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THE SIRENS' CALL

A short story for
learning to learn



The Sirens' Call

- **Topic:** Managing attention and resisting distractions
- **Reading time:** 20 minutes
- **Level:** 8-12 years old

SUMMARY

Melina is a member of Odysseus' crew and dreams of exploring the world. But during a perilous passage, the ship approaches the Sirens, mythological creatures whose song bewitches the sailors and prevents them from reaching their destination. Melina will have to learn to control her attention, avoid distractions and stay on course to bring her crew safely to port.

KEY WORDS

Attention, distraction, focus, goal, objective, resist

Chapter 1: The Odyssey

The sun reflected off the sparkling water as the ship ploughed through the waves. **Melina**, perched on the bow, feels her heart pounding with excitement. For weeks, she has been sailing with **Odysseus' crew** across the immense sea, each wave a promise of adventure.

‘Soon we'll reach Ithaca!’ exclaims one of the sailors.

‘If we don't let ourselves get sidetracked’, adds another, lowering his voice.

Melina frowns. She has already experienced various of the many dangers of the journey. But there is one that particularly worries the crew: the Sirens. These mythical creatures sing a melody so haunting that anyone who hears it forgets everything and is stranded on the rocks.



Chapter 2: An Irresistible Distraction

‘Soon we'll be passing the Sirens' Island’, announces **Odysseus**. ‘Plug your ears with wax so you don't hear their song.’

Everyone complies. All except Odysseus, who wants to hear the melody without succumbing to its power. He asks the crew to tie him to the mast to prevent him from changing course.

Melina is curious. She wants to hear this song that everyone is talking about. Maybe she can **resist** it too? But as she discreetly removes a little wax from her ear, a soft, bewitching melody seeps into her mind.

The world around her disappears: the ship, the journey, even her **goal** of going back to Ithaca. Just this beautiful, soothing music. A voice whispers to her:

‘O sailors lost at sea,
Let your souls glide towards us.

Listen to our golden voices,
They sing the secrets of the heavens and the seas.

Abandon the fickle wind,
Drop the oar, forget the sail.’

She then notices the ship is moving more slowly. Other sailors begin to waver. Some remove their wax, believing they can listen without losing control. But as soon as they do, they stop rowing and dive for the Sirens.

Chapter 3: Getting back on course

Melina feels her body shaking. Her feet slip on the deck. She's about to head for the edge of the ship... But a voice echoes in her head:

‘Keep your goal in mind. Remember why you're here.’

It sounds like Odysseus' voice. Or maybe her own. Melina shakes her head. No, she can't let herself be distracted. But the song is so powerful and the temptation to join the Sirens is growing. How can she break the spell?

She remembers something Odysseus once said: **‘When the sea is rough, fix your eyes on the horizon to steady yourself.’**

‘That’s it, I need an anchor!’ she thinks.

Her hands are trembling, her thoughts feel scattered—but she **chooses one thing to focus on**. The ropes of the mast. She stares at them, tracing their twists and knots with her eyes. She presses her hands against the wood, feeling its rough surface beneath her fingertips.

‘I’m here. I’m holding on. The boat is moving forward, she tells herself.’

She takes a deep breath, then another, matching the rhythm of the waves. Inhale... exhale... like the tide rolling in and out.

Little by little, the music starts to fade. The more she focuses on real, tangible things—the ropes, the mast, her breath—the weaker the Sirens’ song becomes.

When she finally comes to her senses, she realises that she has wrapped her arms tightly around the mast. She has anchored herself—and she has resisted.



Chapter 4: The Power of Attention

Melina runs to her companions, her heart pounding. The Sirens’ song is fading in her mind, but around her, her companions are still caught by their call. A few reach trembling hands towards their ears to remove the wax and listen.

‘No!’ Melina shouts. ‘Stay with me!’

The crew is bewitched by the Sirens and seem not to notice her at all. How can she help them resist?

She remembers how she fought the song herself. Instead of trying to push away the song with force, **she gave her mind something stronger to hold on**.

‘Look at me! Focus on the rocking of the boat, the sea spray on your face, the sound of my voice!’

One by one, the sailors lift their heads. Their hands reach out for the roars.

‘Feel the rhythm of the waves: breath in, and out. Remember: we must reach Ithaca; our families are waiting for us.’

Their hands grip the oars more firmly. The rhythm returns. The ship moves forward again, its course steady.

Behind them, the Sirens' song twists into frustrated howls as the ship slips beyond their reach. The cursed island shrinks into the distance. The air lightens, as if a weight has lifted from their chests.

Still tied to the mast, Odysseus gives a proud smile.

‘You resisted the distractions. You have regained control of your attention. That’s how you reach your goal.’

Melina turns to the open sea, the wind filling the sail. She’s convinced: she will reach Ithaca.

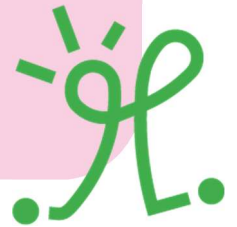


Today, I learnt...

Distractions are everywhere, and they can make us lose sight of what's important.

But Melina taught us to:

- Identify what captures our attention,
- Understand the impact of distractions on our progress,
- Refocus on the task by using our senses (sound, touch, view).



MASTER YOUR MIND

Question 1

Melina was almost swept away by the song of the Sirens, but she managed to refocus on her objective. **If you're in the middle of a task and you get distracted, what can you do to regain your concentration?**

1. Look at a fixed point or mentally repeat your objective.
2. Accept the distraction and postpone the task.
3. Change your activity completely, hoping to come back to it later.



Some people use visual cues or key phrases to refocus (like Melina staring at the last), others take a moment to breathe before resuming.

Question 2

Why did Odysseus choose to be tied to the mast before passing by the Sirens?

1. To show that he was stronger than the others.
2. Because he knew he could be tempted and put in place a strategy not to give in.
3. Because he found it amusing.



Odysseus knew he couldn't rely on willpower alone and anticipated the difficulty by putting up a physical barrier. In life, we can also create strategies to avoid certain distractions, like putting your phone away when you're working.

Question 3

Doing several things at once may seem efficient, but it often leads to more mistakes. Some people prefer to finish one task before starting another, while others alternate between two activities with planned breaks.



Have you ever noticed which method works best for you? Do you have any tips that you would like to share with your classmates?

TOOLBOX

These tools can help you in the way you learn.

We all learn in different ways.

Choose the tool that best suits your needs.

You can download the tools on the website of the project.

1/ Attention barometer

Objective: Assess your attention level

The attention barometer enables to assess your attention level before taking a task. You can then analyse it with your teacher to decide how you can adjust the activity to match your attention.

2/ The motivational map

Objective: Self-awareness, self-assessment, target setting, reflection, adjustment of learning strategies

The motivational map helps you understand what motivates you most to learn, so that the course can be adapted to your interests and needs. Your teacher can guide you. This way, you will more easily keep your interest and perform better. It's a tool that makes learning more personal and effective.



CogniQuest is a project created by organisations and schools from Belgium, Croatia, France, Greece and Poland.

Together, they have developed tools to help you think about your thinking. This is called metacognition - a fancy word that means “learning how to learn”.

Through these tales, you’ll discover different ways to solve problems, stay focused, and reflect on how you learn best.

Explore the whole CogniQuest collections on the website of the project:

www.cogniquet.eu



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