Name: _____ Date: _____

How the Whale Got His Throat

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 807 words

In the sea, once upon a time, O my Best Beloved, there was a Whale, and he ate fishes. He ate the starfish and the garfish, the skate and his mate, and the really truly twirly-whirly eel. He ate every fish that he could find in all the sea, with his mouth, so! And at last there was only one small fish left. That last fish was a small 'Stute Fish, and he swam a little behind the Whale's right ear, so as to be out of harm's way.

Then the Whale stood up on his tail and said, "I'm hungry!" And the small 'Stute Fish said, in a small 'stute voice, "Noble and generous Whale, have you ever tasted Man?" "No," said the Whale. "What is it like?" "Nice," said the 'Stute Fish, "but nubbly." "Then fetch me some," said the Whale, and he made the sea froth up with his tail. "One at a time is enough," said the 'Stute Fish.

"Swim to latitude fifty north, longitude forty west, and you will find a shipwrecked Mariner on a raft, in the very middle of the sea. He has on a pair of blue canvas breeches, a pair of suspenders, and a jack-knife. Do not forget the suspenders. And it is only fair to tell you that he is a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity." So the Whale swam and swam, as fast as he could swim, to latitude fifty north and longitude forty west.

And there, on a raft in the middle of the sea, he found one single, solitary Mariner, trailing his toes in the water. He had his mother's leave to paddle, or he would never have done it, because he was a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity. Then the Whale opened his mouth back and back and back, till it nearly touched his tail. He swallowed the Mariner and the raft he was sitting on, and the blue canvas breeches, and the suspenders, and the jack-knife.

He swallowed them all down into his warm, dark insides. Then he smacked his lips, and turned round three times on his tail. But as soon as the Mariner found himself inside the Whale, he began to stump and jump and thump and bump. He pranced and he danced, he banged and he clanged, he hopped and he dropped, he crawled and he bawled, and he danced hornpipes where he should not have danced. The Whale felt most unhappy indeed.

The Whale said to the 'Stute Fish, "This man is very nubbly, and besides he is giving me the hiccoughs. What shall I do?" "Tell him to come out," said the 'Stute Fish. So the Whale called down his own throat, "Come out and behave yourself. I have the hiccoughs!" "No, no," said the Mariner. "Not so, but far otherwise. Take me home to my own shore and the white cliffs, and I will think about it."

And he danced more than ever. "You had better take him home," said the 'Stute Fish. "I ought to have warned you that he is a man of infinite-resource-and-sagacity." So the Whale swam and swam and swam, with both flippers and his tail, as hard as he could for the hiccoughs. At

last he saw the Mariner's own shore and the white cliffs, and he rushed halfway up the beach, and opened his mouth wide and wide and wide.

Out walked the Mariner. But while the Whale had been swimming, the Mariner had taken his jack-knife and cut the raft into a little square grating, all running criss-cross. He had tied it firmly with his suspenders. (Now you see why you were not to forget the suspenders!) He dragged that grating, good and tight, into the Whale's throat, and there it stuck. Then he said a little rhyme: "By means of a grating, I have stopped your ating."

The Mariner stepped out on the pebbles and went home to his mother, who had given him leave to trail his toes in the water. He married, and he lived happily ever afterward. So did the Whale. But from that day on, the grating in his throat, which he could neither cough up nor swallow down, would let him eat nothing except very, very small fish. And that is the reason why whales nowadays never eat men or boys or little girls.

The small 'Stute Fish went and hid himself in the mud under the door-sills of the Equator. He was afraid that the Whale might be angry with him. The Mariner took his jack-knife home, and he wore the blue canvas breeches when he walked up the beach. The suspenders were left behind in the Whale's throat, to tie the grating with. And that is the end of that tale, Best Beloved, and the reason why every sailor keeps a good pair of suspenders.

Questions

1. Why did the Whale want to eat a man?

A. He had eaten every other fish in the sea
B. The Mariner asked him to
C. He was tired of swimming

2. What did the Mariner do inside the Whale?

A. He fell fast asleep
B. He danced and stamped until the Whale had hiccoughs
C. He sang a quiet song

3. How did the Mariner stop the Whale from eating big things?

A. He tied a grating in the Whale's throat with his suspenders
B. He told the Whale a secret
C. He gave the Whale a map

4. "Infinite-resource-and-sagacity" tells you the Mariner was --

A. very tall
B. very clever and quick to think
C. very quiet

5. What does this story say about the 'Stute Fish's advice?

A. It was always wise

B. It came from a small fish that wanted to stay safe, and it caused trouble

C. It was meant to be helpful to the Mariner

6. Why do whales eat only small fish now, in the story?

A. They like small fish best

B. A grating stuck in the first Whale's throat

C. Men and boys taste bad

Words to know

Mariner: a sailor

grating: crisscross of bars

sagacity: good sense

hiccoughs: hiccups

breeches: short trousers

Answer key: How the Whale Got His Throat

1. A. He had eaten every other fish in the sea
2. B. He danced and stamped until the Whale had hiccoughs
3. A. He tied a grating in the Whale's throat with his suspenders
4. B. very clever and quick to think
5. B. It came from a small fish that wanted to stay safe, and it caused trouble
6. B. A grating stuck in the first Whale's throat