

A Legend of the Northland

Introduction

'A Legend of the Northland' written by Phoebe Cary is essentially a ballad which narrates an old traditional story of Northland, about an old lady who angered Saint Peter because of her greed.

Summary

The poem is set in the Northland where it is extremely cold. Once Saint Peter, while preaching around the world, came here. It was evening and the Saint was very hungry and nearly faint with fasting. He came to a cottage where a little woman was baking cakes. He asked her to give him a single cake. The lady bakes a cake for him but thinks that it is too big to be given away. She then bakes another small cake but still does not have the heart to give it away. Then, she bakes a cake as thin as a wafer but still keeps it with her. Saint Peter becomes angry on seeing her greedy ways. He says that she is too selfish to dwell in human form. He therefore cursed her to become a bird and spend her life searching for food by boring all day in dry and hard wood. After Saint Peter's curse, the little woman went up through the chimney and was changed into a woodpecker. When she went through the chimney her clothes burned and her body turned to coal black. She was wearing a red cap and it changed into the red plumage of the woodpecker. Even today she can be seen in the forests, boring and boring barks of trees in search of food.

Message

The poem conveys the message that we should not be greedy and should help others in need.





Extract Based Questions

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 legend belongs to the region of
- (b) The duration of is so long that the people cannot sleep them through.
- (c) Since the Sun's rays reach for a less time in the Northland, the hours of the day are few in
- (i) summer (ii) winter
(iii) spring (iv) autumn
- (d) The word 'few' means

Answers

- (a) the Northland
(b) night
(c) (ii) winter
(d) not many/hardly any
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 animal found in the Northland region is
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
People in the Northland region tie the reindeers to sledges.
- (c) The children in the region look like:
(i) lion's cubs (ii) bear's cubs
(iii) goat's kids (iv) dog's puppies
- (d) The word 'swift' means the same as

Answers

- (a) reindeer
(b) True
(c) (ii) bear's cubs
(d) fast
3. Once, when the good Saint Peter
Lived in the world below,
And walked about it preaching,
Just as he did, you know.
- (a) The story in this extract is about
- (b) At the time of this story, Saint Peter lived in the
- (c) Saint Peter went around the world giving:
(i) speeches
(ii) religious lectures
(iii) political lectures
(iv) personal praise
- (d) The word 'preaching' means the same as

Answers

- (a) Saint Peter
(b) world. i.e., Earth
(c) (ii) religious lectures
(d) sermonising
4. 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) While travelling around the Earth, Saint Peter reached the door of a
- (b) 'Hearth' in this extract means
- (c) In the cottage, the little woman was making:
(i) cakes (ii) samosas
(iii) pastries (iv) patties
- (d) The word similar in meaning to the word 'cottage' is

Answers

- (a) cottage
(b) the fire place
(c) (i) cakes
(d) hut
5. 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) The Saint got faint due to
- (b) The Saint asked the old lady for out of many cakes.
- (c) 'For the day was almost done' in this extract means:
(i) the whole day had passed
(ii) Saint was eating the whole day
(iii) Saint had not eaten anything the entire day
(iv) Saint had not done anything the whole day
- (d) The word that means the same as 'weak' in the extract is

Answers

- (a) fasting
(b) just one cake
(c) (iii) Saint had not eaten anything the entire day
(d) faint
6. 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) The woman started making for Saint Peter.
- (b) The woman looked at the cake and thought that it was too to be given to someone.
- (c) A character trait of the little woman as shown in this extract is her:
(i) beauty (ii) selfishness
(iii) carefulness (iv) thoughtfulness
- (d) The word 'seemed' means the same as



Answers

- (a) a very little cake
(b) large
(c) (ii) selfishness
(d) appeared
7. 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) When the woman ate the cakes herself, they seemed to her very
- (b) The woman did not give any cake to
- (c) The little woman put all the cakes on the:
(i) cupboard (ii) shelf of her kitchen
(iii) bed (iv) dining table
- (d) State whether the given statement is True or False.
Ultimately, the little woman gave the saint a cake to eat.

Answers

- (a) small
(b) Saint Peter
(c) (ii) shelf of her kitchen
(d) False
8. Then good Saint Peter grew angry,
For he was hungry and faint;
And surely such a woman
Was enough to provoke a saint.
- (a) Saint Peter became angry as he was
- (b) The woman was not ready to give him even
- (c) The word 'provoke' in this extract means the same as:
(i) make happy (ii) enjoy
(iii) make angry (iv) have fun
- (d) The quality of the old woman that provoked Saint Peter was her

Answers

- (a) hungry and faint
(b) a small cake
(c) (iii) make angry
(d) selfishness
9. And he said, "You are far too selfish
To dwell in a human form,
To have both food and shelter,
And fire to keep you warm.
- (a) 'He' here refers to
- (b) Saint Peter cursed the woman and said that she did not deserve to live in
- (c) An antonym of the word 'selfish' is:
(i) greedy (ii) benevolent
(iii) egocentric (iv) shrewd

