Name: _____ Date: _____

Odo Gets Measured Up

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1215 words

Tansy Orr had never owned anything that fit. Her sleeves came down over her thumbs, her shoes had room in the toes for a second, smaller Tansy, and her desk at school wobbled because nobody had ever thought to measure the legs. "Close enough" was what people said when they bought her things, and Tansy had come to understand that close enough was a size, and that it was hers. In August she was sent to stay with her grandad in the town of Odo Bend.

He met her at the station with a wooden ruler in his shirt pocket, where it had lived for sixty years. Grandad lent her the ruler to hold in the truck, because he had noticed that her hands needed something to do. It was old and smooth, with inches along one edge and centimeters along the other, and Tansy ran a fingernail over the little marks the whole way to town. Click, click, click.

Odo Bend sat in the crook of a brown, slow river, and the river was its one great inconvenience. The bakery stood on one bank and the school on the other. For two hundred years the only way across had been a long walk to the stone bridge, or Captain Pell's ferry, which ran when Captain Pell felt like it. This summer, at last, the town was building a footbridge.

It would open on Saturday with a ribbon and a brass band, and on Wednesday morning Grandad took Tansy down to watch the last beam go in. Three people were in charge of it, and they had never agreed about anything, including the weather. Mrs. Hobb, the town engineer, wore a hard hat over a very straight bun and carried the plans in a tube. Mr. Rudge the carpenter had built every barn in the county, and he trusted nothing that he could not measure with a folding rule. Captain Pell trusted nothing that he could not count in steps.

The beam came on a truck, golden and new and longer than a bus, and six men carried it to the bank and slid one end out over the water. It reached out, and out, and stopped. On the far side, a good long stride of air lay between the tip of the beam and the grass. A hush went around the crowd like a plate being passed. "It's short," said somebody at the back.

"It is not short," said Mr. Rudge, who had turned red to the ears. "It says twelve on the plan, and I cut twelve." Mrs. Hobb unrolled the plans against the side of the truck, and there it was, in her neat black hand. Twelve. "Twelve," she agreed. "Thirteen," said Captain Pell, who had walked the bank that morning with his hands behind his back, counting, and who now counted again on his fingers, to be sure.

"Thirteen steps across, and I have not taken a short step since the Navy." "Then somebody has mismeasured the river," said Mr. Rudge, "or the river has moved." Everybody looked at

the river, which did nothing at all, because that was its job. Mrs. Hobb said twelve again, louder, as if the number might be hard of hearing. Tansy stood at the back with Grandad's ruler in her hand and listened to three grown-ups throwing twelve, twelve and thirteen at one another like stones.

Her fingernail was running along the marks, click, click, click, past the end of the inches and on along the little centimeters on the other edge, and then it stopped. It was a thing she knew about, being the wrong size. There was always a second number somewhere, hiding in the first. "Excuse me," said Tansy, in a voice that was smaller than she meant, and then, because nobody heard, a good deal bigger. "Twelve what?"

The crowd went quiet. "Meters," said Mrs. Hobb, as if it were obvious. "Feet," said Mr. Rudge. Then he looked at the plan and scratched his neck. "No. Yards. The plan says meters, but a meter is a yard, near enough, and I work in yards. Near enough has never hurt a barn." "Steps," said Captain Pell, with great dignity. Tansy looked at the three of them. Near enough was a phrase she had heard all her life, and she had never once heard anybody ask how near. "I think," she said slowly, "I would like some string."

Grandad found her a ball of it in the glove box. Tansy cut one piece as long as three of his rulers laid end to end, which was exactly one yard, and another as long as one hundred of the little centimeter marks, which was exactly one meter. She laid the two strings side by side on the bumper of the truck. They began together. They did not end together. The meter stuck out past the yard by the width of three fingers and a thumb.

"That is all it is," said Tansy. "One of them is a little bit longer." "A little bit," said Mr. Rudge, "is nothing." Then she laid the yard string along the bank, end to end, twelve times, and Grandad walked beside her and counted every length out loud. She did the same with the meter string, a few feet away along the bank, and nobody spoke at all while she did it.

When she was done, the line of meters ran on past the line of yards by one whole meter, as long as the string in her hand. The tip of Mr. Rudge's beam had stopped exactly where the line of yards stopped. Mr. Rudge took off his cap and looked at the gap for a long time. Captain Pell cleared his throat. "In the Navy," he said, "they told me my step was a yard. Thirty-six inches, on the nose."

"Then thirteen of your steps is thirteen yards," said Tansy, "and twelve meters is thirteen yards and a little more. You are the only one who counted right." The Captain studied his boots. "Always said I was," he said, though his ears had gone pink. Mrs. Hobb took a red pen from behind her ear and wrote an m after every number on the plan, very small. Mr. Rudge said that he could cut a plank to fit the gap and have it fixed on by morning.

On Saturday the band played, and Mrs. Hobb cut the ribbon with Grandad's scissors, and Captain Pell crossed first, counting his steps out loud. Thirteen, and a little more. The plank in the middle was paler than the others, because there had not been time to match the wood,

and the children of Odo Bend decided at once that it was the best part of the bridge. They named it Close Enough, and jumped on it on purpose.

That night, at Grandad's kitchen table, Tansy put the ruler down beside her plate, next to the jam. "Keep it," said Grandad. "I have another." He did not, but Tansy was kind enough not to say so. Her sleeves came down to her thumbs, as they always did. She looked at them for a while. Then she took hold of each one and rolled it back, exactly three inches, and they stayed.

Questions

1. Why did Tansy say that close enough was her size?

A. People bought her things that were almost right, but never quite
B. She was the smallest girl in her class
C. She liked to wear her sleeves long

2. What was wrong with the beam when it was slid out over the river?

A. It was too heavy to lift
B. It stopped short of the far bank
C. It was the wrong color

3. Why were Mrs. Hobb and Mr. Rudge both sure they were right?

A. They each used a different kind of unit for the same number
B. They had measured different rivers
C. They had both counted steps

4. What did Tansy's two pieces of string show?

A. A yard and a meter are exactly the same
B. A meter is a little longer than a yard
C. A yard is a little longer than a meter

5. In this story, a person who speaks with dignity speaks

A. with calm pride
B. in a very small voice
C. as fast as possible

6. Why did the children of Odo Bend call the pale plank Close Enough?

A. It was the last plank to be painted
B. They were teasing a carpenter who was always late
C. It was the piece that made up for a number that was only near enough

Words to know

engineer: plans and builds
inconvenience: bother
footbridge: walkers' bridge
dignity: calm pride
plank: long board

Answer key: Odo Gets Measured Up

1. A. People bought her things that were almost right, but never quite
2. B. It stopped short of the far bank
3. A. They each used a different kind of unit for the same number
4. B. A meter is a little longer than a yard
5. A. with calm pride
6. C. It was the piece that made up for a number that was only near enough