



Explanation of the Poem

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 the 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 like 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 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 so 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 winda.*

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 led 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 mouse holed.*

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 of Custard. But, he failed to hit him and Custard remained unharmed. Then Custard swallowed the whole 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 shows it 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.

The Tale of Custard the Dragon Analysis by Ogden Nash

Nash is well known for his children's poetry, and "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" is one such poem. It is like a fairy tale, in fact. The story itself is very simple, as fairy tales generally are. But its moral is an important one – that we must never judge anyone without getting to know them well. As many scholars have said, fairy tales are used as a vehicle for teaching children how to survive in this world. In Nash's poem, we find fantastical creatures like the dragon, as well as everyday creatures like the cat, the dog and the mouse.

All these characters are personified. In the story, Belinda and her smaller pets are very courageous. This is an admirable quality, of course, but when the time comes to deal with an actual danger such as the pirate, their courage is all but lost. The generally meek and cowardly dragon named Custard is the one who saves the day. Even though his longing for a safe cage has been mocked all through the poem, the moment that Custard sees the pirate, he sheds all his cowardice and gobbles the pirate up at one go. In the end, Custard emerges as a brave heart.

On the other hand, the pirate who had been full of bravado crumbles upon seeing Custard charge at him. Hence, both Custard and the pirate are not what they seem. This is the lesson that Nash is trying to teach – not to judge any book by its cover. At some point or the other, the true colours of any person will shine through, whether those colours are good or bad. He uses the vehicle of a fanciful tale to teach this lesson.

POETIC DEVICES IN THE TALE OF CUSTARD THE DRAGON:

Rhyme scheme:

Each of the 14 stanzas in "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" follows the same simple rhyme scheme – AABB. That is to say, each stanza is actually composed of a pair of rhymed couplets.

Rhetorical devices:

Oxymoron: In this rhetorical device, contradictory terms appear in conjunction. In this poem, the poet uses the device of oxymoron when he writes the phrase "pet dragon". We all know that dragons are dangerous creatures, and therefore, we find it hard to believe that they can be domesticated and kept as pets.

Simile: This rhetorical device is used when an overt comparison is made between two different things. In this poem, the poet uses the device of simile in the 3rd line of the 2nd stanza when he compares Belinda's dog with mustard, saying that both are sharp, and also uses the word "as" while making the comparison. The poet also uses this device in the 3rd line of the 3rd stanza when he compares the dragon's mouth with a fireplace, and also uses the word "like" while making this comparison. In the 4th stanza, similarly, the poet compares Belinda with a barrel of bears, and her dog with a tiger. In the 10th stanza, the dragon is compared with an engine and a robin, and the sound of its tail with that of irons in a dungeon.

Metaphor: This rhetorical device is used when a covert comparison is made between two different things or ideas. In this poem, the poet uses the device of metaphor in the 3rd line of the 3rd stanza when he compares the dragon's nose with a chimney.

Personification: This rhetorical device is used to bestow human qualities on something that is not human. In this poem, the poet uses the device of personification with respect to Belinda's kitten, mouse, and dog. In the 2nd line of the 5th stanza, he gives them all the human ability to speak to and tease another being. They are seen teasing the dragon.

Onomatopoeia: This rhetorical device is used when a word is used to describe a sound. In this poem, the poet uses the device of onomatopoeia in the 2nd line of the 6th stanza, where he uses the word "week" to describe the sound a mouse makes while giggling.

Transferred epithet: This rhetorical device is used when an emotion is attributed to a non-living thing after being displaced from a person, most often the poet himself or herself. In this poem, the poet uses the device of transferred epithet in the 2nd line of the 9th stanza when he writes the phrase "terrified yelp". It is not the yelping sound that is terrified, for it is not a living thing, but that the dog is terrified by the pirate and yelps in reaction.

Central Idea of The Tale of Custard the Dragon:

Belinda and her pets live peacefully in a little white house. These pets are a cat named Ink, a mouse named Blink, a dog named Mustard and a dragon named Custard. Among them all, Custard is the most cowardly and is also often mocked for the same. Then one day, a pirate breaks into Belinda's house. Everyone is scared, but Custard charges towards the pirate and gobbles him up. Everyone is proud of Custard and their life goes back to normal after this incident.

Themes of The Tale of Custard the Dragon:

Do not judge a book by its cover: Custard is always mocked for being cowardly, whereas the others are quite brave. However, when a pirate breaks into Belinda's house, she and Ink and Blink and Mustard are all very frightened. It is Custard who charges at the pirate and eats him alive all at once. The one who had seemed to be the biggest coward is the one who saves the day in the end. On the other hand, the pirate had been full of bravado when he was entering the house, but he loses all of that as soon as he sees Custard approaching him. He can only stare at Custard and have a drink to prepare himself for the unavoidable fate of being gobbled up. Thus, neither Custard nor the pirate are what they seem to be. Therefore, we should never judge someone without fully getting to know them. When the situation demands it, they are bound to show their true colours and these may surprise us.

