

The Tale of Custard the Dragon

Introduction

This poem has been written by Ogden Nash. It is in the form of a ballad. It recounts the adventures of girl named Belinda and her pets viz. a black kitten, a grey mouse, a yellow dog and a dragon. It is a humorous ballad close to a parody.



Summary

Belinda lived in a white house with Ink—a black kitten, Blink—a grey mouse, Mustard—a yellow dog and Custard—a dragon. They all, except Custard, thought that they were quite brave. Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears. Ink and Blink could chase lions down the stairs. Mustard could be as brave as a tiger in rage, but Custard appeared to be a coward because he always cried for a safe cage. Belinda and the others were always making fun of Custard for his cowardice, but still he didn't stop asking for a safe cage. A pirate once entered their house through the window. He had a pistol in his hand. Everyone was scared. Belinda started crying for help. Mustard and Ink, both fled from the scene and Blink dived into his hole. But Custard, the dragon, was not at all scared. He stood up, snorting like an engine and he attacked the pirate in a similar manner in which a worm is attacked by a robin. The pirate fired two bullets at him, but still he was not scared. He hit him hard with his forceful tail and ate him up. Belinda and the others were quite happy. They hugged and kissed Custard and danced around him. But after sometime, they again started boasting of their bravery and Custard again started asking for a safe cage. Life was again normal at the cottage.

Message

The poet wants to convey the message that true bravery manifests itself only at the time of adversity.

Extract Based Questions ↘

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

1. But the dragon was a coward, and she called him Custard.
Custard the dragon had big sharp teeth,
And spikes on top of him and scales underneath,
Mouth like a fireplace, chimney for a nose,
And realio, trulio daggers on his toes. (CBSE 2023)

(a) Complete the analogy by selecting the suitable word from the extract.

sharp : blunt :: above :

(b) Which one of the following is not a feature of the Dragon?

- (i) Big sharp teeth
- (ii) Spikes on the top
- (iii) Brave as a lion
- (iv) Could release fire from the mouth

(c) What effect does the poet want to create by the simile 'mouth like a fireplace'?

- (i) Emphasis
- (ii) Compassion
- (iii) Rhyme
- (iv) Pathos

(d) Complete the sentence appropriately.

It is clear that 'Metaphor' is the poetic device used for 'chimney for a nose' because

(Clue: explain how metaphor applies here)

(e) State whether the following statement is True or False based on the given extract:

Custard's formidable appearance was a true reflection of his courage.

Answers

- (a) underneath
- (b) (iii) Brave as a lion
- (c) (i) Emphasis
- (d) Metaphor is a poetic device used to represent a comparison without using the words 'like' and 'as'. Here, the comparison is made between 'nose' and 'chimney' and the words 'like' and 'as' are not used.
- (e) False

2. Belinda embraced him, Mustard licked him.
No one mourned for his pirate victim.
Ink and Blink in glee did gyrate
Around the dragon that ate the pirate.

(a) Belinda embraced Custard:

- (i) out of shock
- (ii) out of fear
- (iii) out of helplessness
- (iv) out of gratitude

(b) Fill the blank with one word.

Ink and Blink were because of the pirate being killed.

(c) What did Mustard, Ink and Blink do?

(d) Choose a word from the extract which is similar in meaning to 'grieved'.

Answers

- (a) (iv) out of gratitude
- (b) happy
- (c) Mustard licked Custard whereas Ink and Blink moved around in circles.
- (d) Mourned

Short Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. Where did Belinda live? Who else accompanied her?

Ans. Belinda lived in a little white house. Her pet animals—a black kitten, a grey mouse, a yellow dog and a little dragon lived along with her.

Q 2. Why did Custard cry for a nice safe cage? Why is the dragon called 'cowardly dragon'?

OR

How was Belinda's behaviour with the dragon?

(CBSE 2022 Term-2)

Ans. Custard cried for a nice safe cage because he wanted to be safe from all dangers. This was interpreted as his being a coward. He was called a 'cowardly dragon'. Belinda, Ink, Blink and Mustard laughed at him and made fun of him.

Q 3. 'Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful...! Why?'

(CBSE 2017)

Ans. I think Belinda tickled the dragon unmercifully because the dragon laughed and acted in a hilarious way on being tickled. This was fun for Belinda and the other pets.