Name: _____ Date: _____

The Fibbing Shepherd

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 665 words

High above a small village, a green hill rose up toward the clouds. A flock of sheep lived there, and a boy named Tomas looked after them. Every morning he drove them up the winding path with his stick, and every evening he drove them down again. He was twelve years old, and he had been doing this since the spring.

At first, Tomas liked the work. He liked the wide, windy views and the tinkle of the sheep bells. But after a few weeks, every day began to feel exactly like the one before. The sheep chewed the grass, the clouds drifted lazily by, and the sun moved so slowly across the sky that absolutely nothing ever seemed to happen at all.

One hot afternoon, Tomas lay on his back and counted the clouds. He reached forty, and then he lost count and gave up completely. "If only something exciting would happen," he sighed. Then a sly idea popped into his head, and a grin spread across his face. He jumped up, cupped his hands around his mouth and yelled as loudly as he could.

"Wolf! Wolf! A wolf is chasing the sheep!" His voice rolled down the hill and into the village. Doors banged open. The baker dropped his loaves, the blacksmith dropped his hammer, and a dozen people came pounding up the path with sticks and pans. They were red-faced and out of breath by the time they reached the top.

But there was no wolf anywhere. There was only a boy rolling in the grass, laughing so hard that he hiccuped. "You should see your faces!" he said. The villagers stood panting, and none of them thought it was funny. "That was not kind, Tomas," said the baker, and they trudged back down, grumbling the whole way.

A few days later, Tomas was bored again. The clouds were the same and the sheep were the same, but the memory of the villagers' astonished faces was still wonderfully funny to him. So he took a deep breath and yelled again. "Wolf! Wolf! Please help me! It is right here among the sheep, and it is huge!"

Once more the people dropped everything and ran up the hill, and once more they found nothing except a delighted boy and a flock of perfectly peaceful sheep. This time the blacksmith was angry. "Do not do that again," said an old man with a long white beard. "If you cry wolf when there is no wolf, people will stop listening." Tomas only giggled.

Then, one gray evening, the wind turned cold, and the sheep began to huddle nervously together. Tomas looked toward the trees. Two yellow eyes were shining there, and behind them was a long, lean shape with a gray tail. It was a real wolf, and it was creeping slowly and silently toward the frightened flock.

Tomas ran to the edge of the hill and shouted, "Wolf! Wolf! Please come, it is a real wolf this time!" His voice was shaking. Down in the village, the people looked up from their suppers and shook their heads with a tired sigh. "It is only Tomas again," they said. "He will not fool us a third time."

The wolf ran at the flock, and the sheep scattered in all directions. Tomas shouted and waved his stick, and the wolf, surprised by the noise, gave up and trotted off into the dark forest, hungry and cross. When the hill was quiet, Tomas sat down and put his face in his hands. Not a single sheep was left in sight.

All through the long, dark night he searched the hillside with a lantern, finding the sheep one by one in bushes and ditches. At dawn, the old man with the white beard climbed up the path, and together they brought the last sheep home. "Nobody believes a fibber," he said, "even when he tells the truth." Tomas nodded, and from that day forward, he told the truth.

Questions

1. What was Tomas's job?

A. He baked bread
B. He worked for the blacksmith
C. He looked after sheep

2. Why did Tomas first cry "Wolf!"?

A. A wolf was near
B. He was bored and wanted something to happen
C. He wanted to scare the sheep

3. Why did the villagers stay home the third time?

A. They thought he was fibbing again
B. They were afraid
C. They did not hear him

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

A. Walked slowly and heavily
B. Ran quickly
C. Jumped up and down

5. What does this fable show about fibbing?

A. Wolves are clever
B. Sheep are hard to find
C. People stop believing a fibber, even when he tells the truth

Words to know

flock: a group of sheep
winding: bending and curving
sly: clever and a bit sneaky
trudged: walked slowly and heavily
scattered: ran in all directions

Answer key: The Fibbing Shepherd

1. C. He looked after sheep
2. B. He was bored and wanted something to happen
3. A. They thought he was fibbing again
4. A. Walked slowly and heavily
5. C. People stop believing a fibber, even when he tells the truth