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The Ashes That Made Trees Bloom Summary

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This Japanese folk tale narrates the story of an old couple who loved their pet dog dearly. The dog, named Muko, was treated with kindness and affection, and in return, it showed loyalty and care. One day, the dog led the old man to a hidden treasure of gold. The couple used this wealth generously, sharing with their neighbors. However, their greedy neighbors, who were cruel to dogs, tried to replicate their fortune by coaxing the dog to find treasure but failed. They killed the dog in anger. The spirit of the dog appeared to the old man in a dream, instructing him to make a mortar and mill from the pine tree over the dog's grave. These magical tools produced gold when used. The greedy neighbors tried to use them but only produced foul results and destroyed the tools. Later, the dog's spirit told the old man to use the ashes of the mill to make withered trees bloom. The old man sprinkled the ashes on a bare cherry tree, which blossomed miraculously, bringing joy and admiration from the village and the daimio (lord). The greedy neighbors tried to misuse the ashes but failed and met a miserable end. The story highlights values such as honesty, kindness, diligence, and the rewards of good character.

Key Elements

- **Themes:** Kindness and compassion, honesty versus greed, the power of faith and hard work, magical realism.
- **Characters:** The old couple, their dog Muko, the greedy neighbors, the daimio.

- **Literary Devices:** Symbolism (dog as loyalty and faith), magical realism (magical mortar and mill, ashes that make trees bloom), moral allegory.

Important Quotes

- "The dumb creature loved its protectors like a being with a soul." – shows the deep bond between the dog and the old couple.
- "The whole mass turned into a heap of gold coins." – magical transformation symbolizing reward for goodness.
- "Take the ashes of the mill, sprinkle them on the withered trees, and they will bloom again." – symbolizes hope and renewal.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who was Muko in the story?
- What did the old couple do with the gold they found?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Why did the greedy neighbors fail to get gold from the magical mortar and mill?
- Explain the significance of the ashes in the story.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Discuss how the story uses magical realism to convey moral lessons.
- Analyze the character traits of the old couple and the greedy neighbors.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Muko was the old couple's pet dog. The old couple shared their gold generously with their poor neighbors.
- **Level 2:** The greedy neighbors failed because they were selfish and lacked kindness; the magic only worked for the good-hearted. The ashes symbolize hope, renewal, and the power of goodness to bring life and beauty.
- **Level 3:** The story uses magical realism by blending everyday life with magical elements (gold-producing tools, ashes that make trees bloom) to teach values like kindness and honesty. The old couple are kind, patient, and generous, while the neighbors are greedy and cruel, leading to their downfall.

Quick Reference

- **Theme:** Goodness rewarded, greed punished.
- **Characters:** Old couple, dog Muko, greedy neighbors.
- **Setting:** Japanese village in the days of the daimios.

Glossary

- **Daimio:** A feudal lord in old Japan.
- **Mortar and mill:** Tools used for pounding and grinding food.
- **Magical realism:** A literary device where magical elements appear in a realistic setting.

Chivvy Poem Analysis

Poet: Michael Rosen

This humorous poem reflects on the many instructions and prohibitions that adults give children, often leading to frustration. The poet recalls being called "Michael Don't" by his mother, highlighting how children are frequently told what not to do. The poem invites readers to think about the nature of rules and the relationship between adults and children.

Key Elements

- **Themes:** Authority and obedience, childhood frustration, communication between adults and children.
- **Literary Devices:** Repetition (of prohibitions), irony, humor.

Important Lines Explained

- "Michael Don't" – a playful nickname showing how children are often defined by what they are told not to do.
- "No one thinks you're funny" – an example of a harsh adult comment that can affect a child's confidence.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- What does the nickname "Michael Don't" suggest?
- List three instructions adults commonly give children as mentioned in the poem.

