



Grade IX

Lesson 5 - A Legend of the Northland

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Poetry

Soul of the poem

This poem is a legend of an old lady who angered Saint Peter because of her greed. The story goes like this. Long long ago, there lived an old lady in Northland. She was very selfish and greedy. One day Saint Peter, while preaching round the world, reached her door. She was making cakes and baking them on a hearth. St. Peter was fainting with hunger. He asked the lady to give him a piece of cake. So, he made a very small cake. As it was being baked, it appeared to her be very big. She did not give him that piece. She made another still smaller but that too seemed her to be very big. Again, she took an extremely little scrape of dough and rolled it flat. She baked it as thin as a wafer, but she could not part with it. This made St. Peter angry. He told her that she was not fit to live in a human form and enjoy food and warmth. He cursed her and turned her into a woodpecker who has to bore a hole in hard and dry wood to get its scanty food. She can be seen in the trees till this day boring and boring for food.

NCERT Questions

Thinking About the Poem

I. 1. Which country or countries do you think the "Northland" refers to?

The "Northland" could refer to any extremely cold country in the Earth's north polar region, such as Greenland, the northern regions of Russia, Canada, Norway etc.

2. What did Saint Peter ask the old lady for? What was the lady's reaction?

Saint Peter asked the old lady for one of her baked cakes to satisfy his hunger. The lady tried to bake a small cake for the saint.

3. How did he punish her?

He punished the lady by changing her into a woodpecker that built "as birds do" and gathered scanty food by boring in the "hard, dry wood" all day long.



4. How does the woodpecker get her food?

The woodpecker gets her food by boring holes into trees.

5. Do you think that the old lady would have been so ungenerous if she had known who Saint Peter really was? What would she have done then?

Some of the people lack basic human values. Selflessness is a rare virtue. One does not want to help anybody without self-interest. They always want something in return. A person goes to a temple or a church or to a gurudwara just because they want something in return. The lady in the poem belongs to the same category. No, the lady would have behaved differently. She was a greedy woman. If she had known about Saint Peter and his power, she would have offered him her entire stock of cakes. She would have asked for some favours from him in return.

6. Is this a true story? Which part of this poem do you feel is the most important?

The poem is a folklore. It passes on orally from one generation to the other. The main objectives of such poems or stories is to convey some values. Through some characters or incidents, some value are passed on from one generation to another. This method of spreading values is very effective. No, this is not a true story. The poet himself says, "I don't believe 'tis true." It is a legend. The most important part of the poem is the one which conveys that one must not be greedy.

7. What is a legend? Why is this poem called a legend?

A 'legend' is a popular story from the past which is believed by many but one cannot prove whether it is true or not. It usually contains a message or a moral and is narrated to children. The poet himself says that he doesn't believe this tale to be true. This poem, a 'legend', preaches generosity towards fellow beings.

8. Write the story of 'A Legend of the Northland' in about ten sentences.

Once Saint Peter stopped by an old lady's cottage because he was feeling hungry and weak after the day's fasting. The lady was baking cakes on the hearth. Since he was weak with fasting, he asked her for a cake from her store of cakes.

The selfish lady tried to bake small cakes but each time they seemed too big for her to give away. Finally, she baked one that was as thin as a wafer. Unable to part with it too, she put it on a shelf and did not give any cake to the Saint.

Saint Peter was very angry with her behaviour and said she was too selfish to live as a human and have food, shelter and a fire to keep her warm. He punished her by changing her into a



woodpecker that would have to build a nest to live in, bore for food in the trunks of trees. Her clothes were burned and she was left with her scarlet cap on her head as she flew out through the chimney. Even today she still lives in the woods and is seen by all the country school boys.

II. 1. Let's look at the words at the end of the second and fourth lines, viz., 'snows' and 'clothes', 'true' and 'you', 'below' and 'know'. We find that 'snows' rhymes with 'clothes', 'true' rhymes with 'you' and 'below' rhymes with 'know'.

The rhyming words are:

'Few' and 'through'

'Earth' and 'hearth'

'Done' and 'one'

'Lay' and 'away'

'One' and 'done'

'Flat' and 'that'

Myself and 'shelf'

'Faint' and 'saint'

'Form' and 'warm'

'Food' and 'wood'

'Word' and 'bird'

'Same' and 'flame'

'Wood' and 'food'

2. Go to local library or talk to older persons in your locality and find legends in your own language. Tell the class these legends.

Echo was a nymph who talked too much. She was very fond of having the last word. One day she spoke rudely to the great Juno, who said that for this offence Echo should never use her voice again, unless to repeat what she had just heard, but since she was so very fond of last words, she might repeat the last words of others.

