Name: _____ Date: _____

The Hungry Fox

Reading level 9 (5th grade) · 561 words

It was a hot, dusty afternoon in late summer, and a red fox was walking along a country road. He had not eaten since the morning before, and his stomach rumbled so loudly that a pair of sparrows flew out of the hedge. The fox sighed and trudged on, looking carefully to the left and to the right for anything at all that might possibly be good to eat.

After a while, the road curved beside a high stone wall. A garden lay on the other side, and a thick vine had climbed up the stones and over the top. Its leaves were broad and green, and its curly tendrils waved in the breeze like little hands. The fox stopped in the middle of the road, because something purple was shining mysteriously among the leaves.

It was a bunch of grapes, round and plump and dusty with bloom, hanging from the very top of the wall. They glowed in the sunshine like precious jewels, and the fox could almost taste them already. "What luck!" he said, and he licked his lips. "I have not seen anything so tempting in a month. That is the finest lunch in the county."

He backed up a few careful steps, crouched down low and sprang. He stretched his nose and his paws as far as they would go, but his teeth snapped shut on nothing but air. He landed in the dust with a thump and shook his head in disappointment. "Much too short," he said. "It was only a practice jump. The next one will be better."

So he ran at the wall as fast as his legs could carry him and leaped much higher. This time his paws scraped the stones, and he slid back down, sneezing. A black crow sat on the top of the wall and watched. "Caw," said the crow, in a voice that sounded very much like a chuckle.

The fox pretended not to hear anything at all. He dragged an enormous flat rock to the foot of the wall and climbed carefully up onto it. From there, he jumped once, twice, and then ten more times. Every time, the grapes swung just beyond his claws, like a purple bell, and every time he fell back with a bump.

At last he sat down in the dust, quite exhausted and out of breath. His paws ached, his tongue was dry, and his fur was full of grit. He gazed up at the beautiful grapes for one long, hungry moment. Then, very slowly, he lifted his nose into the air, as though he had never cared about them at all.

"Well, who really needs them?" said the fox in a loud, important voice. "I was only being polite. Anyone can see those grapes are sour. They are hard and green on the inside, I am sure of it. I certainly would not eat one if you paid me a hundred acorns." He flicked his tail and began to stroll away.

The crow watched him go, and then he hopped along the top of the wall in a very cheerful

manner. He tugged at the vine until a single grape came loose, and he ate it with a tiny, happy crunch. It was juicy and sweet and warm from the sun. The fox, far down the road, did not look back.

Questions

1. Where were the grapes growing?

A. Beside a brook
B. In a basket on the ground
C. On a vine on top of a wall

2. What did the fox do after he failed to reach the grapes?

A. He climbed over the wall
B. He said they were sour
C. He asked the crow to get them

3. What happened when the crow tried a grape?

A. It was sweet and juicy
B. It was bitter
C. The crow did not taste it

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

A. Bent low to the ground
B. Stood up tall
C. Jumped away

5. Why did the fox say the grapes were sour?

A. He tasted one
B. The crow told him so
C. He could not reach them and did not want to feel bad

Words to know

tendrils: thin curling stems
plump: round and full
tempting: very nice to want
crouched: bent low to the ground
sour: sharp and not sweet

Answer key: The Hungry Fox

1. C. On a vine on top of a wall
2. B. He said they were sour
3. A. It was sweet and juicy
4. A. Bent low to the ground
5. C. He could not reach them and did not want to feel bad