Name: _____ Date: _____

Thor Goes Fishing

Reading level 10 (6th grade) · 1008 words

One morning the Norse god Thor left the high halls of Asgard disguised as a young man, with no goats, no chariot and no companions to keep him company. He walked a long way, and when evening came he reached the farm of a giant named Hymir, who lived close to the edge of the sea. Hymir had no idea who his guest really was, but he let him stay the night, and Thor was glad of a warm bed.

At dawn Hymir got up, dressed himself and began to prepare for a day of fishing. Thor sprang out of bed at once and pulled on his clothes. "May I row out with you?" he asked. The giant looked him over and laughed. "You are small and young," he said, "and I will get very little help from you. I go far out and I stay out a long time, and a boy like you will be frozen before we come home."

Thor did not enjoy being laughed at, but he held his temper. "Row as far from the shore as you please," he answered calmly. "We shall see which of us is the first to beg to go back." Then he asked Hymir what they were going to use for bait. "You will have to find your own," the giant told him carelessly, and he stalked down to the beach to shove the boat into the water.

Thor went to the pasture where Hymir kept his herd of enormous oxen. He picked out the biggest one of all, a great beast named Himinbrjot, and he carried its massive head down to the beach to use as bait. By the time he got there, Hymir had already launched the boat and was waiting for him impatiently in the shallows. Thor climbed aboard, settled himself in the stern, took up two heavy oars and began to row.

Thor was so strong that the boat fairly flew across the waves, and Hymir, who sat in the bow rowing with all his might, could scarcely keep up. At last the giant stopped. "This is the very place where I like to catch flatfish," he announced proudly. But Thor shook his head. "Let us go much farther," he said, and he rowed on, until the land behind them was only a thin gray line on the edge of the water.

Hymir was no longer smiling, and he fidgeted on his seat. "We cannot go any farther," he said uneasily. "It is dangerous to stay out here, because the great Midgard Serpent lives in these deep waters." Thor only smiled. "I think we will row a little more," he said cheerfully. And so they did, while Hymir grew quieter and quieter, until at last Thor lifted his oars out of the water and said, "Here."

Thor took out a fishing line of extraordinary strength and tied a hook the size of an anchor to the end of it. He fixed the ox's head firmly on the hook and tossed it over the side. The line ran down and down through the dark green water until the bait settled on the bottom of the sea.

For a long time nothing happened. The boat rocked slowly, and Hymir held his breath and wondered what Thor thought he was doing.

Far below, in the darkest part of the ocean, the Midgard Serpent lay coiled all the way around the world, with its tail in its own mouth. It smelled the bait, opened its enormous jaws and swallowed the ox's head, hook and all. Then, feeling the sharp hook, it pulled away with all its terrible strength. Up in the boat, the line snapped as tight as a bowstring, and the force of it dashed both of Thor's hands against the side.

Thor was astonished, and then he was delighted. "A bite at last!" he shouted. He braced himself and heaved on the line with such tremendous force that both of his feet went straight through the bottom of the boat and stood firmly on the floor of the sea. Still he pulled. Slowly, slowly, up through the water came the serpent, until its great head burst through the surface and rose right beside the little boat.

Nobody had ever seen such a sight. The serpent's eyes were as big as shields, and it glared at Thor while Thor glared back. Water poured over the sides of the boat, and a hiss like the sound of a gale came out of the serpent's mouth. Its coils stretched away over the waves like a long green hill. It was a very long way from being a flatfish, and Hymir knew it.

The giant who had been so brave on shore turned white as snow. He saw the serpent, and he saw the sea pouring into the boat, and his knees knocked together. Thor lifted his hammer high above his head. At that very moment Hymir fumbled out his fishing knife and cut the line at the edge of the boat, and the serpent sank back into the ocean. Its splash sent waves rolling away in every direction.

The great head slid down into the deep, and rings of foam spread out across the water. Thor looked at the cut line in his hands, and then he looked at the giant, and he was not at all pleased. But the boat was filling with water, and there was no time to be cross. Hymir seized the oars and rowed for his life. Thor waded alongside in the shallow water, and the two of them reached the shore at last.

Thor did not catch the serpent that day, but he had seen it face to face, and it had seen him. The storytellers of Iceland said that the Midgard Serpent still lies in the ocean, curled around the whole world. As for Hymir, who had boasted so loudly on the beach, he was not nearly so brave out on the open sea, and he never laughed at a stranger again.

Questions

1. What did Thor use as bait?

A. A fish from the harbor
B. The head of Hymir's biggest ox
C. A loaf of bread

2. What did Hymir do when the serpent appeared beside the boat?

A. He cut the line with his knife
B. He sang a song
C. He jumped overboard

3. What happened to the serpent at the end?

A. It was taken ashore
B. It sank back into the sea
C. It swam away with the boat

4. Hymir laughed at Thor on the shore. What does the story show about Hymir's boasting?

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

5. Hymir said the sea was dangerous. What does "dangerous" mean?

A. Very pretty
B. Likely to cause harm
C. Easy to cross

Words to know

giant: huge being
stern: back of boat
bait: fish lure
serpent: big snake
hammer: heavy tool

Answer key: Thor Goes Fishing

1. B. The head of Hymir's biggest ox
2. A. He cut the line with his knife
3. B. It sank back into the sea
4. A. He was braver in words than at sea
5. B. Likely to cause harm