Name: _____ Date: _____

How Thor Got His Hammer

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1348 words

High above the world, in the land of Asgard, lived the Norse gods, and the strongest of them all was Thor, with his red beard and his voice like rolling thunder. His wife was Sif, who had the most beautiful hair in Asgard. It was long and golden, and when she walked through the fields it shimmered like ripe wheat in the summer sunshine. Thor was tremendously proud of it, and so was Sif.

Also in Asgard lived Loki, who was clever, quick and always full of mischief, and who could never leave a good thing alone. One night, while Sif lay sleeping, he crept into her room carrying a pair of sharp shears. Snip, snip, snip went the shears, and in a few moments every golden hair lay scattered on the floor. Loki tiptoed away, giggling into his sleeve, certain it was the funniest joke he had ever played.

In the morning, Sif woke up, touched her head and cried out in dismay. Thor came running, and when he saw her, his face turned as red as his beard while the sky outside rumbled angrily. He did not need to ask who had done it, because only one god in Asgard would play such a trick. He stormed off, found Loki and lifted him right off his feet. "Put it back," Thor roared, "or you will be sorry you ever touched a pair of shears!"

Loki dangled helplessly in the air and thought fast, which was the thing he was best at. "Wait, wait!" he squeaked. "I cannot glue it back on, but I can do something even better. I will visit the dwarfs, the cleverest smiths in all the worlds, and persuade them to make Sif new hair of real gold that grows on her head exactly like her own." Thor scowled and considered it. Then he set Loki down. "Go," he said, "and do not come back without it."

The dwarfs lived deep underground, in caverns full of fire and smoke and the ringing of hammers. Loki visited the workshop of the sons of Ivaldi and used his most flattering words, and the delighted dwarfs set to work. Out of their furnace came three wonders. The first was a wig of fine golden hair. The second was a ship called Skidbladnir, which always had a favorable wind and could be folded as small as a handkerchief. The third was a spear called Gungnir, which never missed.

Loki should have hurried straight home, but he could not resist making a little more mischief. He strolled into another workshop, where two dwarf brothers named Brokk and Sindri were working. "Look at these," Loki boasted, displaying the hair, the ship and the spear. "I will bet my own head that you two could never make three treasures as marvelous as these." Brokk folded his arms. "Agreed," he said. "Your head against our work." Sindri was already lighting the furnace.

Sindri laid a pigskin in the fire and turned to his brother. "Pump the bellows and keep the fire blazing," he said, "and do not stop for a single moment until I take it out again." Then he went out of the smithy. Brokk pumped, whoosh, whoosh, whoosh, until the fire roared. Suddenly an enormous black fly landed on his hand and bit him hard, but Brokk did not stop. When Sindri returned and pulled the work from the fire, it was a boar with bristles of shining gold.

Next, Sindri laid a lump of gold in the furnace and repeated the same warning. Brokk pumped, and back came the fly, which this time bit him on the neck, twice as painfully as before. Brokk gritted his teeth and kept on pumping, and out of the fire came a gold ring called Draupnir. Brokk did not suspect it, but most tellers say the fly was really Loki in disguise. Loki did not want to lose his bet, and he was doing everything he could to ruin the dwarfs' work.

Last of all, Sindri laid a lump of iron in the fire. "This one is the most important," he said, "and if the fire cools even once, it will be spoiled." Brokk pumped harder than ever. The fly came buzzing back, landed between his eyes and bit his eyelids until he could barely see. At last Brokk let go of the bellows for one moment to swat it away. Sindri rushed in, frowning. "That was nearly a disaster," he said, and lifted a heavy iron hammer from the fire.

The hammer was strong and splendid, but there was one small problem. Because the fire had cooled for that single moment, its handle had come out a little too short. Sindri named it Mjolnir, wrapped all three treasures carefully and handed them to Brokk. "Carry these to Asgard," he said, "and let the gods decide who wins." So Brokk and Loki climbed up out of the caverns together, and Loki looked quite satisfied with himself, though his eyes kept returning to that stubby handle.

In Asgard, the gods gathered in their enormous hall. Odin, the wise king of the gods, sat in the middle, with Thor on one side and Frey on the other, and those three would be the judges. Loki presented his gifts first. He gave Odin the spear Gungnir, which would never miss, and gave Frey the ship Skidbladnir. Then he gave Thor the golden hair. Sif placed it on her head, and immediately it took root and began to grow, softer and brighter than ever.

Then it was Brokk's turn. He gave Odin the ring Draupnir. "Every ninth night," he explained, "eight more rings exactly as heavy will drop from it." He gave Frey the golden boar, which could gallop across the sky and over the ocean faster than any horse, and whose bristles glowed so brightly that it never needed a lantern. Last of all, Brokk placed the iron hammer in Thor's hands. Thor lifted it, weighed it carefully, and his eyes began to shine.

"This is Mjolnir," said Brokk. "You may strike as hard as you like, and it will never break, and you may throw it as far as you like, and it will always fly back to your hand. If you wish, it will even shrink small enough to tuck inside your shirt. Its only fault is that the handle is a little short." Thor swung the hammer, and thunder rolled across the sky. "A short handle is nothing," he laughed. "With this, I can protect Asgard from the frost giants forever."

The three judges did not need long to decide, because the hammer was the finest treasure of all, and Brokk had won the bet. "Now," said Brokk, turning to Loki, "I will collect your head, please." Loki pulled on his magic shoes and raced away across the sky, but Thor caught him with one hand and brought him back. Loki thought fast once more. "You won my head," he said, "but you certainly did not win my neck, so how will you take one without touching the other?"

Brokk stared at him, and then all the gods began to laugh, because it was exactly the kind of answer Loki would give. "Very well," Brokk grumbled, "keep your head. But since your clever mouth got you into this trouble, the gods must make you keep it shut." The gods agreed that was fair. For a long, long while, Loki was not permitted to say a single word, and Asgard was quieter and more peaceful than it had been for years.

Sif's golden hair grew long again and shimmered like a field of wheat, and Odin's ring dripped new gold every ninth night. Frey's boar lit up the darkest skies, and his ship carried him wherever he wished to go. And Thor carried Mjolnir with him everywhere. Whenever the frost giants came stamping toward Asgard, he hurled it at them, and it always came spinning back to his hand. So Loki's mean little trick, in the end, gave the gods their greatest treasure.

Questions

1. Why did Loki go to visit the dwarfs?

A. To buy a new ship for himself
B. To get Sif new golden hair
C. To hide from the frost giants

2. Who was the black fly that kept biting Brokk?

A. Loki in disguise
B. Sindri's pet
C. A fly from the furnace

3. Why did the hammer's handle come out too short?

A. Sindri ran out of iron
B. Thor asked for a small one
C. Brokk stopped pumping for a moment

4. Brokk had to pump the bellows. What are bellows for?

A. Cutting hair
B. Blowing air into a fire
C. Ringing a bell

5. How did Loki keep his head after he lost the bet?

A. He said Brokk could not touch his neck

B. He gave Brokk the spear

C. He hid inside the folding ship

6. What does this story suggest about Loki's tricks?

A. They never cause any trouble

B. Only Thor can play them

C. They make trouble, but sometimes good things come out of it

Words to know

mischief: naughty tricks

smiths: metal makers

bellows: fire blower

furnace: very hot oven

bristles: stiff hairs

Answer key: How Thor Got His Hammer

1. B. To get Sif new golden hair
2. A. Loki in disguise
3. C. Brokk stopped pumping for a moment
4. B. Blowing air into a fire
5. A. He said Brokk could not touch his neck
6. C. They make trouble, but sometimes good things come out of it