

ENGLISH

CHAPTER 10: THE TALE OF CUSTARD THE DRAGON



THE TALE OF CUSTARD THE DRAGON

~Summary~

-by Ogden Nash**Stanza- 1**

Belinda lived in a little white house,
With a little black kitten and a little gray mouse,
And a little yellow dog and a little red wagon,
And a realio, trulio, little pet dragon.

Explanation: The poem opens with introducing the characters of the poem, namely, Belinda, a little girl who lived in a little white house with her pets and a wagon. Her pets include a black kitten, a little grey mouse, a little yellow dog and a little dragon.

Stanza- 2

Now the name of the little black kitten was Ink,
And the little gray mouse, she called her Blink,
And the little yellow dog was sharp as Mustard,
But the dragon was a coward, and she called him Custard.

Explanation: Belinda had named her little black kitten as Ink and her little gray mouse was called Blink. The colour of her dog was as sharp and yellow as Mustard and her dragon was called Custard. Here, the readers are introduced to the cowardice of Custard as he was not brave and feared a lot.

Stanza- 3

Custard the dragon had big sharp teeth,
And spikes on top of him and scales underneath,
Mouth like a fireplace, chimney for a nose,
And realio, trulio, daggers on his toes.

Explanation: The description of Custard's physical appearance seems quite surprising to the readers as it has been shown as carrying all the features of a dragon that makes dragons powerful, scary and brave. It has big sharp teeth and spikes on its back that could easily scare anyone away. Custard also has the ability to spit fire which makes its mouth look like a fireplace showing his power. And his nose becomes the chimney through which the smoke comes out from the fire in his mouth. Custard's toes are so pointed and sharp that they could cut anything like a dagger.

Stanza- 4

Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears,
And Ink and Blink chased lions down the stairs,
Mustard was as brave as a tiger in a rage,
But Custard cried for a nice safe cage.

Explanation: All the members of the house except Custard are very brave. Belinda's bravery has been compared to the bravery of many bears combined together. Ink and Blink, despite being so small in size have the power to scare and chase away someone as strong as a lion. Her dog's bravery has been compared to that of a tiger's anger. But Custard is completely opposite to his physical description and instead of being brave, always looks for a nice safe cage.

Stanza- 5

Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful,
Ink, Blink and Mustard, they rudely called him Percival,
They all sat laughing in the little red wagon
At the realio, trulio, cowardly dragon.

Explanation: Belinda used to tickle (touch the dragon without stopping and she did it quite cruelly to make it laugh. It should be noted here that tickling is a very soft touch on body and it is related to softness. Since the dragon was such a coward, tickling worked on him. It does not work on rough bodies; hence it's another proof of the dragon's softness. It was rudely named as Percival by Ink, Blink and Mustard. Seeing the dragon react to the tickling made all of them laugh and they laughed sitting in the wagon at the cowardly dragon.

Stanza- 6

Belinda giggled till she shook the house,
And Blink said Week!, which is giggling for a mouse,
Ink and Mustard rudely asked his age,
When Custard cried for a nice safe cage.

Explanation: Belinda laughed a lot at the dragon, she laughed so hard that it seemed that the house is shaking due to her laughter. Blink, the mouse used to say Week, which is the giggling sound for mouse. Ink and Mustard asked dragon's age to make fun of him as it shows that the dragon behaved like a small kid would do but he was not a small kid. Custard just wanted a nice safe cage for himself.

Stanza- 7

Suddenly, suddenly they heard a nasty sound,
And Mustard growled, and they all looked around.
Meowch! cried Ink, and Ooh! cried Belinda,
For there was a pirate, climbing in the window.

Explanation: While all of them were busy making fun of the dragon, there came a very unpleasant sound from the house Mustard, the dog, looked around growling for the source of that sound. Ink cried 'Meowch' and Belinda cried 'Ooh' when they saw that there was a pirate climbing the window of the house to loot it.

