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Department of English 2017-2018

Grade 6 - Comprehension Worksheet

Name: _____ Grade - ____ Date: ____/11/17

THE STORY OF THE AGED MOTHER A Japanese Folk tale



Long, long ago there lived at the foot of the mountain a poor farmer and his aged, widowed mother. They owned a bit of land which supplied them with food, and their humble life was peaceful and happy.

1. Who are the characters in the story?

2. What do they have that supplies them with food?

3. What kind of life do they have?

Shinano was governed by a despotic leader who though a warrior, had a great and cowardly shrinking from anything suggestive of failing health and strength. This caused him to send out a cruel proclamation. The entire province was given strict orders to immediately put to death all aged people. Those were barbarous days, and the custom of abandoning old people to die was not common. The poor farmer loved his aged mother with tender reverence, and the order filled his heart with sorrow. But no one ever thought a second time about obeying the mandate of the governor, so with many deep

hopeless sighs, the youth prepared for what at that time was considered the kindest mode of death.

4. What kind of leader governed Shinano?

5. What was he scared about?

6. What was the cruel proclamation of the leader?

7. How does the poor farmer feel about the cruel proclamation?

Just at sundown, when his day's work was ended, he took a quantity of unwhitened rice which is principal food for poor, cooked and dried it, and tying it in a square cloth, swung and bundle around his neck along with a gourd filled with cool, sweet water. Then he lifted his helpless old mother to his back and started on his painful journey up the mountain. The road was long and steep; the narrowed road was crossed and recrossed by many paths made by the hunters and woodcutters. In some place, they mingled in a confused puzzle, but he gave no heed. One path or another, it mattered not. On he went, climbing blindly upward – ever upward towards the high bare summit of what is known as Obatsuyama, the mountain of the “abandoning of aged”.

8. How did the poor farmer prepare the food for his aged mother?

9. Where did the poor farmer bring his aged mother?

10. Describe the path to the Obatsuyama mountain.

The eyes of the old mother were not so dim but that they noted the reckless hastening from one path to another, and her loving heart grew anxious. Her son did not know the mountain's many paths and his return might be one of danger, so she stretched forth her hand and snapping the twigs from bushes as they passed, she quietly dropped a handful every few steps of the way so that they climbed, the narrow path behind them was dotted at frequently intervals with tiny piles of twigs. At last the summit was reached. Weary and heartsick, the youth gently released his burden and silently prepared a place of comfort as his last duty to the loved one. Gathering fallen

pine needle, he made a soft cushion and tenderly lifting his old mother therein, he wrapped her padded coat more closely about the stooping shoulders and with tearful eyes and an aching heart said farewell.

11. Why did the aged mother drop a handful of twigs of bushes along their way?

12. How did the poor farmer release his mother when they reached the summit?

13. What does it mean when we say “last duty to our loved one”?

The trembling mother’s voice was full of unselfish love as she gave her last injunction. “Let not thine eyes be blinded, my son.” She said. “The mountain road is full of dangers. LOOK carefully and follow the path which holds the piles of twigs. They will guide you to the familiar way farther down”. The son’s surprised eyes looked back over the path, then at the poor old, shrivelled hands all scratched and soiled by their work of love. His heart smote him and bowing to the grounds, he cried aloud: “oh, Honourable mother, thy kindness thrusts my heart! I will not leave thee. Together we will follow the path of twigs, and together we will die!”

14. Did the poor farmer leave his aged mother at the mountain?

15. What do you think is the reason why he didn’t leave his mother in that mountain?

Once more he shouldered his burden (how light it seemed not) and hastened down the path, through the shadows and the moonlight, to the little hut in the valley. Beneath the kitchen floor was a walled closet for food, which was covered and hidden from view. There the son his mother, supplying her with everything needful and continually watching and fearing. Time passed, and he was beginning to feel safe when again the governor sent forth heralds bearing an unreasonable order, seemingly as a boast of his power. His demand was that his subject should present him with a rope of ashes. The entire province trembled with dread. The order must be obeyed yet who in all Shinano could make a rope of ashes?

16. Describe the place where the poor farmer hid his aged mother.

17. What was the demand of the cruel ruler of Shinano?

One night, in great distress, the son whispered the news to his hidden mother. "Wait!" she said. "I will think. I will think" On the second day she told him what to do. "Make rope twisted straw," she said. "Then stretch it upon a row of flat stones and burn it there on the windless night." He called the people together and did as she said and when the blaze and died, behold upon the stones with every twist and fiber showing perfectly. Lay a rope of whit head ashes.

18. How did the poor farmer respond to the demand of the ruler?

The governor was pleased at the wit of the youth and praised greatly, but he demanded to know where he had obtained his wisdom. "Alas! Alas!" cried the farmer, "the truth must be told!" and with deep bows he related his story. The governor listened and then meditated in silence. Finally he lifted his head. "Shinano needs more than strength of youth," he said gravely. "Ah, that I should have forgotten the well-known saying, "with the crown of snow, there cometh a wisdom!" That very hour the cruel law was abolished, and custom drifted into as far a past that only legends remain.

19. Explain the saying "with the crown of snow, there cometh a wisdom!"

20. If you were the poor farmer would you abandon your mother in the mountain? Why or Why not?
