Name: _____ Date: _____

The Jar of Troubles

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 506 words

The Greeks told many stories about their gods. In one of them, the gods made the very first woman. Every god gave her a gift, so her name was Pandora, which means "all the gifts." One taught her to weave beautiful cloth, and one gave her a lovely singing voice. Another gave her a mind that always asked questions.

Last of all, Zeus, the king of the gods, gave her a tall clay jar with a heavy lid. "Keep this safe," he told her. "But you must never open it." Then Hermes, the messenger of the gods, led Pandora down from the mountain to a quiet house on the earth. She set the jar in the corner.

Pandora was happy there, weaving cloth in the sunshine and picking figs from the trees. But every day her eyes went back to the jar. What was in there? Gold, or jewels, or something even better? Why would anyone give her a present and tell her never to look?

Soon she could think of nothing else. She polished the jar, tapped it with one finger, and pressed her ear against the cool clay. Once she heard a tiny rustle, like dry leaves in the wind. Once a thin little voice said, "Please let us out, Pandora. We will not stay long."

Pandora jumped back. "It is only the wind," she told herself, but the wondering grew bigger every day, until it filled the whole house. At last, one afternoon, she knelt beside the jar. "One little peek," she whispered. "Then I will close it, and no one will ever know."

She took hold of the heavy lid and lifted it a crack. At once there was a buzz like a hundred angry bees. Out poured a cloud of small gray creatures with wings like moths. They were the Troubles. There was Sickness, and Sorrow, and Worry, and Quarrels, and a thousand more.

They stung her arms and zipped out of the window, and Pandora slammed down the lid, but it was too late. The Troubles flew over the whole world. That is why, the Greeks said, people catch colds and have bad days and lie awake worrying through the night.

Pandora sat on the floor and cried. "Zeus was right," she sobbed. "I should have left that lid alone." Then, in the quiet, she heard a soft sound from the jar, like a bird settling into its nest. She wiped her eyes and listened.

She peeked through a tiny gap. Something was still inside. It was not gray and it was not cross, but glowed a gentle gold, like the last coal of a fire. "Do not cry," it said, in a voice like sunshine. "My name is Hope. The Troubles forgot me."

So Hope stayed behind. The Troubles are still out in the world, and every one of us meets them sometimes. But the Greeks said that when one stings you, you can think of Pandora's jar. However many troubles fly out, there is always some hope left.

Questions

1. Why was the woman named Pandora?

A. She was the queen
B. Every god gave her a gift
C. She was born in a jar

2. What did Zeus tell Pandora about the jar?

A. To give it to a friend
B. To fill it with figs
C. Never to open it

3. Why did Pandora lift the lid?

A. She could not stop wondering what was inside
B. A god told her to
C. She wanted to lose the jar

4. What came out of the jar?

A. Coins and jewels
B. Bright birds
C. Troubles like Sickness and Worry

5. In this story, what does "creatures" mean?

A. Gray clouds
B. Living things
C. Heavy lids

6. What does the story say about hope?

A. It is still with us when troubles come
B. It flew away first
C. It only lives in a jar

Words to know

Zeus: king of the gods
creatures: living things
troubles: bad things
sorrow: deep sadness
hope: good wishes

Answer key: The Jar of Troubles

1. B. Every god gave her a gift
2. C. Never to open it
3. A. She could not stop wondering what was inside
4. C. Troubles like Sickness and Worry
5. B. Living things
6. A. It is still with us when troubles come