as "honest seamen," like those on the merchant ships that had become their prey. But an honest seaman's life was dull and laborious; the wages were poor, and punishments aboard ship were brutal. Piracy offered excitement and reward-pirates even risked their lives during robberies, but each job filled the pirate's pockets, and he did not need to work very

Pirate crews were large because numbers were the key to success. A merchant sloop of 100 tons was sailed by a crew of about a dozen, whereas the same vessel under the black flag of piracy carried eighty men. However, pirates were robbers; they did not want to destroy the ships they attacked. Their cannons were for defense only. They wanted victims' vessels undamaged so they could take everything worth taking--often enough, the captured ship itself. The captain of a

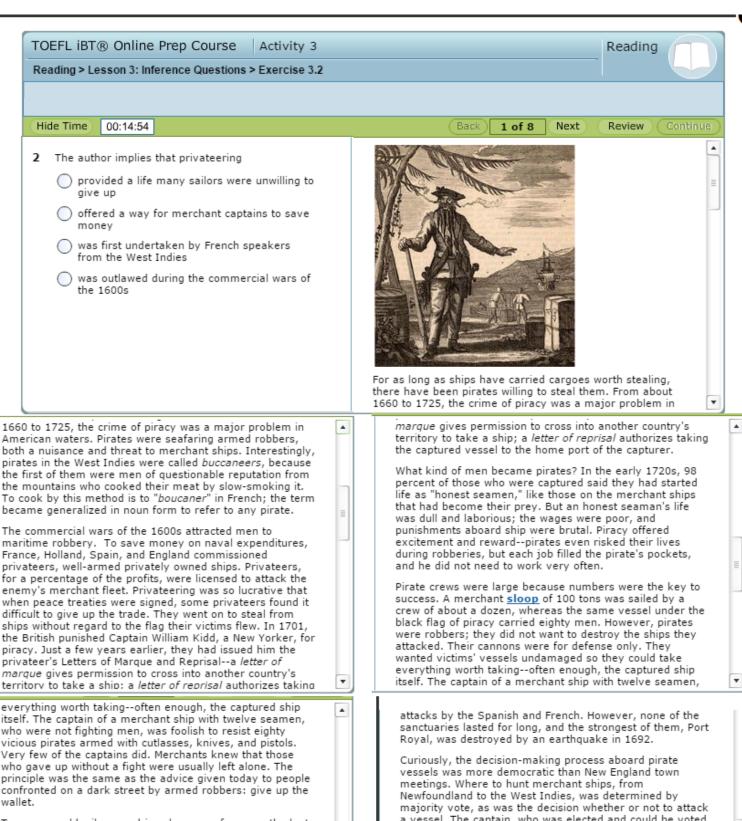
vessels undamaged so they could take everything worth taking--often enough, the captured ship itself. The captain of a merchant ship with twelve seamen, who were not fighting men, was foolish to resist eighty vicious pirates armed with cutlasses, knives, and pistols. Very few of the captains did. Merchants knew that those who gave up without a fight were usually left alone. The principle was the same as the advice given today to people confronted on a dark street by armed robbers: give up the wallet.

Treasure--gold, silver, and jewels--was, of course, the loot that most pirates sought. Mostly, however, they stole food and drink and had to be satisfied with whatever cargo was aboard, even low-cost bulk items--barrels of molasses or tobacco. Selling such contraband was a problem because pirates could not simply set anchor at any port and advertise for buyers. There were a few wide-open pirate towns in the Bahamas and Belize where merchants of dubious integrity would come for the bargains available. In fact, the governor of Jamaica encouraged pirates to come to Port Royal; armed pirate ships in the harbor discouraged attacks by the Spanish and French. However, none of the sanctuaries lasted for long, and the strongest of them, Port Royal, was destroyed by an earthquake in 1692.

Curiously, the decision-making process aboard pirate vessels was more democratic than New England town meetings. Where to hunt merchant ships, from Newfoundland to the West Indies, was determined by majority vote, as was the decision whether or not to attack a vessel. The captain, who was elected and could be voted out, claimed a far smaller share of booty than the masters of merchant ships received. His allowance of food and drink was the same as that of the crewmen. Only when "fighting, chasing, or being chased" did he have the absolute authority of a naval commander.