This was almost as bad as if Juno had changed her into a parrot. Echo was very much ashamed, and hid herself in the forest.

Narcissus, a young man who had hair as yellow as gold and eyes as blue as the sky, -a very rare thing in Greece, where most people were very dark, - used to hunt in the forest where





Echo was hiding. As she was peeping out shyly from some cave or from behind a great tree, Echo often saw Narcissus, and she admired him very much.

One day Narcissus became separated from his friends, and hearing something rustle among the leaves, he called out, "Who's here?"

"Here", answered Echo.

"Here I am. Come!" said Narcissus.

"I am come," said Echo; and, as she spoke, she came out from among the trees.

When Narcissus saw a stranger, instead of one of his friends as had expected, he looked surprised and walked quickly away.

After this, Echo never came out and allowed herself to be seen again, and in time she faded away till she became only a voice.

This voice was heard for many, many years in forests and among mountains, particularly in caves. In their solitary walks, hunters often heard it. Sometimes it mocked the barking of their dogs; sometimes it repeated their own last words. It always had a weird and mournful sound, and seemed to make lonely places more lonely still.

Solved Question Bank

Reference-to-Context Questions

Q. Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. Away, away in the Northland,

Where the hours of the day are few.

And the nights are so long in winter,

That they cannot sleep them through;

a. The place being talked about is the _____.

Northland

b. In this region days are short and the nights are _____.

Long

c. In line 4 'they' refers to the people who live in this region.

True

d. A synonym for 'away, away' can be _____.

'Far off'



2. Where they harness the swift reindeer,

To the sledges when it snows;

And the children look like bear's cubs

In their funny, furry clothes:

a. The _____ is an animal which is found in this region.

Reindeer

b. People tie the reindeers to the _____.

Sledges

c. Here, the children look like lion's cubs because of their furry clothes.

False

d. The poetic device used in line 4 is _____.

Simile

3. They tell them a curious story -

I don't believe 'tis true;

And yet you may learn a lesson

If I tell the tale to you.

a. 'They' in line 1 refers to the _____ of the children.

Parents/elders

b. According to the poet, the story may not be true but it gives an important lesson.

True

c. The poetic device used in line 3 and 4 is _____.

Enjambment

d. _____ means the same as 'eager to know'.

'Curious'

4. Once, when the good Saint Peter

Lived in the world below,

And walked about it, preaching,

Just as he did, you know,

a. The above lines talk about _____.

Saint Peter

b. That time he used to _____ in this world.

Live



c. He used to roam around giving religious sermons to the people.

True

d. _____ in the passage means the same as 'delivering sermons'.

'Preaching'

5. He came to the door of a cottage.

In travelling round the earth.

Where a little woman was making cakes.

And baking them on the hearth;

a. One day _____ reached the door of a cottage.

Saint Peter

b. In the fireplace of the cottage a _____ was baking cakes.

Little woman

c. The literary device used in line 2 is 'Alliteration'.

False

d. _____ means 'cooking by dry heat without exposure to a flame'.

'Baking'

6. And being faint with fasting,

For the day was almost done,

He asked her, from her store of cakes,

To give him a single one.

a. _____ had not eaten the entire day.

Saint Peter

b. 'For the day was almost done' means _____.

The day was almost over

c. He just asked for two cakes from the woman's store.

False

d. 'Faint with fasting' means _____.

'feeling hungry or weak'

7. So she made a very little cake,

But as it baking lay,

She looked at it, and thought it seemed

Too large to give away.



a. In the above lines, the lady appears very _____.

Greedy

b. Even the little cake appeared _____ to be given away.

Too large

c. The lady's intention was not to give Saint Peter even a little cake.

True

d. The antonym of the word 'little' is _____.

'Big/large'

8. Then she took a tiny scrap of dough,

And rolled and rolled it flat;

And baked it thin as a wafer,

But she shouldn't part with that.

a. This time the lady took a very _____ amount of _____ and rolled it.

Small, dough

b. The cake has been compared to a _____.

Wafer

c. The lady couldn't even give that thin piece of cake to the Saint.

True

d. The antonym of 'part' is _____.

'Meet/acquire'

9. For she said, "My cakes that seem too small

When I eat of them myself

Are yet too large to give away."

So she put them on the shelf.

a. 'She' in the above lines is the _____.

Greedy woman

b. When she herself eats the same cake, it appears too _____.

Small

c. It can be concluded that, the lady was selfish and miserly. She had no compassion for anybody.

