

# The Tale of Custard the Dragon

This is a story of a girl Belinda, who has some strange pets. They have queer names. She calls the black kitten Ink, the little grey mouse as Blink, the yellow dog as Mustard and the cowardly dragon Custard. Belinda's, the kitten, the mouse and the dog were very brave but the dragon was a coward. One day, a pirate came armed with a pistol into their house except the dragon, Custard and all the others were terrified of the pirate. Custard attacked the pirate and gobbled him up. Belinda then embraced him while Mustard licked him. Even after this brave incident, Custard did not give up his cowardly ways. He still kept on crying for a safe cage.

## NCERT Solutions

### Thinking about the poem (132)

Question 1.

Who are the characters in this poem? List them with their pet names.

Answer:

The characters in this poem are Belinda, a little girl, and her pets: a little black kitten, a little grey mouse, a little yellow dog, a little pet dragon and a pirate.

Characters	Pet name
Kitten	Ink
Mouse	Blink
Dog	Mustard
Dragon	Custard

Question 2.

Why did Custard cry for a nice safe cage? Why is the dragon called "cowardly dragon"?

Answer:

Custard cried for a nice safe cage because it was a coward and was scared very easily. It is called "cowardly dragon" because everyone else in the house is very brave while the dragon is the only one,

who fears a lot and looks for a nice safe cage for himself. Belinda is as brave as a barrel full of bears, Ink and Blink can chase lions and Mustard is as brave as an angry tiger.

Question 3.

“Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful...” Why?

Answer:

Tickling always works on people, who are a little softer. So, Belinda tickled the dragon unmerciful as it worked a lot on him. Despite being a dragon, a tickling could disturb him and this showed his cowardice on which everyone laughed.

Question 4.

The poet has employed many poetic devices in the poem. For example “Clashed his tail like iron in a dungeon” – the poetic device here is a simile. Can you, with your partner, list some more such poetic devices used in the poem?

Answer:

In the poem, ‘The tale of Custard, the Dragon’, the poet has used a lot of poetic devices. Following are the devices used

1. Simile: mouth like a fireplace
2. Repetition: the repetitive use of the word ‘little’ in stanza 1.

Question 5.

Read stanza three again to know how the poet describes the appearance of the dragon.

Answer:

Do it yourself.

Question 6.

Can you find out the rhyme scheme of two or three stanzas of the poem?

Answer:

The rhyme scheme of the poem is ‘aabb’.

Question 7.

Writers use words to give us a picture or image without actually saying what they mean. Can you trace some images used in the poem?

Answer:

Writers always use such phrases and words that do not tell us directly about what they mean but always gives us an indication of the meaning. Such words or phrases are used to trigger our own imagination in painting the picture that they mean. Use of such images in the poem is the following: ‘mouth like a fireplace’, ‘chimney for a nose’, ‘brave as a barrel full of bears’, ‘brave as a tiger in a rage’, ‘went at the pirate like a robin at a worm’, etc.

Question 8.

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

Answer:

‘The Tale of Custard the Dragon’ is a very light and funny poem meant to be enjoyed by everyone. The way the poem has been written with a fix rhyme scheme, makes it very easy and enjoyable to

read. The poet has even used wrong spelling to maintain the rhyme scheme. The features of Belinda and her pets described in the poem make it quite funny. Belinda's bravery has been compared to a barrel full of bears, a liquid substance. All the tiny creatures such as the kitten and the mouse have been shown so brave that they can scare a lion and the dog's bravery is like a tiger's rage. The biggest of them all, the dragon is the only one, who has been shown as a coward and soft being, who looks for a cage for himself, which is very ironic, hence making the poem funny.

Question 9.

This poem, in ballad form, tells a story. Have you come across any such modern song or lyric that tells a story? If you know one, tell it to the class. Collect such songs as a project.

Answer:

Do it yourself

## Extra Questions

### Short Answer Type

Question 1.

What were the names of Belinda's pets?

Answer:

The names of Belinda's pets were Ink, a little black kitten; Mustard, a little yellow dog; Blink, a little grey mouse and a dragon whose name was Custard.

Question 2.

How did the pirate look?

Answer:

The pirate held a pistol in his left hand and another pistol in his right hand. He had black beard and his one leg was of wood. He held a bright cutlass in his teeth. It was clear that his intentions were not good.

Question 3.

Why did the Belinda cry for help?

Answer:

Belinda was scared to see the pirate who had pistols in his hands and had a bright cutlass in his teeth. There was something bad in his appearance and intention. Therefore Belinda was afraid of the pirate and cried for help.