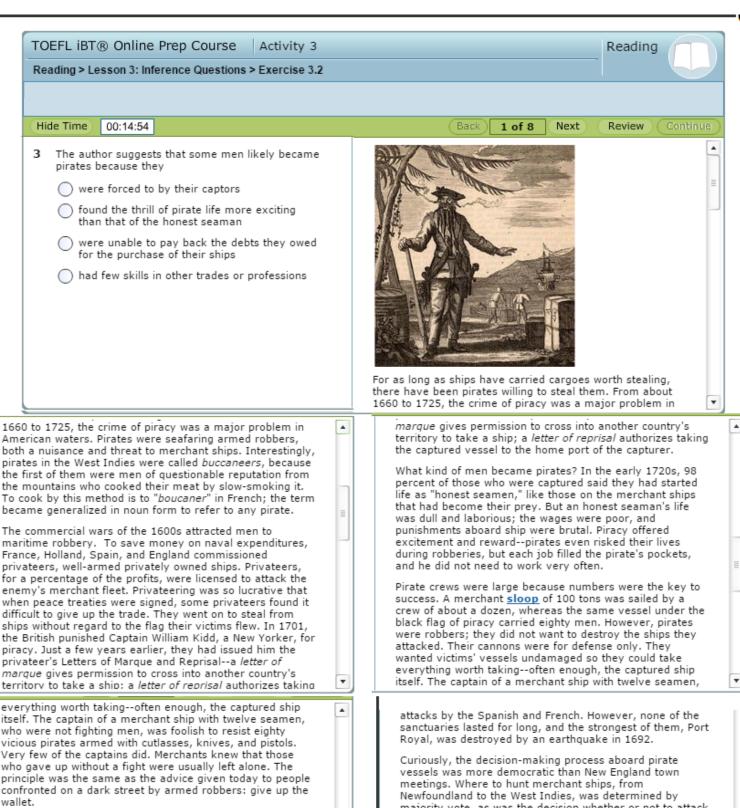
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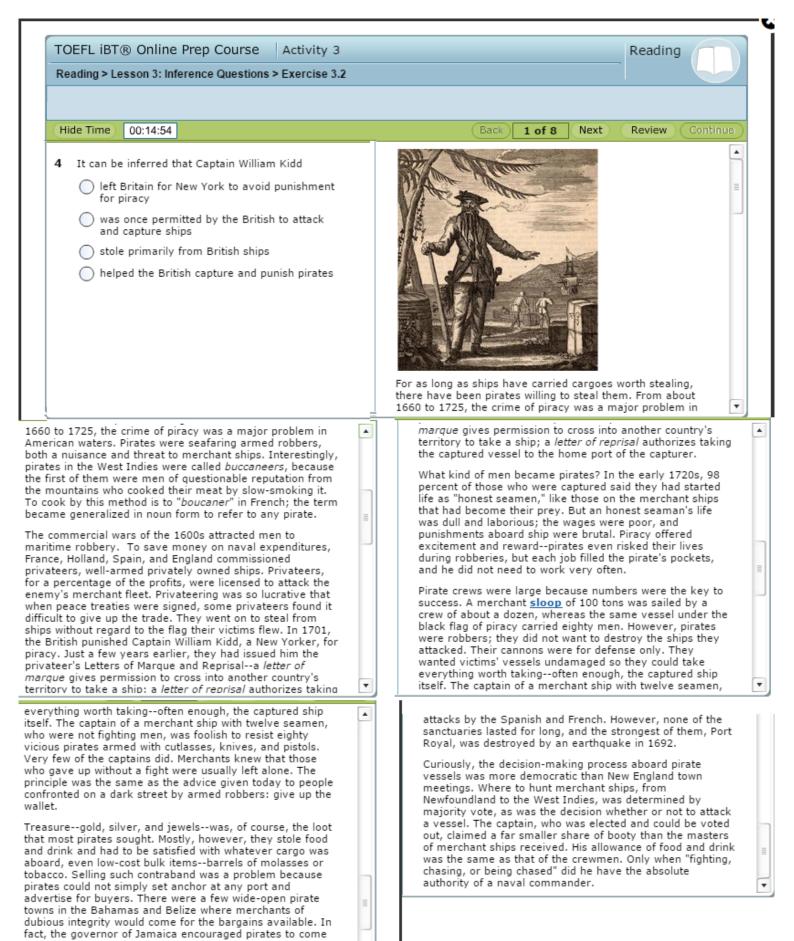
