Name: _____ Date: _____

The Snake on the Island

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 573 words

A ship was sailing up the Nile toward home. On the deck stood an officer who had been sent on a long trip for the king. The trip had not gone well, and he kept sighing and wringing his hands. "What shall I tell the king?" he said.

A servant who stood nearby spoke up. "Be calm, my lord," he said. "Everyone is safe, and that is what matters. Let me tell you what happened to me once, when I came home from a trip that went wrong." The officer sat down to listen.

"Long ago," the servant said, "I sailed out to sea in a great ship with many sailors. A storm rose, and a wave as tall as a house broke over us. The ship split apart, and I only lived because I caught hold of a plank."

"The sea tossed me onto the sand of an island, and I lay there, cold and tired. The island had plenty to eat. There were figs and grapes, melons and leeks, and fish and birds. I made a fire and waited, and at night I slept in the hollow of a tree."

"On the third day, I heard a sound like thunder, and the trees shook. A snake came gliding out of the woods, as long as a ship, with scales that shone like gold. I was so scared that I could not speak, and I put my face to the ground."

"The snake lifted me up with great care and carried me to its home. It did not leave a mark on me, and it asked me who had brought me there. When I told it about the storm and the plank, it said, 'Do not be afraid.'"

"Then the snake told me about itself. It had had a family on the island once, and now they were gone. So it knew what it was to be sad, and it said, 'When sorrow is over, it is good to tell about it.'"

"The snake went on. It said I would stay for four months. Then a ship would come from my own country, and I would see my wife and children and my friends. I bowed low to it, and from that day on, I was not afraid."

"I promised to send it gifts from Egypt. The snake only laughed softly. It said it had more spice than it needed, for it ruled a land that was rich in it. It told me that when I left, the island would sink into the sea. No one would find it again."

"After four months, a ship came, just as the snake had said. I climbed a tall tree and saw that I knew every man on it. I ran to tell my friend. It said, 'Go home, and may your name be good in your city.'"

"The snake piled the sand with gifts, and there were perfumes, spices, monkeys and many

other fine things. I loaded them on the ship and thanked the snake. As we sailed away, the island slowly sank behind us, and I never saw it again."

"I took all the gifts to the king, and he was pleased. He gave me a place among his servants. So you see, my lord, hard times pass, and a story told afterward is a pleasure." The officer smiled for the first time in days, and he stood up to face the king.

Questions

1. Why did the servant tell the officer a story?

A. To ask for gold
B. To pass the time
C. To cheer him up

2. What saved the servant from the sea?

A. A plank of wood
B. A rope
C. A small boat

3. How long did the snake say he would stay on the island?

A. Three days
B. Four months
C. A year

4. What does the story suggest about hard times?

A. They never end
B. They are always the fault of the sea
C. They pass, and telling about them later can be a pleasure

5. The snake came "gliding" out of the woods. What does gliding mean?

A. Moving smoothly
B. Running fast
C. Jumping high

Words to know

officer: a leader on a ship
plank: a flat piece of wood
sorrow: sadness
gliding: moving smoothly

Answer key: The Snake on the Island

1. C. To cheer him up
2. A. A plank of wood
3. B. Four months
4. C. They pass, and telling about them later can be a pleasure
5. A. Moving smoothly