An old man with steel rimmed spectacles\(^1\) and very dusty clothes sat by the side of the road. There was a pontoon bridge\(^2\) across the river and carts, trucks, and men, women and children were crossing it. The mule-drawn carts staggered up the steep bank from the bridge with soldiers helping push against the spokes of the wheels. The trucks ground up and away heading out of it all and the peasants plodded along in the ankle deep dust. But the old man sat there without moving. He was too tired to go any farther.

It was my business to cross the bridge, explore the bridgehead\(^3\) beyond and find out to what point the enemy had advanced. I did this and returned over the bridge. There were not so many carts now and very few people on foot, but the old man was still there.

"Where do you come from?" I asked him.
"From San Carlos," he said, and smiled.
That was his native town and so it gave him pleasure to mention it and he smiled.
"I was taking care of animals," he explained.
"Oh," I said, not quite understanding.
"Yes," he said, "I stayed, you see, taking care of animals. I was the last one to leave the town of San Carlos."

He did not look like a shepherd nor a herdsman and I looked at his black dusty clothes and his gray dusty face and his steel rimmed spectacles and said, "What animals were they?"
"Various animals," he said, and shook his head. "I had to leave them."

I was watching the bridge and the African looking country of the Ebro Delta\(^4\) and wondering how long now it would be before we would see the enemy, and listening all the while for the first noises that would signal that ever mysterious event called contact, and the old man still sat there.

"What animals were they?" I asked.
"There were three animals altogether," he explained. "There were two goats and a cat and then there were four pairs of pigeons."
"And you had to leave them?" I asked.
"Yes. Because of the artillery. The captain told me to go because of the artillery."
"And you have no family?" I asked, watching the far end of the bridge where a few last carts were hurrying down the slope of the bank.
"No," he said, "only the animals I stated. The cat, of course, will be all right. A cat can look out for itself, but I cannot think what will become of the others."
"What politics have you?" I asked.
"I am without politics," he said. "I am seventy-six years old. I have come twelve kilometers now and I think now I can go no further."
"This is not a good place to stop," I said. "If you can make it, there are trucks up the road where it forks for Tortosa."
"I will wait a while," he said, "and then I will go. Where do the trucks go?"
"I know no one in that direction," he said, "but thank you very much. Thank you again very

---

\(^1\) **steel rimmed spectacles**: glasses with a round metal frame.
\(^2\) **pontoon bridge**: temporary floating platform made of pieces of metal.
\(^3\) **bridgehead**: strong position that the army had conquered, from which it could control or attack the enemy.
\(^4\) **Ebro Delta**: the Ebro river is the longest river in Spain. Its delta is on the Mediterranean coast, midway between Barcelona and Valencia.
much."
He looked at me very blankly and tiredly, and then said, having to share his worry with someone, "The cat will be all right, I am sure. There is no need to be unquiet about the cat. But the others. Now what do you think about the others?"
"Why they'll probably come through it all right."
"You think so?"
"Why not," I said, watching the far bank where now there were no carts.
"But what will they do under the artillery when I was told to leave because of the artillery?"
"Did you leave the dove cage unlocked?" I asked.
"Yes."
"Then they'll fly."
"Yes, certainly they'll fly. But the others. It's better not to think about the others," he said.
"If you are rested I would go," I urged. "Get up and try to walk now."
"Thank you," he said and got to his feet, swayed from side to side and then sat down backwards in the dust.
"I was taking care of animals," he said dully, but no longer to me. "I was only taking care of animals."

There was nothing to do about him. It was Easter Sunday and the Fascists were advancing toward the Ebro. It was a grey overcast day with a low ceiling so their planes were not up. That and the fact that cats know how to look after themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.

**GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING**

**A. FILL IN THE GAPPED SUMMARY USING THE WORDS IN THE BOX BELOW.**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>remains</th>
<th>Barcelona</th>
<th>animals</th>
<th>hometown</th>
<th>urges</th>
<th>bombed</th>
<th>worried</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>soldier</td>
<td>bridge</td>
<td>dust</td>
<td>artillery</td>
<td>enemy</td>
<td>dangerous</td>
<td>road</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

During the Spanish Civil War a young 1. ________________ is on duty at a 2. ________________ on the River Ebro. The 3. ________________ is advancing and the people are escaping towards 4. ________________. An old man is sitting in the 5. ________________, at the side of the 6. ________________. He will not 7. ________________, so the young man tries to convince him that it is 8. ________________ to stop there, but the old man is 9. ________________ because he has walked 10. ________________ kilometres and he is 11. ________________ about his 12. ________________, which he had to leave behind. In fact, he says he only left his 13. ________________ because he was 14. ________________ to go away, as the place was about to be 15. ________________. Although the young man 16. ________________ him to walk on, the old man does not 17. ________________ to him and 18. ________________ there.
Detailed Understanding

A. Focus on the opening paragraph. All the verbs in bold describe different ways of moving. Work out their exact meaning with the help of the context and of the definitions below.

a. to cross ___ 1. to go in a particular direction
b. to stagger ___ 2. used to indicate the slow, noisy and difficult movement of vehicles or machines
c. to push ___ 3. to move unsteadily and slowly, as if about to fall over
d. to grind up ___ 4. to go from one side to the other of something like a road, a room or a river
e. to head ___ 5. to walk with very slow and heavy steps, as if very tired or in difficulty
f. to plod ___ 6. to use your hands to put pressure and move something away from you

Now say what sort of image these verbs contribute to create in the reader’s mind:

B. Underline the correct definition of the following words as used in the short story:

a. contact: 1. the meeting with the enemy
            2. the first words exchanged with the old man
            3. the noise of the planes
b. to fork: 1. to arrive in
            2. to turn left
            3. to divide into two parts
c. blankly: 1. hoping for an answer
            2. surprised and amused
            3. showing no feeling, understanding or interest

C. Answer these questions briefly:
1. Why is the old man so worried about his animals? (2 elements)

2. Which animal is the old man least concerned about?

3. What is the narrator's job?
   a. He questions people before they cross the bridge.
b. He protects the people who cross the bridge.
c. He scouts ahead for the enemy’s location.
d. He stops people from crossing the bridge.

4. Why didn’t the planes fly that day?

5. The old man is a symbol of what?
   a. the causes of war
   b. the patience of the soldiers
   c. the civilian victims of war
   d. the apathy of the civilians

**ANALYSIS**

A. **ANSWER THESE QUESTIONS IN LENGTH, USING QUOTES FROM THE TEXT.**

1. What statements from the story suggest that the old man is about to give up on life? Quote specific statements to back your answer.

2. What kind of life has the old man been leading? Use details from the story to support your answer.

3. Comment on the last sentence of the short story: “That and the fact that cats know how to look for themselves was all the good luck that old man would ever have.”