Question 4.

What did the custard do at last?

Answer:

Custard saved Belinda and the other pets from the pirate. He showed his braver side and attacked the pirate and gobbled him up. Finally, Custard showed that he was not as coward as others.

Question 5.

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

Answer:

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.

Question 6.

What did Belinda and her pets hear?

Answer:

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.

Question 7.

What terrified the pirate? Who killed him and how?

Answer:

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.

Question 8.

Write the poetic aspect of the poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon".

Answer:

The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" is a light-hearted story, written in the ballad style. It is written in a four-lined stanza format with the rhyming scheme of aabb. It takes it near to the heroic couplet. The poem offers many similes. The stanzas vary in size. The lines are prosaic and long. The first two stanzas act as refrain to indicate continuity. The words are simple.

Question 9.

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'.

Answer:

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.

Question 10.

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'.

Answer:

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.

Question 11.

The dragon Custard was considered a coward. The humble dragon proved his bravery in adversity. Analyses that certain qualities like bravery and courage are situation and spontaneous. Explain with reference to the poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon".

Answer:

The pirate held a pistol in his left hand and another pistol in his right hand. He had black beard and his one leg was of wood. He held a bright cutlass in his teeth. It was clear that his intentions were not good.

Question 12.

Who are the characters in this poem? List them with their pet names.

Answer:

The characters in this poem are Belinda, a little black kitten, a little grey mouse, a little yellow dog, a little pet dragon and a pirate.

Character	Pet name
Kitten	Ink
Mouse	Blink
Dog	Mustard
Dragon	Custard

Question 13.

Why did Custard cry for a nice, safe cage? Why is the dragon called "cowardly dragon"?

Answer:

Custard cried for a nice, safe cage because it was a coward. It is called a 'cowardly dragon' because

everybody else in the house was brave. Belinda was as brave as a barrel of bears. Ink and blink are described as so brave they chased lions down the stairs and Mustard was as brave as a tiger in rage. Compared to them, Custard cried asking for a nice and safe cage, which is why it is called a coward.

Question 14.

“Belinda tickled him, she tickled him unmerciful...” Why?

Answer:

Belinda tickled the dragon unmercifully because it was very scared and cried for a safe cage. They all laughed at it as it was a coward.

Question 15.

The poet has employed many poetic devices in the poem. For example: “Clashed his tail like iron in a dungeon”—the poetic device here is a simile. Can you, with your partner, list some more such poetic devices used in the poem?

Answer:

In the entire poem, the poet has made extensive use of similes. Apart from simile, another poetic device that has been used is repetition. For example, the repetitive use of the word ‘little’ in the first stanza to emphasize how everything from the house to Belinda to her pets were all little. Also, in the seventh stanza, the poet has made use of incorrect spelling as a poetic device to maintain the rhyme scheme of the poem.

He has chosen to write ‘winda’ instead of ‘window’ as ‘winda’ rhymes with ‘Belinda’, whereas ‘window’ does not. He has also used alliteration in the poem. For example, in the tenth stanza, ‘custard’ has ‘clashed’ his tail with a ‘clatter’ and a ‘clank’. Similarly, in stanza eleven, the pirate ‘gaped’ at the dragon and ‘gulped’ some ‘grog’.

Question 16.

Read the stanza three again to know how the poet describes the appearance of the dragon.

Answer:

The teeth of the dragon, Custard were having fine edges or points. There were spikes with sharp points on the top of his body and beneath his body had scales or hard body. His mouth looked like a fireplace or hearth and his nose was like a chimney. And there were short pointed daggers like sharp points on his toes.

Question 17.

Can you find out the rhyme scheme of two or three stanzas of the poem?

Answer:

The rhyme scheme of each stanza of this poem is ‘aabb’.

Question 18.

Writers use words to give us a picture or image without actually saying what they mean. Can you trace some images used in the poem?

Answer:

Some such images used in the poem are ‘mouth like a fireplace’, ‘chimney for a nose’, ‘brave as a barrel full of bears’, ‘brave as a tiger in a rage’, ‘went at the pirate like a robin at a worm’, etc.

Question 19.

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

Answer:

*The Tale of Custard the Dragon* is a light-hearted poem. It is almost a parody. The names of the pets of Belinda are all rhyming and funny. Belinda has been compared to a barrel full of bears. The kitten and mouse, both little, could chase lions down the stairs. The little yellow dog was as brave as a tiger, while the dragon was a coward and they all teased him. However, when the pirate came to their little house, all of them were engulfed in fear and had hidden themselves.

