Name: _____ Date: _____

Grapes on the High Vine

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 814 words

Reynard was a fox who thought a great deal of himself. He could open a henhouse latch with one claw, and he could slip past a farm dog without a sound. In all the valley, he often told himself, there was no problem that a clever mind and a quick pair of legs could not solve. As he trotted down the dusty road that afternoon, with nothing in his stomach and his tail dragging in the dirt, he had no idea what was coming. He was about to be tested by something no bigger than a bunch of fruit.

He came upon the garden wall at the hottest hour of the afternoon. He had been walking since dawn, and his throat was parched. High above him, among the broad leaves of a vine, hung a cluster of grapes, so dark and swollen that they looked as though they might burst. His heart gave a happy leap, and he forgot all about his tired legs. A fox who is hungry and sure of himself can forget almost anything. "Dinner," he thought, "is served."

He measured the wall with his eyes. It was higher than he had guessed, but only slightly, and foxes are famous for their jumping. He bent his legs, counted to three and sprang up the wall. For one glorious instant, his nose brushed a leaf. Then gravity took hold, and he tumbled to the ground in a cloud of dust, with his ears flat and his dignity a good deal flatter. He glanced around quickly to make certain that nobody had been watching.

"A little low," he told himself, brushing off his fur. "A good fox does not give up after the first attempt." He took a longer run, and he leaped with his whole body. This time he bumped his chin against the stones, which was annoying, and he sat down in the shade for a moment to feel sorry about it. He wondered whether the wall had grown taller while he was not looking. It was a silly thought, but it was a comforting one.

A hedgehog came shuffling down the road with a basket of mushrooms. "Good afternoon," she said. "Are you looking at something?" Reynard straightened his whiskers at once. "Just admiring the view," he said. "Do not mind me." The hedgehog gave him a sideways glance, and shuffled on, because she was far too polite to ask any questions, although she was certainly thinking of several. She remembered the strange, thin fox for the rest of the day.

Once she was gone, he tried again, and again, and then a dozen times more. He built a stack of three loose stones to stand on, and it collapsed under him. He tried leaning a stick against the wall, and the stick fell over. Each time the grapes swung gently, beyond his claws, as if they were laughing quietly at him, and the purple skin gleamed more temptingly every minute. It was very hard to bear.

Somewhere in the middle of all this, a quiet voice began to speak inside his head. It said, "You are not as good at this as you thought." It was a horrible thing to hear. Reynard did not want to

believe it, and so, as the sun began to sink, he started looking for a story that he could believe in instead, one that would let him walk away without feeling small. It had to keep his clever, quick-footed picture of himself in one piece.

By now, a crow had landed on the wall to watch the show, and he had settled himself comfortably, like a person at the theater. Reynard glared at him, sat down in the dust and made a great show of yawning. "Oh, I see," he said loudly, to nobody in particular. "Those grapes. Anyone can tell they are sour. Green, hard and bitter, I expect. I am glad that I did not waste my supper on them."

It was a very convincing speech, and for a moment Reynard almost believed it himself. He stood up, lifted his chin and marched off down the road, with his tail swinging proudly behind him. He felt much better, and he did not feel quite right, but the feeling was far too small to stop him, and he told himself that it would go away by supper. If we are honest, it very nearly did.

The crow watched him disappear around the bend. Then he hopped along the wall, pulled a single grape loose, and ate it. It was as sweet as honey, cool from the shade of the leaves. The crow smiled, wiped his beak on the stones and flew off to tell the story to his friends, who laughed so hard that they nearly fell out of the tree. People say that is how the saying about sour grapes began.

Questions

1. What did Reynard say to the hedgehog about what he was doing?

A. He said he was hunting
B. He asked her to help him
C. He said he was admiring the view

2. What was Reynard's problem with the grapes?

A. He was afraid of the crow
B. He could not reach them
C. They were poisonous

3. Why did Reynard decide that the grapes were sour?

A. It helped him feel better about failing
B. He tasted one
C. The crow said so

4. What does "parched" mean in this story?

A. Very dry and thirsty
B. Very tired
C. Very proud

5. What does the crow's grape show?

A. Crows are lucky

B. The wall was too high

C. The grapes were not sour, and the fox was pretending

Words to know

parched: very dry and thirsty

cluster: a bunch

attempt: try

convincing: easy to believe

glared: looked angrily

Answer key: Grapes on the High Vine

1. C. He said he was admiring the view
2. B. He could not reach them
3. A. It helped him feel better about failing
4. A. Very dry and thirsty
5. C. The grapes were not sour, and the fox was pretending