

Monsieur Sauvage, who felt even more fuddled⁶ in this warm air, stopped and said:

“What about it, then? Shall we go?”

70 “Go where?”

“Fishing!”

“But where can we go?”

“To our island, of course. The French frontline is near Colombes. I know the colonel in command—fellow called Dumoulin. I’m sure we’d have no trouble in getting through.”

Morissot began to quiver with excitement.

“Right!” he said. “I’m your man!”

And the two friends separated and went off to get their fishing tackle.

80 An hour later they were striding down the main road together. They reached the villa in which the colonel had set up his headquarters. When he heard their request, he smiled at their **eccentric** enthusiasm but gave them permission. They set off once again, armed with an official pass.

They soon crossed the frontline, then went through Colombes, which had been evacuated, and now found themselves on the fringe of the area of vineyards which rise in terraces above the Seine. It was about eleven o’clock.

On the opposite bank they could see the village of Argenteuil, which looked deserted and dead. The hills of Orgemont and Sannois dominated the horizon, and the great plain which stretches as far as Nanterre was empty, completely empty, with nothing to be seen but its leafless cherry trees and gray earth.

90 Pointing towards the high ground Monsieur Sauvage muttered:

“The Prussians are up there.”

And as the two friends gazed at the deserted countryside, they felt almost paralyzed by the sense of uneasiness which was creeping through them.

The Prussians! They had never so much as set eyes on them, but for four months now they had been aware of their presence on the outskirts of Paris, occupying part of France, looting, committing **atrocities**, reducing people to starvation . . . the invisible yet all-powerful Prussians. As they thought of them, a kind of superstitious dread was added to their natural hatred for this unknown, victorious race.

100 “What if we should happen to run into some of them?” said Morissot nervously.

Monsieur Sauvage gave the sort of reply which showed that cheerful Parisian banter survived in spite of everything.

“Oh, we’ll just offer them some nice fish to fry!”

Even so, they were so worried by the silence of the surrounding countryside that they hesitated about going any further.

It was Monsieur Sauvage who finally made up his mind.

“Come on!” he said. “We’ll go on—but we must keep a sharp lookout!” **D**

eccentric (ĭk-sĕn’tŕĭk) *adj.*
strange; peculiar

atrocities (ə-trŏs’ĭ-tē) *n.* a
very cruel or brutal act

D MAKE INFERENCES

What does the men’s decision to continue their fishing trip reveal about their personalities and view of the world?

6. **fuddled**: drunk and confused.