

My heart is thumping so fast, I feel like it wants to jump right out of my chest. My shoulder muscles are aching and my hands burn as they pull the oars. Behind me, I can hear Jim counting the strokes – two hundred and ten, two hundred and eleven ... As I lean backwards on each stroke, I can sense my ponytail brushing the floor of the boat – swish, swish, swish. The boat is rocking like crazy, and I wonder if I'm going to be thrown out. A sudden rush of ice-cold water hits me in the face, and drips down my cheeks, but I don't even blink. I have to keep going, no matter what. A small silvery fish flies past my face, just missing my nose. I want to give up, but I can hear Beth's voice from what feels like a million miles away.

'Keep going, Molly. You can do it. Don't stop now – you can't let the team down. We're almost there.'

It seems like a million years have passed before I hear the most beautiful sound in the world – the bell announcing the end of the race. I let go of the oars, and before I have time to check my hands for blisters, Beth is hugging me.

'We did it!' she shrieks. 'We did it!'

My legs are a bit wobbly as I climb out of the boat so I quickly sit down on the grass next to the washing line. Mum hands me a glass of water.

'Well done, darling,' she says. 'All you needed were three hundred strokes in your ten minutes, and you even went over that! You and Beth have beaten Jim and me in the Saturday challenge – again!'

I don't know what it feels like to row the whole way across the Atlantic, but I wonder if it feels a bit like this?

Even though I was rowing a battered old dinghy that Jim found in a skip somewhere.

Even though the boat was on the grass, and Mum had been rocking it from side to side while I rowed.

Even though the spray of water came from the garden hose that Jim was holding.

Even though the only fish in the garden came from an old fishing game Beth had found in the shed.

Even though the finishing bell was a saucepan and a wooden spoon.

Beth was dancing around the garden, singing 'We are the champions.' Mum and Jim were laughing like little kids. I lay back on the grass and tried to catch my breath.

My best friend Beth and her dad moved in with Mum and me ages ago. At first that was really weird, but now I was getting used to it, and sometimes I can hardly remember a time when they didn't live with us. Like all dads, Jim can be a bit annoying sometimes, but he comes up with the craziest and best ideas. The Saturday challenge was in its third week, and it was always Mum and Jim against Beth and me. The rules were a bit vague, but no one cared – mostly we were all too busy laughing for anything else to matter.

The first week, Jim set up a very complicated obstacle course in the garden, where you had to run the first half in odd wellies, and the second half with a glass of water in your pocket. The second week, we all had to pretend to be horses, jumping over bamboo canes propped up on kitchen chairs, with extra points for the best horsey sound effects. These things might sound a bit lame and stupid, but as long as you know there's no one planning to make a video and post it on YouTube, they are really, really fun.

After a while, everyone calmed down.

'That was so brilliant, Jim,' I said. 'I think that was the best challenge ever.'

'Thanks, Molly,' he said. 'I do my best – and wait till you see what I've got planned for next week.'

'Tell us, please, Dad!' said Beth. 'I don't think I can wait a whole week to find out.'

'Sorry, sweetie-pie,' he said as he put his arm around her. 'You're just going to have to be patient. Now let's go inside, I think it's time we ordered that takeaway you've been promised. How about we get a big pot of Irish stew?'

### Words in context

1. Find and highlight the words in the text: wobbly, vague, propped
2. Find the definition for these words.
3. What could they be replaced with?

### Retrieval

1. Where is Molly?
2. What created the spray from the ocean?
3. What events were involved in the obstacle race?

### Inference

1. Does Molly have long or short hair? (support your answer with evidence from the text)
2. What clues in the first paragraph shows how determined Molly is?
3. How do you think Molly would feel if a video was posted on YouTube? Explain your answer.
4. Why do you think Jim has designed all these silly activities?
5. Why does the author start 'Even though' at the start of several sentences?

### Challenge question:

What effect does the first paragraph have on the reader? Why?