

Mini-Q Sample Essay: Higher Proficiency Cabeza de Vaca: How Did He Survive?

The odds were not good. There was Cabeza de Vaca, washed up on the beach of east Texas with no food, no clothes, winter coming on, and Mexico City a thousand miles away. Cabeza was one of the few survivors of a Spanish expedition that had been shipwrecked in an unexplored region of Florida. Soon the number of men still alive would be only four. The question was, how would Cabeza and his three fellow survivors escape their slave condition and get to Mexico City alive? It took a combination of luck and good decisions, but there were three main reasons they made it home: wilderness skills, healing powers, and good relations with the Native Americans.

Cabeza's ability to survive was remarkable. First, he was able to eat just about anything. At times he lived only off the fruit of the prickly pear cactus (Doc B). At other times he ate rats, roots, and even spiders (Doc B). Second, Cabeza knew how to battle the cold by digging a hole and building fires all around (Doc B). He also was smart about languages. Between him and his friends, they spoke six languages and were also able to sign (Doc B). Put all these wilderness skills together and you can see he survived because he was able to deal with hunger and cold temperatures, and have little talks with nervous Indians so they wouldn't kill him.

Besides wilderness skills, Cabeza and his friends survived because they were healers. The Indians must have suffered from many diseases and injuries. Cabeza tried to help. At one point in northern Mexico, a man was brought to him with an arrow point in his chest. Cabeza used his knife to cut out the point, and he used a deer bone to stitch up the wound (Doc C). The man survived and Cabeza and his friends became something like rock stars. Indian people began to escort the men as they continued on their long journey. The power of healing helped Cabeza survive because they were regarded as gods. They were given food and helped along the way. Without the power to heal, the men might have been left alone, unprotected.

A final key to Cabeza's survival was that he and his friends really cared about the Indians. Cabeza saw the Indians as human beings just like himself. He was angry at the first Spaniards they met, who were on an expedition to catch and enslave Indians. The Indians stood up for Cabeza and appreciated that he gave away his possessions and did not steal, and that he went barefoot and needed little, just like them (Doc D). Cabeza's attitude toward Native Americans helped him survive because he was making friends, not enemies, all across northern Mexico. There is no better way to survive than to be surrounded by people who have your back.

Wilderness skills, healing powers, friendship towards the Native Americans—all these things helped Cabeza get to Mexico City alive. Certainly he also needed some luck along the way. For example, he could easily have been lost at sea on his raft or lost the flame from his torch on a cold desert night. But Cabeza was more than lucky. He had big-time skills and an even bigger heart.

Body paragraph 1- Sub-claim does not align with claim (wilderness skills).

Rainbow Highlighting
Background Information
Claim Statement (Thesis)
Sub-claims
Evidence
Citation
Argument (Reasoning)