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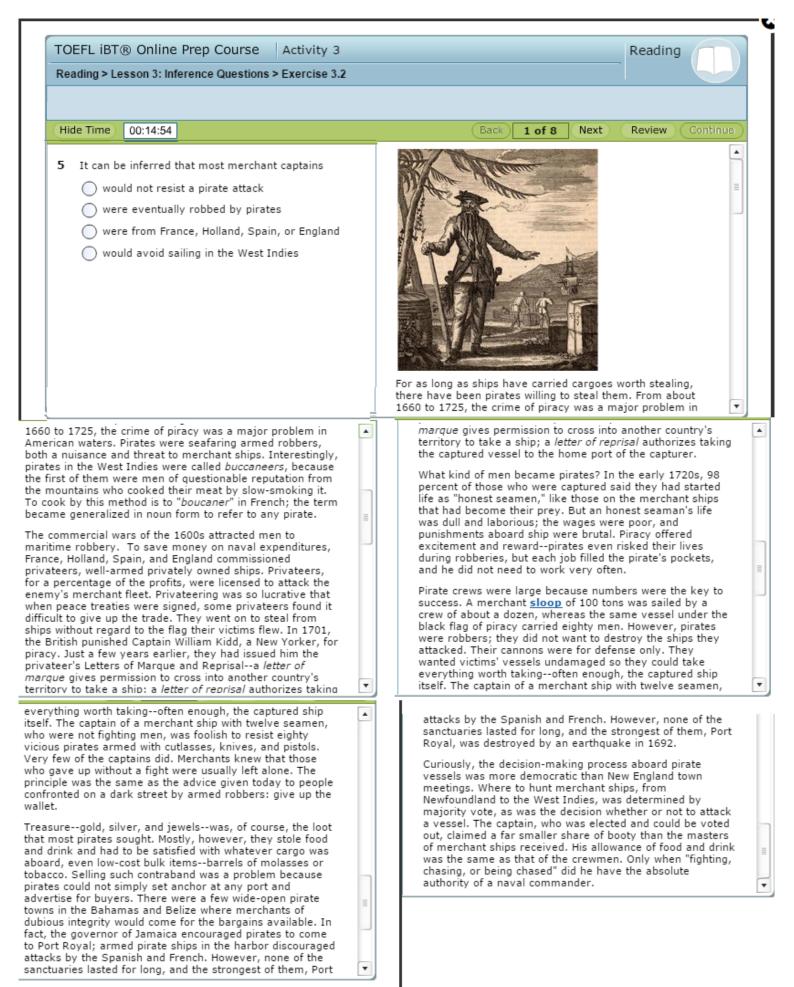
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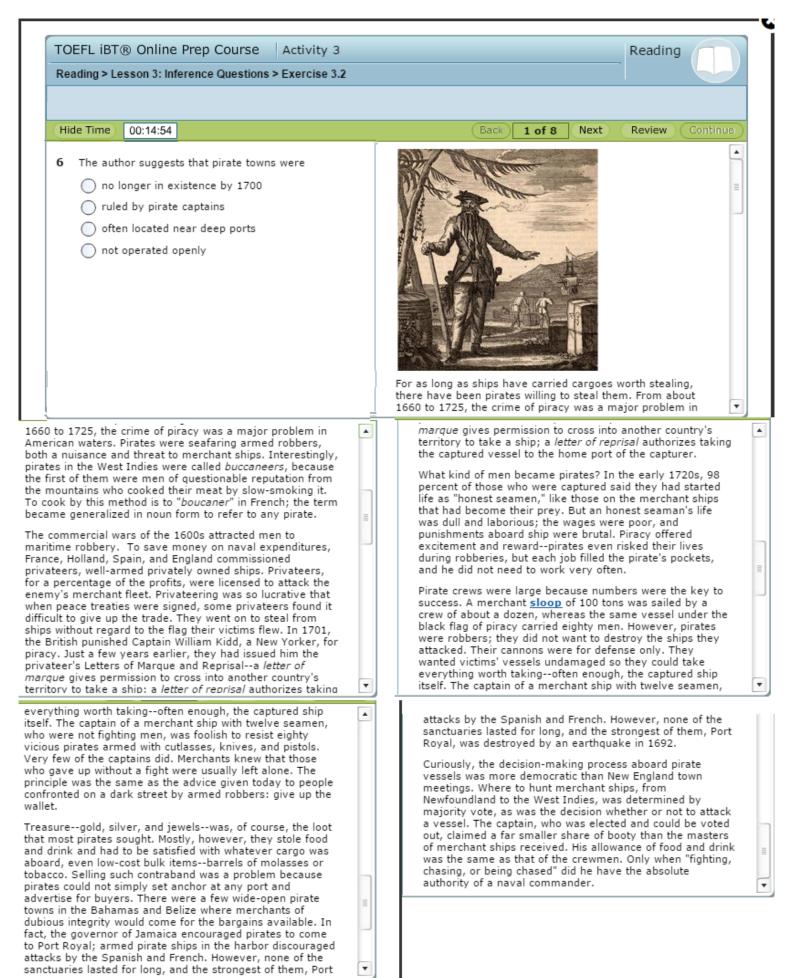