Childish vocabulary: Since Nash's primary audience for this poem is children, he has also modified his vocabulary to make it likeable to children. Children often mispronounce words, and that is what Nash does here when he uses the words "realio" and "trulio" to mean "real" and "true". Even the names for Belinda's pets are bound to make children laugh. Nash imagines what kinds of sounds animals might make in their different moods, and says that a mouse would say "week" when it is giggling and a cat would say "meowch" when it is scared. He also makes these animals dance when they are happy. It is for these reasons that children love reading Nash's poems.

Tone of The Tale of Custard the Dragon:

The tone of this poem is humorous for the most part. A tone of suspense comes in when the pirate enters Belinda's house, but that is soon replaced by joy when Custard saves the day. It could be argued that the thought of a man being eaten alive is quite scary and inappropriate for children, but the way in which Nash tells us the story is bound to make us laugh.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS:

Q1. Read the lines given below and answer the questions that follow:

*Belinda paled, and she cried Help! Help!
But Mustard fled with terrified yelp,
Ink trickled down to the bottom of the household,
And little mouse Blink strategically mousehold.*

1. **Who cried for help?**
(i) Mustard (ii) Ink (iii) Blink (iv) Belinda
2. **What did Mustard, Ink and Blink do?**
(i) ran away (ii) faced the pirate (iii) hid themselves (iv) saved Belinda
3. **Ink trickled down to the _____ of the household.**
(i) top (ii) underneath (iii) bottom (iv) outer
4. **Name the rhyme scheme of the stanza.**
(i) aaab (ii) abab (iii) aabb (iv) abba

Answer

1. Belinda
2. ran away
3. bottom
4. aabb

Q2. Read the lines given below and answer the questions that follow:

*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.*

1. **The pirate gaped at 'Belinda's**
(i) dog (ii) rat (iii) dragon (iv) cat
2. **How many bullets did he fire?**
(i) one (ii) four (iii) six (iv) two
3. **Who gobbled him every bit?**
(i) Blink (ii) Mustard (iii) Ink (iv) Custard
4. **Find the word from the passage which means same as 'swallowed'.**
(i) gaped (ii) gobbled (iii) gulped (iv) flagon

Answer

1. dragon
2. two
3. Custard

4. Gobbled

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS:

Q1. Describe the appearance of the dragon.

Ans. Custard, the dragon had a formidable appearance, with sharp teeth, toes like daggers, spikes on back and scales on the belly. Its mouth was a fireplace and the nose was always fuming like a chimney. However, in sharp contrast to the appearance, his temperament was extremely timid.

Q2. Do you find 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon' to be a serious or a light-hearted comedy? Give reasons to support your answer.

Ans. 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon' is a humorous, light hearted poem as the characters display behavioural attributes, contrary to their appearance as well as nature. It is extremely funny to imagine a fierce looking dragon crying for a safe cage or mouse raging like a lion.

Q3. Is there a hidden message that the poet is wishing to convey or do you think that entertainment is the sole purpose of writing this poem?

Ans. The interpretation of the message in the poem may vary for different readers. The situation narrated underscores a basic truth that the real test of courage is during a crisis. The dragon though never put his strength on display but exhibited it in action when it was required to do so.

Q4. What do you think changed the attitude of the other animals and that of Belinda towards the dragon?

Ans. The dragon, Custard, initially commanded no amount of respect from Belinda and the other pets, on account of his cowardice; but when the house was attacked by an armed pirate and all others panicked and ran for shelter, the dragon savagely attacked the pirate and ate him up. Thus, the other animals realized his worth and came to respect him genuinely.

5. Why did the Custard, the dragon cry for a nice, safe cage?

Custard, in fact, was very brave but still he kept asking for a nice, safe cage. It made people think him to be cowardly. He might be crying for a nice, safe cage so that he might not harm anyone when in anger or he might be proving that a little safety cage averts a disaster. The others thought that he cried for a cage as he was a coward.

6. What did Belinda and her pets hear?

Belinda and her pets heard a nasty sound made by the pirate breaking in through the window. Belinda and her pets except Custard were terrified and cried for help. Ink, Blink and Mustard fled away cowardly. Custard fought with him bravely and killed him.

7. What terrified the pirate? Who killed him and how?

Custard, the dragon, jumped up, snorting and clashing his tail. He was making a lot of clatter and clanking and he was squirming. He attacked the pirate. It terrified the pirate. He fired at Custard and missed. Custard killed him by swallowing him up. It shows that he was brave.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS:

1. 'Appearances are deceptive' is an apt summation of the poem, 'The Tale of Custard the Dragon.' Elucidate.

Belinda's pet dragon though ferocious in looks, believed he was a coward at heart, it seemed. In comparison, the other pets boasted of their bravery, their ability to chase lions and their tiger cries, while the dragon just whimpered for a safe cage to hide in. The appearance of a pirate brought forth the dragon's true worth for while the other creatures scuttled off to hide, the dragon measured up to the pirate's threats by snorting at him, clattering his steely tail, and finally, gobbling him up.

