Name: _____ Date: _____

The Cows That Walked Backward

Reading level 7 (3rd grade) · 336 words

Maia lived in a cave on a mountain in Greece. Her baby son was named Hermes. His father was Zeus, king of the gods.

Hermes was a very clever baby. On his first morning, he crawled out of his bed. He went to look at the world.

Outside the cave lay a shell, dry and hollow. "What a lovely shape," said Hermes. "I know just what you can be."

He fixed two arms to the shell. Then he stretched seven strings across it. He plucked each one, and it sang.

Hermes had made the first lyre ever. He sang a happy song. It was about his mother, his father and their cave.

But Hermes had another idea. His brother Apollo kept fifty fine cows. They lived in a green meadow nearby.

At sunset, Hermes crept into the meadow. He drove the cows out, and off they went.

A clever trickster must hide his tracks. So Hermes turned the cows around, and they walked backward! Their prints seemed to lead the wrong way.

He wove sandals out of twigs. No one could read his own prints. He put the cows in a cave.

Then Hermes crept home to his cradle. He tucked the lyre beside him and shut his eyes.

Maia was awake. "You rascal," she said, "Apollo will be so angry!" Hermes only yawned.

The next morning, Apollo came up the mountain. "Where are my cows?" he asked with hard eyes.

Hermes looked up at his big brother. He did not want to fool him now. "It was me," he said, "and I am sorry."

Zeus watched from above and laughed. He told the brothers to settle things fairly.

At the cave, Apollo found every cow safe and well. Then Hermes took up his lyre and played. Apollo had never heard such music.

Apollo forgot to be angry. "May I have it?" he asked. Hermes gave him the lyre.

Apollo gave Hermes a herding stick in return. The Greeks said that Apollo and Hermes were friends.

Questions

1. What did Hermes make the lyre from?

A. A basket
B. An old shell
C. A drum

2. Why did Hermes make the cows walk backward?

A. To hide his tracks
B. To make them faster
C. To make Apollo laugh

3. What did Hermes say when Apollo came?

A. "It was me. I am sorry."
B. "They ran away."
C. "I saw a thief."

4. Who gave a herding stick as a gift?

A. Maia
B. Zeus
C. Apollo

5. Hermes was called a rascal. What is a rascal?

A. A giant cow
B. A playful trouble-maker
C. A kind king

Words to know

trickster: a clever joker
meadow: grassy field
rascal: playful rogue
sandals: open shoes

Answer key: The Cows That Walked Backward

1. B. An old shell
2. A. To hide his tracks
3. A. "It was me. I am sorry."
4. C. Apollo
5. B. A playful trouble-maker