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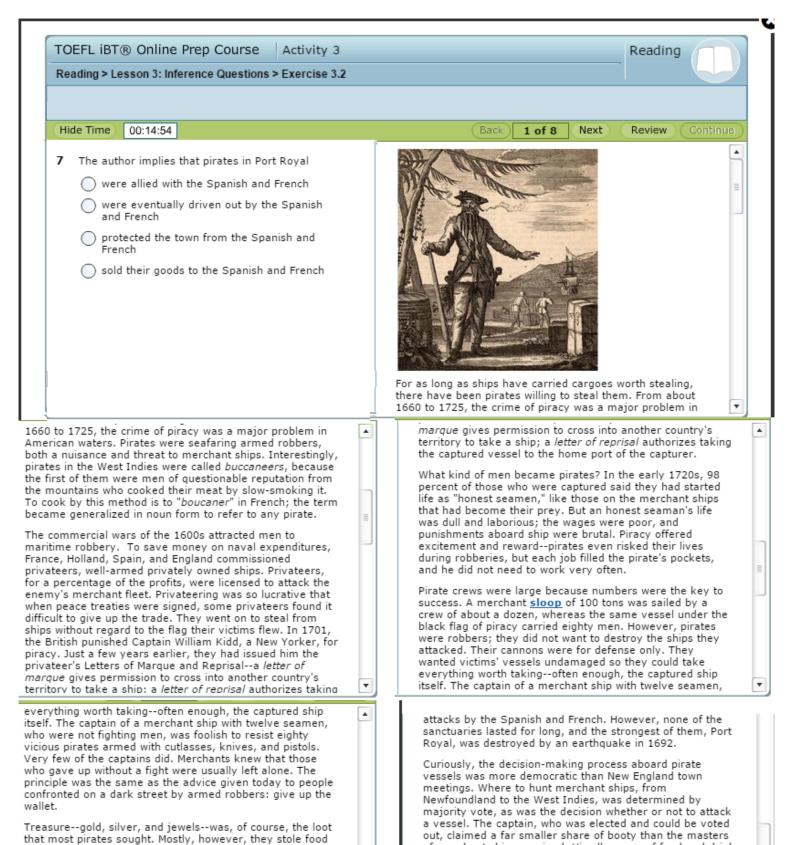
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