

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

WHY THE SEA IS SALT

Independent Reading. Read the poem below. Read aloud then answer the questions that follow.

Notes for reading: Preview the text to be read. Before you start reading, ask yourself, what does the poet want me to think or feel? Do I agree with the author? While you read pay close attention to the details presented in the text.



This is a fairy tale.

Mary Howitt was born in 1804, at Coleford, England. She wrote many charming stories for children in prose and verse, and also translated many from Swedish, Danish, and German authors. This story is arranged from one in a collection named "Peter Drake's Dream, and Other Stories." She died in 1888.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

Word Search

Words you would find in this story.

Find the word in the puzzle. Words can go in any direction. Words can share letters as they cross over each other.

ancient

bargain

envious

newcomers

shutter

astonishment

comfortable

flocking

perplexed

tempting

bargain

demand

hearth

precious

trifling

B Y T I E U Q B F S G S
H A T R Z D A I L U N U
H E R J I R U A O O I O
L T J G G F B N C I T I
U T R A A E L C K V P C
Z L I A E I H I I N M E
D N A M E D N E N E E R
R E T T U H S N G G T P
E C O M F O R T A B L E
K P E R P L E X E D O M
T E P S R E M O C W E N
A S T O N I S H M E N T

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

WHY THE SEA IS SALT

There were, in very ancient times, two brothers, one of whom was rich, and the other poor. Christmas was approaching, but the poor man had nothing in the house for a Christmas dinner; so he went to his brother and asked him for a trifling gift. The rich man was ill-natured, and when he heard his brother's request he looked very surly. But as Christmas is a time when even the worst people give gifts, he took a fine ham down from the chimney, where it was hanging to smoke, threw it at his brother, and bade him begone and never to let him see his face again.

The poor man thanked his brother for the ham, put it under his arm, and went his way. He had to pass through a great forest on his way home. When he had reached the thickest part of it, he saw an old man, with a long, white beard, hewing timber. "Good evening," said he to him.

"Good evening," returned the old man, raising himself up from his work, and looking at him. "That is a fine ham you are carrying." On this, the poor man told him all about it.

"It is lucky for you," said the old man, "that you have met with me. If you will take that ham into the land of the dwarfs, the entrance to which lies just under the roots of this tree, you can make a capital bargain with it; for the dwarfs are very fond of ham, and rarely get any. But mind what I say: you must not sell it for money, but demand for it the 'old hand mill which stands behind the door.' When you come back, I'll show you how to use it."

The poor man thanked his new friend, who showed him the door under a stone below the roots of the tree, and by this door he entered into the land of the dwarfs. No sooner had he set his foot in it, than the dwarfs swarmed about him, attracted by the smell of the ham. They offered him queer, old-fashioned money and gold and silver ore for it; but he refused all their tempting offers, and said that he would sell it only for the old hand mill behind the door.

At this, the dwarfs held up their little old hands, and looked quite perplexed. "We cannot make a bargain, it seems," said the poor man, "so I'll bid you all a good

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

day.” The fragrance of the ham had by this time reached the remote parts of dwarf land. The dwarfs came flocking around in little troops, leaving their work of digging out precious ores, eager for the ham. 9. “Let him have the old mill,” said some of the newcomers; “it is quite out of order, and he don’t know how to use it. Let him have it, and we will have the ham.”

So the bargain was made. The poor man took the old hand mill, which was a little thing not half so large as the ham, and went back to the woods. Here the old man showed him how to use it. All this had taken up a great deal of time, and it was midnight before he reached home.

“Where in the world have you been?” said his wife. “Here I have been waiting and waiting and we have no wood to make a fire, nor anything to put into the porridge pot for our Christmas supper.”

The house was dark and cold; but the poor man bade his wife wait and see what would happen. He placed the little hand mill on the table, and began to turn the crank. First, out there came some grand, lighted wax candles and a fire on the hearth, and a porridge pot boiling over it, because in his mind he said they should come first. Then he ground out a tablecloth, and dishes, and spoons, and knives and forks.