Stanza- 8

Pistol in his left hand, pistol in his right,
And he held in his teeth a cutlass bright,
His beard was black, one leg was wood;
It was clear that the pirate meant no good.

Explanation: The appearance of the pirate seemed very dangerous as he was carrying many arms with him. He had a pistol in both hands and he was carrying a bright sharp blade between his teeth as well. He had black beard and a wooden leg indicating that he was a tough man, who must have lost his leg in some fight or battle. His looks made it very clear to the housemates that the pirate meant to harm the people and pets living there.

Stanza- 9

Belinda paled, and she cried, Help! Help!
But Mustard fled with a terrified yelp,

Ink trickled down to the bottom of the household,
And little mouse Blink strategically mouseholed.

Explanation: Looking at the pirate, Belinda became pale with fear and cried for help. All her brave pets could not help her and everyone fled from the scene. Mustard made a huge cry and ran away; Ink silently went to the bottom of the house and Blink very smartly disappeared in a mouse hole, leaving Belinda all alone in front of the pirate. Their bravery could not do them any good.

Stanza- 10

But up jumped Custard, snorting like an engine,
Clashed his tail like irons in a dungeon,
With a clatter and a clank and a jangling squirm.
He went at the pirate like a robin at a worm.

Explanation: When everyone fled on seeing the pirate, it was the coward dragon, Custard, who came to rescue and fought the pirate bravely. He jumped in front of the pirate and made large noises through his nose like an engine, indicating his anger. He started to move his tail and it made clattering sounds like an iron rod striking the walls of a prison in a dungeon. With all these dangerous sounds, he followed the pirate like a robin follows a worm to eat it.

Stanza- 11

The pirate gaped at Belinda's dragon,
And gulped some grog from his pocket flagon,
He fired two bullets but they didn't hit,
And Custard gobbled him, every bit.

Explanation: Custard shocked the pirate and he took a good look at him and drank some wine from a bottle that he carried in his pocket. The pirate then took out his pistol and fired two bullets at Custard. But, he failed to hit him and Custard remained unharmed. Then Custard swallowed the whole of the pirate, without leaving any trace of him.

Stanza- 12

Belinda embraced him, Mustard licked
him, No one mourned for his pirate victim
Ink and Blink in glee did gyrate
Around the dragon that ate the pirate.

Explanation: After the Custard ate the pirate, to everyone's surprise, there was joy all over the house. Belinda embraced him to express gratitude for saving everyone. Mustard licked the dragon as that's how a dog show its love for someone. Everyone celebrated the death of the pirate and there was no grief. Ink and Blink started dancing around the dragon out of happiness.

Stanza- 13

But presently up spoke little dog Mustard,
I'd have been twice as brave if I hadn't been flustered.
And up spoke Ink and up spoke Blink,
We'd have been three times as brave, we think,
And Custard said, I quite agree
That everybody is braver than me

Explanation: It became very clear that, who is brave and who is a coward after the pirate incident. But, Mustard started to give excuses for his cowardice and said that he would have been twice as brave as Custard if he had not got nervous, when the pirate came. Ink and Blink said that they would have been thrice as brave as the dragon. They could not believe that Custard, the coward dragon, had done such a heroic act and so they started giving excuses for running away. The humble dragon accepted that he was the most coward and everyone was braver than him.

Conclusion of The Tale of Custard the Dragon

It is quite visible that in The Tale of Custard The Dragon poem summary, the poet is trying to say that sometimes even a timid person comes out to be the actual hero in the most challenging situations that life throws at you just like Custard came out and saved everyone's lives and proved his bravery to all of them.

NCERT SOLUTION

Questions (Page No. 132)

(THINKING ABOUT THE POEM)

Question 1: Who are the characters in this poem? List them with their pet names.

Answer: The characters in this poem are Belinda, a little girl and her pets: a little black kitten, a little grey mouse, a little yellow dog, a little pet dragon and a pirate.