Once the enemy was conquered, the animals emerged and made lame excuses about their inability to confront the pirate in true warrior spirit, the dragon magnanimously said that he truly a coward, exposing their weaknesses.

2. When the pirate attacked Belinda, all of her brave friends—Ink, Blink and Mustard ran away. Only Custard fought with the enemy. Based on your reading of the poem, write a paragraph on the topic: 'A friend in Need is a Friend Indeed'.

Man is a social animal and we all have survived throughout the civilization through the process of socialization. The beginning of any friendship is when one tries to socialize with the other. But not all socializations result in friendship. Some people walk past us in the journey of life, and some stay back and see us grow. The ones, who walk away when the clouds are cast, are the ones who will never stick around when we need them the most.

A true friend is the one who always sticks around irrespective of how good or bad the situation is. Therefore, it is rightly said that those who survive the test of friendship i.e., those who stand by us in our most trying times are the real friends. Truly, a friend in need is a friend indeed.

3. Everyone believed that the Custard was a coward; but when an opportunity came he showed exemplary courage. Based on your reading of the poem, write a paragraph on the topic: 'Courage is a Mind, not of Muscle'.

Mark Twain once said that 'Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear'. Courage is not merely a show of power but the ability to overcome fear and not allow it to paralyze our minds. Most of us tend to generalize and call people who shy away from a physical show of power as being cowards.

But the truth lies in the fact that those who indulge in physical aggression are the ones who are the most insecure. David was barely one-fourth of Goliath, the giant. Yet David succeeded, in

killing him. He had used his presence of mind and stood successful over an entire army. Thus, we must remember that courage is a matter of mind, not muscle.

REFERENCE-TO-CONTEXT

Read the stanza given below and answer the questions that follow:

Question 1.

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

(a) The little dog was called because it was sharp.

Answer:
mustard

(b) Belinda's pets are a black kitten, grey mouse, yellow dog and

Answer:
dragon

(c) Belinda called the dragon

Answer:
custard

(d) Find the antonym of 'brave' in the extract.

Answer:
coward

Question 2.

*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.*

(a) Belinda thought that Custard the dragon was a-----

Answer:
coward

(b) The dragon had 'realio, trulio' on his toes.

Answer:
daggers

(c) “Realio, trulio” (really, truly) is used for poetic effect in the extract.

Answer:

True.

(d) Find the antonym of ‘blunt’ in the extract.

Answer:

sharp.

Question 3.

*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.*

(a) Mustard the yellow dog has been compared to a

Answer:

tiger

(b) Belinda was as brave as a full of bears.

Answer:

barrel

(c) Custard cried for a nice safe cage, which shows his bravery.

Answer:

False

(d) Find the same meaning of ‘followed’ in the extract.

Answer:

chased.

Question 4.

*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.*

(a) Belinda tickled Custard, the dragon

Answer:

unmerciful

(b) Ink, Blink and Mustard called the Custard

Answer:

Percival

(c) Custard, the dragon, lived in the black wagon.

Answer:

False

(d) Find the antonym of 'merciful' in the extract.

Answer:

unmerciful.

Question 5.

*Pistol in his left hand, pistol in his right,
And he held in his teeth a cutlass bright, ...*

(a) The pirate's intention was to Belinda and others.

Answer:

kill

(b) The pirate held a bright -----in his teeth.

Answer:

cutlass

(c) Belinda attacked the pirate brutally.

Answer:

False

(d) Find the same meaning of 'sword' in the extract.

Answer:

cutlass

Question 6.

*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.*

(a) Belinda cried for help because she was-----by a pirate with a pistol.

Answer:

attacked

(b) Mustard fled with a terrified-----

Answer:

yelp

(c) Blink hid strategically in a mousehold.

Answer:

True

(d) Find the same meaning of 'howl' in the extract.

Answer:

yelp

Question 7.

*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”.*

(a) Custard, the dragon has been compared to an-----

Answer:

engine

(b) Custard attacked the pirate like a----- on a worm.

Answer:

robin

(c) 'Simile' is used in the line 'clashed his tail like irons in a dungeon'.

Answer:

True

(d) Find the same meaning of 'wriggle' in the extract.

Answer:

squirm.

Question 8.

*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.*

(a) The pirate fired two from his pistol.

Answer:

shots

(b) The pirate met his end when the dragon him up.

Answer:

gobbled

(c) The pirate gaped at the dragon because he was not scared.

Answer:

False

(d) Find the same meaning of 'drank' in the extract.

Answer:

gulped.

Question 9.

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.

(a) Everyone embraced the dragon because he had the pirate.

Answer:

gobbled up

(b) The Custard proved that he was not a

Answer:

coward

(c) Nobody was happy because the pirate was not eliminated. (True/False)

Answer:

False

(d) Find the antonym of 'unhappy' in the extract.

Answer:

glee.