

Journey to the End of the Earth

by Tishani Doshi

Class 12 Vistas Chapter 3

About the author

Tishani Doshi (born 1975).

Indian poet, journalist and dancer based in Chennai.

Welsh mother, Gujarati father.

Won the Forward Poetry Prize.

About the lesson

A travel essay about her voyage to Antarctica with the 'Students on Ice' programme.

The lesson moves from physical journey to a meditation on climate change and the place of humans on the planet.

A travel piece + a science essay + a warning

The voyage

Doshi sets off from Madras.

Route : Chennai to Cape Town,
then south on the Russian
research vessel

'Akademik Shokalskiy'.

Travel statistics :

- * 100 hours of total travel
- * 9 time zones crossed
- * 6 checkpoints
- * 3 bodies of water
- * many ecospheres

Her first^{*} impression of the
continent is overwhelming.

Endless white land, white sky,
no people, very few sounds.

Antarctica = vast, silent, white

She sees only icebergs, the open
sea, and the midnight sun that
never sets in summer.

Gondwana and deep time

650 million years ago, all the southern continents were joined as one giant landmass.

Gondwana = ancient super-continent

Antarctica was part of Gondwana.

At that time the climate was warm, the land was covered with forests and many life forms.

About 500 million years ago Gondwana broke apart. The pieces drifted to form Africa, South America, Australia, India and Antarctica.

Antarctica drifted south, grew cold, and is now the coldest, driest, windiest continent.

The ice itself is a record of half a million years of climate.

Humans on the timeline

Homo sapiens appeared only
12,000 years ago.

A short blink on the geological
clock.

Yet in that short time we have
changed the planet :

- * built cities everywhere
- * burnt fossil fuels
- * cut down forests
- * released huge CO₂

*

Why visit Antarctica ?

No country owns it. No army, no
industry, no native population.

It is the cleanest place to study
how the planet is changing.

The ice cores trapped here are
a 500,000 year diary of Earth's
atmosphere.

Antarctica = best place to read the climate diary

Visible damage

The author sees the damage with her own eyes :

(a) Wilkins Ice Shelf

A floating ice sheet the size of a small country - cracked off and broke up in 2008.

(b) Retreating glaciers

Many glaciers have pulled back several kilometres in recent decades.

(c) Ozone hole

Sits directly above Antarctica.
More UV reaches the surface.

Phytoplankton - tiny but huge

Phytoplankton are single-celled plants drifting in the sea.

They feed the entire food chain and also produce oxygen by photosynthesis.

Students on Ice

Founded by Geoff Green,
a Canadian educator.

He stopped taking celebrities and
wealthy tourists to Antarctica.

Instead he takes high school
students, because :

- * they are at an impressionable
age
- * they will inherit the planet
- * a first-hand look is the most
powerful teacher

The aim - young people return
home as informed, motivated
citizens, ready to act.

The central mantra

Take care of the small things

the big things will follow

<- key line of the essay

Themes

(a) Climate change

Antarctica shows what humans are doing to the planet - ice shelves collapse, glaciers retreat, ozone thins*.

(b) Geological time vs human time

Earth - 4.5 billion years.

Humans - 12,000 years.

Damage done - 200 years.

(c) Humility and perspective

Standing on the ice, one feels how small humans are. The essay urges humility.

(d) Education through experience

No textbook can match the lesson of seeing a glacier calve into the sea.

(e) Hope through small action

The closing mantra - act on the small, the big follows.

Style and craft

Doshi uses :

- * hyperbole - 'walked into a giant ping-pong table'
- * sensory imagery - whiteness, silence, vast sky
- * numbers as rhetoric - '650 million years'
- * a personal, reflective voice

Quick revision

Q. Why is Antarctica the best place to study climate change ? *

A. It is uninhabited, untouched, and its ice cores hold half a million years of climate data. *

Q. What does the title mean ?

A. Literally a trip to Antarctica.
Metaphorically a trip to the edge of human knowledge and comfort.

Q. What is the central mantra ?