Name: _____ Date: _____

Hercules and the Wagoner

Reading level 7 (3rd grade) · 259 words

A wagoner was driving his horses down a muddy lane. His wagon was heaped high with sacks of grain.

It had rained for three days. The lane was as soft as porridge.

Then the wheels sank into the mud. They went down deep, up to their middles, and stuck.

The horses pulled. The wagoner shouted. The wagon did not move one inch.

He sat on a rock and groaned. Then he thought of Hercules, the strongest man alive.

"Hercules!" he called. "Hercules! Please come and lift my wagon out of the mud!"

All at once, a big man stood in the lane. He had arms like tree trunks. His face was stern but kind.

"I am Hercules," he said. "You called me. But what have you done to help yourself?"

"I have been sitting here calling," said the wagoner. He looked down at his boots.

"That is not enough," said Hercules. "Get up and look at the wheels. Dig the mud away with a spade."

The wagoner dug. He packed stones into the ruts. He laid branches in front of the wheels.

"Now put your shoulder to the wheel," said Hercules. "And call to your horses."

The wagoner pushed, and the horses pulled. Hercules gave one small push with his big hand. The wagon rolled out of the mud.

The wagoner was muddy up to his knees, and smiling. "I did most of that myself," he said.

"You did," said Hercules with a laugh. "That is how it works." Then he waved goodbye and walked off down the lane.

Questions

1. What was stuck in the mud?

A. A wagon
B. A cow
C. A boat

2. What did Hercules tell the wagoner to do first?

A. Go home
B. Help himself

C. Sell his horses

3. Why did Hercules not just lift the wagon at once?

A. The wagoner had not tried to help himself

B. Hercules was not strong

C. He did not like mud

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

A. Silly

B. Serious

C. Tiny

5. What does this fable show?

A. Do your own part before you ask for help

B. Wagons are heavy

C. Mud is soft

Words to know

wagoner: wagon driver
lane: narrow road
ruts: wheel grooves
grain: wheat or corn
stern: serious
porridge: thick oat mush

Answer key: Hercules and the Wagoner

1. A. A wagon
2. B. Help himself
3. A. The wagoner had not tried to help himself
4. B. Serious
5. A. Do your own part before you ask for help