The names of the pets are listed below:

Character	Pet Name
Kitten	Ink
Mouse	Blink
Dog	Mustard
Dragon	Custard

Question 2: Why did Custard cry for a nice safe cage? Why is the dragon called “cowardly dragon”?

Answer: Custard cried for a nice safe cage because it was a coward and used to get scared easily. It is called a “cowardly dragon” because everyone in the house was very brave. Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears, Ink and Blink could chase lions down the stairs, Mustard was as brave as a raging tiger, but Custard always cried for a nice safe cage as it feared a lot and wanted to stay safe from any danger.

Question 3: “Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful...” Why?

Answer: Belinda tickled Custard, the dragon unmercifully because it was always very scared and cried for a nice safe cage. She rubbed her fingers creating a tingling sensation that would disturb the dragon and everyone would laugh at its cowardice.

Question 4: The poet has employed many poetic devices in the poem. For example: “Clashed his tail like iron in a dungeon” — the poetic device here is a simile. Can you, with your partner, list some more such poetic devices used in the poem?

Answer: The poet has extensively used similes across the poem. One such simile was “mouth

like a fireplace". Also he has repetitively used the word 'little' in the first stanza to emphasize that everything in Belinda's house including her pets were little in size. In the seventh stanza, the poet used an incorrect spelling as a poetic device such as 'winda' instead of 'window' that rhymes with Belinda's name in the previous line. Furthermore, the poet has also used alliteration in the tenth stanza in the sentences "Clashed his tail" and "With a clatter and a clank". In the eleventh stanza, the poet used the terms, "The pirate gaped" and "gulped some grog" as some of the poetic devices in the poem.

Question 5: Read stanza three again to know how the poet describes the appearance of the dragon.

Answer: The poet describes the appearance of the dragon, Custard as one which had big sharp teeth and spikes on top of its body and scales underneath. Its mouth was like a fireplace with a chimney-like nose and sharp dagger-like toes.

Question 6: Can you find out the rhyme scheme of two or three stanzas of the poem?

Answer: The rhyme scheme of two or three stanzas of the poem is 'aabb'.

Question 7: Writers use words to give us a picture or image without actually saying what they mean. Can you trace some images used in the poem?

Answer: Writers often use words and phrases that do not exactly convey a meaning but they are indicative of their related meanings. Such words or phrases are basically used to trigger our imagination into thinking and visualizing them like a painting with a hidden meaning. The poet has used some images in the poem such as: 'mouth like a fireplace', 'chimney for a nose', 'brave as a barrel full of bears', 'brave as a tiger in a rage', 'went at the pirate like a robin at a worm', etc.

Question 8: Do you find The Tale of Custard the Dragon to be a serious or a light-hearted poem? Give reasons to support your answer.

Answer: 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon' is a very light-hearted and funny poem which was written in such a way so that everyone enjoys it. The poem was composed with a fixed rhyme scheme that makes it interesting and enjoyable to read. The poet has also used wrong spelling 'winda' instead of 'window' to maintain the rhyme scheme with 'Belinda' in the seventh stanza. The poet also described the features of Belinda and her pets in a humorous manner. He compared Belinda's bravery to a barrel full of bears, her kitten, Ink and mouse, Blink to be so brave that they could scare a lion down the stairs and her dog, Mustard was brave enough like a raging tiger. On the contrary, her dragon Custard was the only one who has been projected to be a coward who looks for a cage for itself and was made fun of often by others for its cowardice. However, when the pirate attacked the little house and everyone was scared, it was the same 'cowardly' dragon who saved everyone and jumped snorting like an engine on

the pirate. It clashed its tail and charged towards the pirate like a robin at a worm and ate him. Although everyone made fun of the little dragon, it proved to be the bravest of all. Hence, the poem is dramatically ironic which is funny and reflects the fun and humorous side of the poet.

Question 9: This poem, in ballad form, tells a story. Have you come across any such modern song or lyric that tells a story? If you know one, tell it to the class. Collect such songs as a project.

Answer: Activity to be done by yourself.

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