- (d) The woman also did not deserve to have the food, shelter and fire

Answers

- (a) Saint Peter
(b) a human form
(c) (ii) benevolent
(d) to keep herself warm
10. Now, you shall build as the birds do,
And shall get your scanty food
By boring, and boring, and boring,
All day in the hard, dry wood."
- (a) Saint Peter cursed the woman to become a bird that bores all day to get her
- (b) The word that has been used thrice in this extract is
- (c) The word 'boring' in this extract means
- (i) very little
(ii) making a hole in something
(iii) dull nature
(iv) cutting the wood
- (d) A synonym of 'scanty' is

Answers

- (a) scanty food
(b) boring
(c) (ii) making a hole in something
(d) meagre
11. Then up she went through the chimney,
Never speaking a word,
And out of the top flew a woodpecker,
For she was changed to a bird.
- (a) 'She' here refers to the
- (b) When Saint Peter cursed the woman, she went up through the
- (c) The woman was converted into a:
(i) sparrow (ii) pigeon
(iii) woodpecker (iv) parrot
- (d) 'Never speaking a word' here means

Answers

- (a) little woman
(b) chimney
(c) (iii) woodpecker
(d) she did not get a chance to speak for herself
12. And every country schoolboy
Has seen her in the wood,
Where she lives in the trees till this very day,
Boring and boring for food.
- (a) 'Her' here in the extract refers to the
- (b) Every country schoolboy sees the woman who was converted into
- (c) The message conveyed in this extract is that one should not be:
(i) proud (ii) greedy
(iii) boring (iv) talkative
- (d) The word 'country' here means



Answers

- (a) woman who has been converted into a woodpecker
- (b) woodpecker
- (c) (ii) greedy
- (d) rural areas



Short Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Why can't the people of Northland sleep the winter nights through?

Ans. Northland is near the North Pole. Here the days are shorter and the nights are longer during the winter season. Therefore, the people of Northland cannot sleep the whole night through during winters.

Q 2. What vehicle is common in Northland?

Ans. The plains of Northland are covered with snow. The common vehicle used there is a sledge which is driven by the reindeers.

Q 3. Why do the children of Northland look like bear's cubs?

Ans. Northland lies near the North Pole where the land is covered with snow. The children have to wear funny and furry clothes to protect themselves from the extreme cold. In these clothes, they look like bear's cubs.

Q 4. Which country or countries do you think 'the Northland' refers to?

Ans. 'The Northland' refers to the countries which lie near the North Pole. These countries can be Greenland, Scotland and Northern parts of Russia and Canada.

Q 5. What did Saint Peter ask the old lady for? What was the lady's reaction?

Ans. St. Peter asked the old lady for a cake. The lady thought that her cakes were too big to be given away. So, she started baking smaller and smaller cakes but even a wafer thin cake appeared to be big to her. Therefore, she did not give any cake to St. Peter.

Q 6. How did the little lady treat Saint Peter?

Ans. The little lady treated Saint Peter very rudely. When Saint Peter came to her house he was hungry and tired but she acted in a selfish way and refused to part with even a small cake.

Q 7. Why was Saint Peter angry at the woman?

Ans. Saint Peter was angry at the woman because she kept on baking smaller and smaller cakes and yet could not muster enough kindness to give them to St. Peter, who was feeling faint with hunger.

Q 8. What happened to the little woman after Saint Peter's curse?

Ans. After Saint Peter's curse, the little woman went up through the chimney and was changed to a woodpecker. Her whole body turned to coal black because of going up through the chimney. The red cap that she was wearing changed into the red plumage of the woodpecker.

Q 9. Do you think that the old lady would have been so ungenerous even if she had known who Saint Peter really was? What would she have done then?

Ans. I think that the little lady was greedy and selfish by nature. It is hard to change one's nature. Therefore, it would not have made any difference even if the lady knew St. Peter. She would have reacted in the same manner.

Q 10. What lesson do you draw from the poem 'A Legend of the Northland'?

Ans. The lesson we draw from the poem is that too much greed and selfishness turns a man into an animal. We should be kind towards others and should also be willing to help them in their need. It also teaches us that selfishness and greed can lead to our downfall.



Long Answer Type Questions

Q 1. Write the story of 'A Legend of the Northland' in brief.

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

The selfish lady thought that her cakes were too big to be given away. So, she tried to bake small cakes but each time they seemed too big to 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 the 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 and bore hard 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.

Q 2. Explain how our satisfaction is spoiled by our greed.

Ans. True satisfaction lies in sharing things with others. Peace and satisfaction are the two sides of a coin. If there is satisfaction in our life, peace is bound to come in our life. However, greed spoils both. If we are greedy, we cannot get satisfaction as well as peace in our life. In the poem, the old lady was greedy and she failed to give even a small cake to the Saint. If she had satisfaction, she would certainly have shown honour and regard towards the Saint. She is punished for her greed and selfishness and is turned into a woodpecker. So, it can be said that her greed spoiled her whole life and forced her to live the hard life of a woodpecker.