True

d. Pick the pair of opposite used in the above lines _____.

'Small-large'

10. Then good Saint Peter grew angry,

For he was hungry and faint,

And surely such as woman

Was enough to provoke a saint.

a. The behaviour of the woman made Saint Peter _____.

Angry

b. He was actually feeling very _____.

Hungry

c. The woman's attitude made Saint Peter smile.

False

d. _____ in the above stanza is the synonym of 'arouse'.

'provoke'

11. And he said, "You are too selfish

To dwell in a man form,

To have both food and shelter,

And fire to keep you warm."

a. Saint Peter cursed the lady and said that she was _____.

Very selfish

b. According to Saint Peter, the lady did not even deserve to live like a _____.

Human being

c. Food, shelter, fire and clothing are the essential things.

True

d. The antonym of the word 'selfish' is _____.

'Kind/generous'

12. She had a scarlet cap on her head.

And that was left the same;

But all the rest of her clothes were burned

Black as a coal in the flame.

a. By now, the woman got turned into a _____.

Bird/woodpecker



b. The literary device in line 4 is _____.

Simile

c. Her greed was responsible for her condition.

True

d. 'Scarlet' means _____ colour.

'Red'

Short Answer Type Questions

1. 'For she was changed to a bird.' Who was she and why was she changed to a bird?

An old woman of Northland was changed to a woodpecker by St. Peter. She was a greedy and selfish lady. She did not give a cake to the hungry saint. So, as a punishment, she was turned to a bird.

2. What is a ballad? Is this poem a ballad?

A ballad is a song narrating a story in short stanzas. Ballads are part of the folk culture and are passed on orally from one generation to another. The poem 'A Legend of the Northland' is also a ballad as it contains the story of an old selfish woman.

3. 'Away away in the Northland, where the hours of the day are few.' Which place has been referred to? What kind of place is it?

The place is Northland. It is far off in the north. It is a cold place. Here days are short and the nights are long.

4. 'And the children look like bear's cubs.' What have the children been compared to? Why?

Northland is a cold place. The children have been compared to bear's cubs. They wear funny furry dresses to protect themselves from cold. While running and playing, it looks as if bear cubs are running and playing.

5. 'I don't believe' tis true; And yet you may learn a lesson.' What does the poet he want to tell the tale?

The poet himself admits that the story he was going to tell, may not be true. Still he wants to tell it because it contained a lesson. He wants the readers to learn a lesson from the poem.





6. 'He asked her, from her store of cakes.' Who is 'he' and what did he ask for? Who is 'her' here?

'He' is Saint Peter. He is travelling from one place to another preaching. He is tired and hungry. He asked for a cake from a woman who was baking cakes. 'Her' stands for the selfish lady.

7. "It seemed too large to give away." What does 'it' stand for? What does the above expression show about the woman?

'It' stands for the cake. Saint Peter asked for a cake from the lady. She prepared a tiny cake but even that seemed too large. She could not part with it. It shows that the lady was selfish.

8. 'And surely such a woman was enough to provoke a saint.' Who was the lady and how did she provoke the saint?

The lady was an old greedy woman who was making cakes when the saint visited her and asked for a cake. The old lady did not oblige the hungry and tired saint. The lady lacked decency. She did not part even with a wafer like cake. It provoked the saint who cursed her.

9. 'You are too selfish to dwell in a human form.' Who said this and to whom? Why did he say so?

Saint Peter said so to the old greedy woman who did not oblige the saint by giving him a cake. She was a selfish lady. She did not deserve to be called a human being.

10. Who was St. Peter? How did he reach the old woman's cottage?

St. Peter was an apostle of Christ. He used to travel from one place to another for preaching. He reached the old woman's cottage during his travels.

11. What did the old woman feel about her cakes?

The old lady was too greedy to give a single cake to the hungry saint. She thought that her cakes were too big to be given. She kept all the cakes in her shelf. She did not oblige the saint.

12. How was the woman punished by St. Peter?

St. Peter found the lady too selfish. He said that she did not deserve food, shelter and fire to warm herself. She had disgraced womanhood. He punished her to teach her a lesson.



13. Find out examples of repetition from the poem.

The repetitions are:

- i. And rolled and rolled it flat
- ii. By boring and boring and boring

14. Do you agree that this poem has become part of the folklore of the Northland?
Support your answer with reasons from the poem.

Yes, the poem has become part of the folklore of the Northland. It is passed on orally from one generation to the other. The line which supports this, is 'And every country schoolboy has seen her in the wood.'



Next Generation School