Level 2 – Moderate

- Why do you think adults give so many instructions to children?
- How does the poem use humor to convey its message?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Discuss the impact of constant instructions on a child's personality as suggested by the poem.
- Create five rules that adults should follow when talking to children, inspired by the poem.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** The nickname shows that the child is often told what not to do. Examples of instructions: "Don't talk with your mouth full," "Say please," "Sit up."
- **Level 2:** Adults give instructions to teach manners and proper behavior. The poem uses humor by exaggerating the number and tone of instructions to show how overwhelming they can be.
- **Level 3:** Constant instructions may make children feel controlled or less confident. Suggested adult rules might include: listen more, be patient, explain reasons, encourage questions, and respect children's feelings.

Quick Reference

- **Theme:** Childhood and adult authority.
- **Poet:** Michael Rosen.

Glossary

- **Chivvy:** To nag or bother persistently.
- **Prohibition:** A rule forbidding something.

Quality Prose Analysis

This prose passage highlights the dedication and passion of Mr. Gessler, a craftsman committed to producing high-quality goods. It contrasts the value of quality craftsmanship with the pressures of mass production and consumerism. The passage also touches on the importance of maintaining quality regardless of scale and introduces the concept of accent and pronunciation in spoken English.

Key Elements

- **Themes:** Dedication to quality, conflict between craftsmanship and mass production.
- **Literary Devices:** Contrast, admiration, descriptive language.
- **Language Focus:** Accent vs. stress in pronunciation, minimal pairs, sound practice (e.g., 'sh' sound).

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- Who is Mr. Gessler and what is he known for?
- What is the difference between accent and stress?

Level 2 – Moderate

- Why is it important to maintain quality in production?
- Give examples of minimal pairs and explain their importance in pronunciation.

Level 3 – Challenging

- Discuss the impact of consumerism on traditional craftsmanship as presented in the passage.
- Explain how accent affects communication and identity.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** Mr. Gessler is a craftsman dedicated to high-quality work. Accent is the way words are pronounced based on region; stress is the emphasis on syllables within words.
- **Level 2:** Quality ensures durability and customer satisfaction. Minimal pairs are word pairs differing by one sound (e.g., 'ship' and 'sheep') important for clear pronunciation.
- **Level 3:** Consumerism often favors quantity over quality, threatening traditional crafts. Accent reflects cultural identity but may cause misunderstandings if not clear.

Quick Reference

- **Theme:** Quality vs. mass production.
- **Language:** Accent and pronunciation.

Glossary

- **Accent:** Pronunciation characteristic of a region or group.
- **Stress:** Emphasis on a syllable in a word.
- **Minimal pairs:** Words differing by one sound.

Trees Poem Analysis

This poem describes the seasonal changes in trees, particularly focusing on autumn (called "fall" in American English) when trees shed their leaves. It explores the different reactions of "mothers" and "fathers" to the falling leaves and the idea of chopping trees for timber, indicated by the word "TIMBER-R-R".

Key Elements

- **Themes:** Nature's cycles, human interaction with trees, seasonal change.
- **Literary Devices:** Personification, onomatopoeia ("TIMBER-R-R"), imagery.

Practice Set

Level 1 – Easy

- What does "to rake this fall" mean?
- Why do trees shed their leaves in autumn?

Level 2 – Moderate

- What might "TIMBER-R-R" suggest in the poem?
- How do "mothers" and "fathers" react differently to the falling leaves?

Level 3 – Challenging

- Explain the significance of the vertical arrangement of the last five words in the poem.
- Discuss the environmental message conveyed through the poem.

Answer Key

- **Level 1:** "To rake this fall" means to gather and clean up fallen leaves. Trees shed leaves to conserve water and energy during winter.
- **Level 2:** "TIMBER-R-R" mimics the sound of trees being chopped down. Mothers want to clean up the leaves; fathers may want to chop trees for timber.
- **Level 3:** The vertical arrangement may symbolize the tree's shape or the act of falling leaves. The poem highlights the beauty of nature and the impact of human actions on trees.

Quick Reference

- **Theme:** Seasonal change and nature.
- **Language:** Onomatopoeia, personification.

Glossary

- **Rake:** To gather leaves or debris with a tool.
- **Timber:** Wood prepared for building.
- **Fall:** American English term for autumn.

