Name: _____ Date: _____

The Trick at Utgard

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 643 words

Thor, the strongest of all the gods, had never faced a problem that he could not solve by hitting it. One morning he set off for the land of the giants, because he wanted to prove that this was true everywhere. He rode in a chariot that was pulled by two goats.

His friend Loki, the trickster, came along. He did not really want to go. All day they crossed a lonely moor, and when it grew dark they found a strange building with a wide hall and five long rooms. They slept there, while something outside made a sound like wind in a forest.

In the morning they discovered what the building was. It was a glove! Its owner was an enormous giant named Skrymir, who sat on the hill, yawning. "Shall we travel together?" he asked. "You can carry my bag of food, and I will carry nothing at all."

All day the giant took such huge steps that the gods could hardly keep up. At noon he lay down under a tree and fell asleep, and Thor tried to open the food bag. But the knots only got tighter. Later, Skrymir warned them that the giants in Utgard were much bigger than he was.

Soon they saw the city of Utgard, whose towers rose as high as mountains. The king of the giants sat on a great stone chair and smiled at Thor. "I hear that you are very strong," he said. "Let us see what you can do. Even our boys can win these contests."

First, a servant brought in a long drinking horn. "Most of my men can empty it in one swallow," said the king, "and the weakest need only three." Thor took a long drink, and then another, and then a third. When he put the horn down, it was only a finger's width lower. The giants laughed.

After that, the king nodded toward a gray cat sitting in the corner. "Even a child can lift my cat," he said. Thor put both arms under the animal and heaved, but the cat bent its back and rose only until one paw left the floor. That was all he could do.

Thor was furious. "Let any giant in this city wrestle me!" he cried. The king answered that it would be rude to ask his men, but that his old nurse, Elli, would try. A bent old woman hobbled forward, and Thor took hold of her.

Whatever Thor tried, she stood like a rock, and the more he pulled, the tighter she gripped. At last she made him drop to one knee. The king ended the match, and the giants went to bed. Thor lay awake feeling very small.

In the morning the king led the gods to the gate of his city. "Now that you are outside my walls," he said kindly, "I will tell you the truth. I am Skrymir, the giant of the glove, and everything in my city was magic."

"The far end of the horn was joined to the sea, and you drank until the sea dropped. Men will call it the tide. And the cat? It was the great snake that goes around the whole world, and you lifted one of its paws toward the sky."

"The old woman was Age. Age beats everyone in the end, and yet nobody has stood against her as long as you did. Even the food bag was tied with iron wire, so no one could have opened it. You are stronger than you know."

Thor held up his hammer, but the king and his walls were gone. The gods stood alone on a quiet green plain. Thor had not been beaten at all. He had been tricked by magic. In the end he laughed, and the two friends walked home through the soft grass.

Questions

1. What did Loki and Thor sleep in?

A. A castle
B. A giant's glove
C. A boat

2. What did the king ask Thor to lift?

A. A gray cat
B. A big rock
C. A goat

3. Why could Thor not drink the horn empty?

A. It was made of iron
B. He was too full
C. It was joined to the sea

4. Who was the old woman that Thor wrestled?

A. Loki
B. A giant's friend
C. Age

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

A. Very small
B. Very, very big
C. Very old

6. What does the story show about Thor?

A. Even the strongest can be fooled by magic
B. Giants are always kind
C. Cats are heavy

Words to know

trickster: a prankster
moor: wild open land
enormous: very big
heave: lift with effort
tide: rise of the sea

Answer key: The Trick at Utgard

1. B. A giant's glove
2. A. A gray cat
3. C. It was joined to the sea
4. C. Age
5. B. Very, very big
6. A. Even the strongest can be fooled by magic