As you read the passage, pay attention to the ways the prehistoric man is evolving. The following terms may be new to you: treed, vigor, retarding, abstraction. You may want to use a dictionary to look them up.

There is one puzzling thing about these prehistoric memories of mine. It is the vagueness of the time element. I do not always know the order of events; nor can I tell, between some events, whether one, two, or four or five years have elapsed. I can only roughly tell the passage of time by judging the changes in the appearance and pursuits of my fellows.

Also, I can apply the logic of events to the various happenings. For instance, there is no doubt whatever that my mother and I were treed by the wild pigs and fled and fell in the days before I made the acquaintance of Lop-Ear, who became what I may call my boyhood chum. And it is just as conclusive that between these two periods I must have left my mother.

I have no memory of my father than the one I have given. Never, in the years that followed, did he reappear. And from my knowledge of the times, the only explanation possible lies in that he perished shortly after the adventure with the wild pigs. That it must have been an untimely end, there is no discussion. He was in full vigor, and only sudden and violent death could have taken him off. But I know not the manner of his going—whether he was drowned in the river, or was swallowed by a snake, or went into the stomach of old Saber-Tooth, the tiger, is beyond my knowledge.

For know that I remember only the things I saw myself, with my own eyes, in those prehistoric days. If my mother knew my father’s end, she never told me. For that matter I doubt if she had a vocabulary adequate to convey such information. Perhaps, all told, the Folk in that day had a vocabulary of thirty or forty sounds.

I call them sounds, rather than words, because sounds they were primarily. They had no fixed values, to be altered by adjectives and adverbs. These latter were tools of speech not yet invented. Instead of qualifying nouns or verbs by the use of adjectives and adverbs, we
qualified sounds by intonation, by changes in quantity and pitch, by 
*retarding* and by accelerating. The length of time employed in the 
utterance of a particular sound shaded its meaning.

We had no conjugation. One judged the tense by the context. We talked 
only concrete things because we thought only concrete things. Also, we 
depended largely on pantomime. The simplest abstraction was practically 
behind our thinking; and when one did happen to think one, he was hard 
put to communicate it to his fellows. There were no sounds for it. He was 
pressing beyond the limits of his vocabulary. If he invented sounds for it, 
his fellows did not understand the sounds. Then it was that he fell back on 
pantomime, illustrating the thought wherever possible and at the same time 
repeating the new sound over and over again.

Thus language grew. By the few sounds we possessed we were enabled 
to think a short distance beyond those sounds; then came the need for new 
sounds wherewith to express the new thought. Sometimes, however, we 
thought too long a distance in advance of our sounds, managed to achieve 
abstractions (dim ones I grant), which we failed utterly to make known to 
other folk. After all, language did not grow fast in that day.

Oh, believe me, we were amazingly simple. But we did know a lot that 
is not known to-day. We could twitch our ears, prick them up and flatten 
them down at will. And we could scratch between our shoulders with ease. 
We could throw stones with our feet. I have done it many a time. And for 
that matter, I could keep my knees straight, bend forward from the hips, 
and touch, not the tips of my fingers, but the points of my elbows, to the 
ground. And as for bird-nesting—well, I only wish the twentieth-century 
boy could see us. But we made no collections of eggs. We ate them.

38–41.

**ANALYZING LITERATURE**

1. **Main Idea** According to the excerpt, how did prehistoric people communicate?

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____________________________________________________________________

2. **Critical Thinking: Draw Inferences** What did London mean by the statement “We 
talked only concrete things because we thought only concrete things”?

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