

Unit 2, Lesson 1

Unit Title: Founders & Settlers

Task: Text Annotation and Key Ideas

Name _____

Directions Use logographic symbols and written thinking to annotate the text below.

The symbols will be useful in guiding your initial reactions (*I agree! This is confusing. What?*), but the phrases, questions, and connections that you write on the text are proof of thinking.

"This is interesting," I said a few minutes later. "I was sitting here thinking about the way our ancestors lived, and a very specific image popped into my head fully formed."

Ishmael waited for me to go on.

"It has a sort of dreamlike quality to it. Or nightmarish. A man is scabbling along a ridge at twilight. In this world it's always twilight. The man is short, thin, dark, and naked. He's running in a half crouch, looking for tracks. He's hunting, and he's desperate. Night is falling and he's got nothing to eat."

I continued: "He's running and running and running, as if he were on a treadmill. It is a treadmill, because tomorrow at twilight he'll be there running still-or running again. But there's more than hunger and desperation driving him. He's terrified as well. Behind him on the ridge, just out of sight, his enemies are in pursuit to tear him to pieces-the lions, the wolves, the tigers. And so he has to stay on that treadmill forever, forever one step behind his prey and one step ahead of his enemies.

"The ridge, of course, represents the knife-edge of survival. The man lives on the knife-edge of survival and has to struggle perpetually to keep from falling off. Actually it's as though the ridge and the sky are in motion instead of him. He's running in place, trapped, going nowhere."

"In other words," said Ishmael, "hunter-gatherers lead a very grim life."

"Yes."

"And why is it grim?"

"Because it's a struggle just to stay alive."

"But in fact it isn't anything of the kind," replied Ishmael. "I'm sure you know that in another compartment of your mind. Hunter-gatherers no more live on the knife-edge of survival than wolves or lions or sparrows or rabbits. Man was as well adapted to life on this planet as any other species, and the idea that he lived on the knife-edge of survival is simply biological nonsense. As an omnivore, his dietary range is immense. Thousands of species will go hungry before he does. His intelligence and dexterity enable him to live comfortably in conditions that would utterly defeat any other primate.

"Far from scabbling endlessly and desperately for food, hunter-gatherers are among the best-fed people on earth, and they manage this with only two or three hours a day of what you would call work-which makes them among the most leisured people on earth as well."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Quinn, Daniel. *Ishmael: An Adventure of the Mind and Spirit*. New York: Bantam/Turner, 1992.