

Name: _____ Class: _____

The Four Dragons

In this folktale, four dragons work to help a community that is suffering from a long drought. As you read, take notes on what the dragons do to help the people.

- [1] Once upon a time, there were no rivers and lakes on earth, but only the Eastern Sea, in which lived four dragons: the Long Dragon, the Yellow Dragon, the Black Dragon, and the Pearl Dragon. One day the four dragons flew from the sea into the sky. They soared and dived, playing at hide-and-seek in the clouds.

“Come over here quickly!” the Pearl Dragon cried out suddenly.

“What’s up?” asked the other three, looking down in the direction where the Pearl Dragon pointed.

On the earth they saw many people putting out fruits and cakes, and burning incense sticks. They were praying! A white-haired woman, kneeling on the ground with a thin boy on her back, murmured,



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- [5] “Please send rain quickly, God of Heaven, to give our children rice to eat.”

For there had been no rain for a long time. The crops withered, the grass turned yellow and fields cracked under the scorching sun.

“How poor the people are!” said the Yellow Dragon. “And they will die if it doesn’t rain soon.”

The Long Dragon nodded. Then he suggested, “Let’s go and beg the Jade Emperor for rain.”

So saying, he leapt into the clouds. The others followed closely and flew towards the Heavenly Palace. Being in charge of all the affairs in heaven, on earth, and in the sea, the Jade Emperor was very powerful. He was not pleased to see the dragons rushing in.

- [10] “Why do you come here instead of staying in the sea and behaving yourselves?”

The Long Dragon stepped forward and said, “The crops on earth are withering¹ and dying, Your Majesty. I beg you to send rain down quickly!”

“All right. You go back first, I’ll send some rain down tomorrow.” The Jade Emperor pretended to agree while listening to the songs of the fairies.

1. **Wither (verb):** to become dry and shriveled

The four dragons responded, "Thanks, Your Majesty!"

The four dragons went happily back. But ten days passed, and not a drop of rain came down. The people suffered more, some eating bark, some grass roots, some forced to eat white clay when they ran out of bark and grass roots. Seeing all this, the four dragons felt very sorry, for they knew the Jade Emperor only cared about pleasure, and never took the people to heart. They could only rely on themselves to relieve the people of their miseries. But how to do it? Seeing the vast sea, the Long Dragon said that he had an idea.

[15] "What is it? Out with it, quickly!" the other three demanded.

"Look, is there not plenty of water in the sea where we live? We should scoop it up and spray it towards the sky. The water will be like rain drops and come down to save the people and their crops," said Long Dragon.

"Good idea!" said the others as they clapped their hands.

"But," said the Long Dragon after thinking a bit, "we will be blamed if the Jade Emperor learns of this."

"I will do anything to save the people," the Yellow Dragon said resolutely.

[20] "Then let's begin. We will never regret it," said Long Dragon.

The Black Dragon and the Pearl Dragon were not to be outdone. They flew to the sea, scooped up water in their mouths, and then flew back into the sky where they sprayed the water out over the earth. The four dragons flew back and forth, making the sky dark all around. Before long the sea water became rain pouring down from the sky.

"It's raining! It's raining! The crops will be saved!" the people cried and leaped with joy.

On the ground the wheat stalks raised their heads and the sorghum² stalks straightened up. The god of the sea discovered these events and reported to the Jade Emperor.

"How dare the four dragons bring rain without my permission!" said the Jade Emperor.

[25] The Jade Emperor was enraged, and ordered the heavenly generals and their troops to arrest the four dragons. Being far outnumbered, the four dragons could not defend themselves, and they were soon arrested and brought back to the heavenly palace.

"Go and get four mountains to lay upon them so that they can never escape!" The Jade Emperor ordered the Mountain God.

2. a type of grain

The Mountain God used his magic power to make four mountains fly there, whistling in the wind from afar, and pressed them down upon the four dragons. Imprisoned as they were, they never regretted their actions. Determined to do good for the people forever, they turned themselves into four rivers, which flowed past high mountains and deep valleys, crossing the land from the west to the east and finally emptying into the sea. And so China's four great rivers were formed — the Heilongjian (Black Dragon) in the far north, the Huanghe (Yellow River) in central China, the Changjiang (Yangtze, or Long River) farther south, and the Zhujiang (Pearl) in the very south.

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Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: How do the dragon's actions contribute to the development of the theme of the folktale?
 - A. Their playfulness shows that appearances can be misleading when making character judgments.
 - B. Their willingness to disobey the Jade Emperor shows that sacrifice is often needed for the good of others.
 - C. Their reliability shows that respecting one's elders and following instructions are necessary for a successful society.
 - D. Their respect for the Jade Emperor shows that children can learn much from their ancestors about historical events.

2. PART B: Which TWO paragraphs from the folktale support the answer to Part A?
 - A. Paragraph 1
 - B. Paragraph 8
 - C. Paragraph 13
 - D. Paragraph 18
 - E. Paragraph 23
 - F. Paragraph 27

3. PART A: As used in paragraph 19, what is the meaning of the word "resolutely"?
 - A. acting with determination
 - B. hesitating to act
 - C. producing results
 - D. proceeding cautiously

4. PART B: Which quotation most helps the reader understand the meaning of "resolutely"?
 - A. "Look, is there not plenty of water in the sea where we live?" (Paragraph 16)
 - B. "We should scoop it up and spray it towards the sky." (Paragraph 16)
 - C. "Good idea!" said the others as they clapped their hands." (Paragraph 17)
 - D. "Then let's begin. We will never regret it," said Long Dragon." (Paragraph 20)

5. PART A: In the folktale, how do the dragons most impact the resolution of the plot?
 - A. by providing rain for the people
 - B. by becoming imprisoned in mountains
 - C. by creating a permanent water supply
 - D. by angering the god of the sea

6. PART B: Which detail from the folktale best supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "The water will be like rain drops and come down to save the people" (Paragraph 16)
 - B. "discovered these events and reported to the Jade Emperor." (Paragraph 23)
 - C. "Go and get four mountains to lay upon them" (Paragraph 26)
 - D. "they turned themselves into four rivers" (Paragraph 27)
7. PART A: Which difference in attitudes between the Jade Emperor and the dragons influences events later in the folktale?
- A. The Jade Emperor is amused by the needs of the people, and the dragons are annoyed.
 - B. The Jade Emperor is angered by the needs of the people, and the dragons are pleased.
 - C. The Jade Emperor is indifferent about the needs of the people, and the dragons are concerned.
 - D. The Jade Emperor is upset about the needs of the people, and the dragons are worried.
8. PART B: Which paragraphs provide evidence to support the answer to Part A?
- A. Paragraphs 2-3
 - B. Paragraphs 5-6
 - C. Paragraphs 11-12
 - D. Paragraphs 22-23

