Name: _____ Date: _____

Thor and the Sea Serpent

Reading level 8 (4th grade) · 689 words

One morning, Thor, the Norse god of thunder, set out from his home in Asgard without his goats, his chariot or any of his friends. He wore the plain clothes of a young traveler. By evening, he had reached a farm near the sea, where a giant named Hymir lived, and he asked for a place to sleep.

Hymir had never met Thor and did not guess who he was. He agreed to put up the stranger. The next dawn, the giant prepared his fishing gear, and Thor wanted to come along. "You are too young and slight to be useful," Hymir said with a snort. "You would shiver all day on the water."

Thor disliked being mocked, but he kept his anger in check. "Go as far out as you wish," he replied. "We will find out which of us wants to turn around first." When he asked about bait, Hymir shrugged. "Look for it yourself," he said, and he went to launch the boat.

Thor found a huge piece of meat and carried it to the water's edge. The boat was floating in the shallows, and Hymir sat waiting. Thor climbed aboard, picked up the oars and pulled. The little boat leaped across the waves as if a strong wind were pushing it along.

Hymir sat near the front and rowed hard, but he could not keep pace. After a while he lifted his oars. "Here is my favorite spot for flatfish," he said proudly. "Farther," said Thor. He did not slow down. Soon the shore was nothing but a faint line in the distance.

The giant was no longer so proud. He kept looking at the dark water, and his voice grew small. "This is too far," he mumbled. "The great Midgard Serpent swims in this sea." Thor only smiled and said they would go on a little. At last he stopped rowing and said, "This will do."

Thor unrolled a strong line and attached a hook as large as an anchor. He pushed the meat onto it and lowered it into the green depths. The line slid down and down until it came to rest on the seabed. Then the two of them waited, and the boat rocked, and nothing happened.

At the bottom of the sea, the Midgard Serpent lay curled in a ring that circled the whole earth, its tail held in its jaws. A smell of meat drifted by. The serpent opened its mouth and swallowed the bait. The sting of the hook made it dive and tug with a terrible force.

In the boat, the line went as hard as iron. "At last!" cried Thor, thrilled. He planted his feet and hauled with all of his might. He pulled so strongly that his legs pressed through the boat's boards and stood on the sea floor below. Hand over hand, he drew the serpent up.

The monster's head finally rose above the waves next to the boat. Its eyes glowed as big as shields, and its hiss sounded like a storm. It stared at Thor, and Thor stared right back. Spray soaked the boat. Hymir saw the long green body stretching away over the ocean, and his face

went white.

Thor raised his hammer. Hymir, shaking in every limb, pulled out his knife and sliced through the fishing line. Free of the hook, the serpent sank into the deep, and a ring of foam spread out around the place where it had been. Its great head vanished and the sea grew calm.

Thor studied the cut line and then the giant, and he was far from pleased. But the boat was taking on water, and nobody had time for scolding. Hymir snatched up the oars and rowed for shore as fast as he could, while Thor waded through the shallows beside him.

The serpent was not caught that day, but Thor had met it face to face. The Icelandic storytellers say it still rests in the sea, circling the whole earth. As for Hymir, the big talker, he had learned something about bragging, and he never again made fun of a visitor.

Questions

1. What did Hymir say about Thor on the shore?

A. He was young and slight
B. He was too loud
C. He was lazy

2. How did Thor get the boat out so far?

A. He used a sail
B. A wave carried it
C. He rowed very hard

3. What took the bait?

A. A flatfish
B. A whale
C. The Midgard Serpent

4. What does the story show about Hymir's boasting?

A. He was braver in words than at sea
B. He knew the sea best
C. He was the strongest of all

5. Hymir called Thor slight. What does slight mean?

A. Small and thin
B. Very loud
C. Very rich

Words to know

giant: huge being
bait: food on a hook

serpent: huge snake
anchor: heavy boat hook
shallows: water not deep

Answer key: Thor and the Sea Serpent

1. A. He was young and slight
2. C. He rowed very hard
3. C. The Midgard Serpent
4. A. He was braver in words than at sea
5. A. Small and thin