He was himself astonished at his good luck, as you may believe; and his wife was almost beside herself with joy and astonishment. Well, they had a capital supper; and after it was eaten, they ground out of the mill every possible thing to make their house and themselves warm and comfortable. So they had a merry Christmas eve and morning.

When the people went by the house to church, the next day, they could hardly believe their eyes. There was glass in the windows instead of a wooden shutter, and the poor man and his wife, dressed in nice new clothes, were seen devoutly kneeling in the church.

“There is something very strange in all this,” said everyone. “Something very strange indeed,” said the rich man, when three days afterwards he received an invitation from his once poor brother to a grand feast. And what a feast it was! The table was covered with a cloth as white as snow, and the dishes were all of silver or gold. The rich man could not, in his great house, and with all his wealth, set out such a table.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

“Where did you get all these things?” exclaimed he. His brother told him all about the bargain he had made with the dwarfs, and putting the mill on the table, ground out boots and shoes, coats and cloaks, stockings, gowns, and blankets, and bade his wife give them to the poor people that had gathered about the house to get a sight of the grand feast the poor brother had made for the rich one.

The rich man, was very envious of his brother’s good fortune, and wanted to borrow the mill, intending—for he was not an honest man—never to return it again. His brother would not lend it, for the old man with the white beard had told him never to sell or lend it to anyone. Some years went on, and, at last, the possessor of the mill built himself a grand castle on a rock by the sea, facing the west. Its windows, reflecting the golden sunset, could be seen far out from the shore. It became a noted landmark for sailors. Strangers from foreign parts often came to see this castle and the wonderful mill of which the most extraordinary tales were told.

At length, a great foreign merchant came, and when he had seen the mill, inquired whether it would grind salt. Being told that it would, he wanted to buy it; for he traded in salt, and thought that if he owned it he could supply all his customers without taking long and dangerous voyages. The man would not sell it, of course. He was so rich now that he did not want to use it for himself; but every Christmas he ground out food and clothes and coal for the poor and nice presents for the little children. So he rejected all the offers of the rich merchant. The merchant, however, determined to have it; he bribed one of the man’s servants to let him go into the castle at night, and he stole the mill and sailed away with it in triumph.

He had scarcely got out to sea, before he determined to set the mill to work. “Now, mill, grind salt,” said he; “grind salt with all you might!—salt, salt, and nothing but salt!” The mill began to grind and the sailors to fill the sacks; but these were soon full, and in spite of all that could be done, it began to fill the ship. The dishonest merchant was now very much frightened. What was to be done? The mill would not stop grinding; and at last the ship was overloaded, and down it went, making a great whirlpool where it sank. The ship soon went to pieces; but the mill stands on the bottom of the sea, and keeps grinding out “salt, salt, nothing but salt!” That is the reason, say the peasants of Denmark and Norway, why the sea is salt.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. Where are Denmark and Norway? What do these two regions have in common?

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What had one brother that the other brother did not?

2. According to the passage, what does the word “peasants” means?

3. What is meant by “strangers from foreign parts”?

4. How did the poor man treat his rich brother in return for his unkindness?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

5. Use the passage to help you determine the meaning of the following words.
Match the word and its meaning.

SORT ELEMENTS

- a gulf in which the water moves round in a circle.
- wonderful.
- throwing back light, heat, etc., as a mirror.
- in a reverent manner
- an object on land serving as a guide to seamen

Whirlpool	
Devoutly	
Reflecting	
Extraordinary	
Landmark	

6. How did the poor man find the way to the land of the dwarfs?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

7. Match the word and its meaning.

SORT ELEMENTS

- puzzled
- of small value
- sweetness of smell.
- a mill turned by hand.
- drawn to allured.

Perplexed	
Attracted	
Fragrance	
Trifling	
Hand-mill	

8. Do you think the old man would have told him if the poor man had not been so polite?

Name: _____

Date: _____

Reading Comprehension Worksheets

9. What is a “fairy tale”?

10. What fairy people are told about in this story?

11. How was the greed of the dishonest merchant punished?