Ironically, the 'cowardly' dragon came to their rescue and jumped snorting like an engine. It clashed its tail and charged at the pirate like a robin at a worm and ate him up. Even as everybody became happy to see the bravery of the dragon, they again came back to glorifying themselves that they could have been twice or thrice braver than the dragon. Finally, at the end of the poem, the situation again came back to the other pets being brave and the dragon being the coward.

Question 20.

This poem, in ballad form, tells a story. Have you come across any such modern song or lyric that tells a story? If you know one, tell it to the class. Collect such songs as a project.

Answer:

'Light of Asia' is an epic that has been read. It tells us a story in verse. In it we get the story of Prince Siddhartha, the son of king Sudhodhana. We get from it the complete story of his life, how he was brought-up and how he got married and how he became a saint.

## Reference to Context

Read the following stanza and answer the questions that follow:

Question 1.

*Belinda lived in a little white house,  
With a little black kitten and a little grey mouse,  
And a little yellow dog and little red wagon,  
And a realio, trulio, little pet dragon.*

- (i) Name the poem and poet.
- (ii) Who was Belinda?
- (iii) Where did Belinda live?
- (iv) Who were her companions?

Answer:

- (i) This stanza has been taken from the poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" composed by Ogden Nash.
- (ii) Belinda was a little girl.
- (iii) Belinda lived in a little white house.
- (iv) Belinda had four pets—a little black kitten, a little grey mouse, a little yellow dog and a little red wagon.

Question 2.

*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.*

- (i) What were the names of her pets?
- (ii) Who was the sharpest of them?
- (iii) Who was a coward?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Kitten was Ink, mouse was Blink, the dog was Mustard and the dragon was called Custard.
- (ii) Mustard, the dog was the sharpest of them.
- (iii) The dragon, Custard was a coward.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 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.*

- (i) Who was Custard?
- (ii) What were on his top?
- (iii) How did his mouth and nose look like?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Custard was the pet dragon of Belinda.
- (ii) There were spikes on his top.
- (iii) His mouth looked like a fireplace and his nose was like a chimney.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 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.*

- (i) What type of a girl was Belinda?
- (ii) Who was Ink and Blink?
- (iii) Who was Mustard? What was his quality?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears.
- (ii) The kitten was Ink and the mouse was Blink.
- (iii) Mustard was the name of her pet dog. He was as brave as a tiger.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 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.*

- (i) Who did Belinda tickle?
- (ii) What did other pets call him?
- (iii) Why did they laugh at him?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Belinda tickled the Dragon.
- (ii) The other pets called him Percival.
- (iii) They laughed at him because he was coward.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 6.

*Belinda giggled till she shook the house,  
And Blink said Weeck! which is giggling for a mouse,  
Ink and Mustard rudely asked his age,  
When Custard cried for a nice safe cage.*

- (i) On whom did Belinda giggle?
- (ii) How did Ink and Mustard trouble Custard?
- (iii) What did Custard cry for?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Belinda giggled and made fun of him when Custard cried for a nice safe cage.
- (ii) Ink and Mustard made fun of Custard and rudely asked his age.
- (iii) Custard cried for a nice safe place.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 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.*

- (i) Who are 'they here?
- (ii) What did they hear?
- (iii) How did they react?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) 'They' are Belinda and her pets.
- (ii) They heard a nasty sound.
- (iii) All of them were afraid.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 8.

*Pistol in his left hand, pistol in his right,  
And he held in his teeth a cutlass bright,  
His beard was black, one leg was wood;  
It was clear that the pirate meant no good.*

- (i) Who is 'He' in this stanza?
- (ii) What did he look like?
- (iii) What was his intention?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) 'He' is the pirate in this stanza, who had entered to their house.
- (ii) His beard was black. He had one wooden leg. He looked scary.
- (iii) He did not have good intention.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 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 mouseholed.*

- (i) Why did Belinda become pale?
- (ii) How did Mustard react?
- (iii) What did Ink do? Why?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) Belinda paled when a pirate attacked her.
- (ii) Mustard fled with a terrified yelp.
- (iii) Ink was so terrified that she trickled down to the bottom of the household.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

Question 10.

*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.*

- (i) What did the pirate do?
- (ii) What did he drink?
- (iii) What did Custard do?
- (iv) Name the poem and poet.

Answer:

- (i) The pirate gaped at Belinda's dragon (Custard).
- (ii) He drank some wine from his vessel.
- (iii) Custard gobbled pirate slowly and slowly.
- (iv) The poem "The Tale of Custard the Dragon" and composed by "Ogden Nash".

