

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Read the story and answer the questions that follow.

## **“The Sword of Damocles”**

**Retold by James Baldwin**

There once was a king whose name was Dionysius. He was so unjust and cruel that he won for himself the name of a tyrant. He knew that almost everybody hated him, and so he was always in dread lest someone should take his life.

But he was very rich, and he lived in a fine palace where there were many beautiful and costly things. And he was waited upon by a host of servants who were always ready to do his bidding.

One day, a friend of his, whose name was Damocles, said to him, “How happy you must be! You have here everything that any man could wish.”

“Perhaps you would like to change places with me,” said the tyrant.

“No, not that, O king!” said Damocles. “But I think that if I could only have your riches and your pleasures for one day, I should not want any greater happiness.”

“Very well,” said the tyrant. “You shall have them.”

And so, the next day, Damocles was led into the palace, and all the servants were bidden to treat him as their master. He sat down at a table in the banquet hall, and rich foods were placed before him. He lacked nothing that could give him pleasure. There were costly wines, and beautiful flowers, and rare perfumes, and delightful music. He rested among soft cushions and felt that he was the happiest man in the world.

Then he chanced to raise his eyes toward the ceiling. What was it dangling above him, with its point almost touching his head? It was a sharp sword, and it was hung by only a single horsehair. What if the hair should break? There was danger every moment that it would do so.

The smile faded from the lips of Damocles. His face became ashy pale. His hands trembled. He wanted no more food; he could drink no more wine; he took no more delight in the music. He longed to be out of the palace, far away; he cared not where.

“What is the matter?” said the tyrant.

“That sword! That sword!” cried Damocles. He was so badly frightened that he dared not move.

“Yes,” said Dionysius. “I know there is a sword above your head, and it may fall at any moment. But why should that trouble you? I have a sword over my head all the time. I am every moment in dread lest something may cost me to lose my life.”



“Let me go,” said Damocles. “I now see that I am mistaken and that the rich and powerful are not so happy as they seem. Let me go back to my cottage among the mountains.”

And as long as he lived, he never wanted to change places with the king.

1. Which statement best describes how Damocles views the life of Dionysius at the beginning of the story?
- A. easy and carefree, because he is so cruel
  - B. dangerous, because his subjects may kill him
  - C. wonderful, because he has riches and fine things
  - D. lonely, because his subjects don't like him

2. Which word best describes Damocles at the beginning of the story?
- A. happy
  - B. jealous
  - C. frightened
  - D. adventurous

3. Why is Dionysius referred to as “the tyrant”?
- A. to remind us that he is very rich
  - B. to remind us that he is a good friend to Damocles
  - C. to remind us that he doesn't want to be king anymore
  - D. to remind us that he is a very cruel and unfair king

4. Dionysius rules his kingdom like a tyrant, so his subjects
- A. want to kill him.
  - B. would prefer Damocles be king.
  - C. are happy for him.
  - D. refuse to eat and drink with him.



5. When Damocles chooses to live like the king, what does he learn?

- A. He realizes that having riches only brings problems.
- B. He learns that being the king is hard work.
- C. He understands that the king's life is not as easy as he thought.
- D. He has an argument with Dionysius.

6. What problem does Damocles have at the start of the story and how does he solve it?

- A. He is very hungry, and he is able to have his fill of food and drink at the palace.
- B. His life is in danger, but he is able to gain protection from the king by becoming his friend.
- C. He envies the king's riches, but he realizes that his own life is happier.
- D. He is upset that the king is a tyrant, and he convinces the king to be kinder.

7. Which of the following statements might Damocles make at the end of the story?

- A. "I will do my best to protect the king from danger."
- B. "I don't want to be king, but I still want to be wealthy and strong."
- C. "I will try to find a stronger rope to hold the sword."
- D. "I don't want to be rich and powerful because it might not make me happy."

8. Which is an example of figurative language from the story?

- A. He was so badly frightened that he dared not move.
- B. He lacked nothing that could give him pleasure.
- C. When Dionysius tells Damocles, "I have a sword over my head all the time."
- D. When Damocles tells Dionysius, "I should not want any greater happiness."



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On the other side of the sea from Rome there was once a great city named Carthage. The Roman people were never very friendly to the people of Carthage, and at last a war began between them. For a long time it was hard to tell which would prove the stronger. First the Romans would win a battle, and then the men of Carthage would win a battle; and so the war went on for many years.

Among the Romans there was a brave general named Regulus. It so happened after a while, that Regulus was taken prisoner and taken to Carthage. Sick, and very lonely, he dreamed of his wife and children so very far away. He had little hope of ever seeing them again. He loved his home dearly, but he believed that his first duty was to his country; and so he had left his home to fight in this cruel war.

He had lost a battle and had been taken prisoner. Yet he knew that the Romans were gaining ground, and the people of Carthage were afraid of being beaten in the end. They hired soldiers from other countries to help them, but even with their help Carthage would not be able to fight against Rome for much longer.

One day some of the rulers of Carthage came to the prison to talk with Regulus. “We would like to make peace with the Roman people,” they said, “and we are sure that if your rulers at home knew how the war is going, they would be glad to make peace with us. We will set you free and let you go home, if you will agree to do as we say.”

“What is that?” asked Regulus.

“In the first place,” they said, “you must tell the Romans about the battles which you have lost, and you must make it clear to them that they have not gained anything by the war. In the second place, you must promise us that if they will not make peace, you will come back to our prison.”

“Very well,” said Regulus, “I promise you that if they will not make peace, I will come back to prison.”

So they let him go. They knew that a great Roman soldier would keep his word. When he arrived in Rome, all the people greeted him gladly. The men who made the laws for the city came to see him. They asked him about the war.

“I was sent from Carthage to ask you to make peace,” he said. “But it will not be wise to make peace. It is true that we have been beaten in a few battles, but our army is gaining ground every day. The people of Carthage are afraid. Keep on with the war a little while longer, and Carthage shall be yours. As for me, I have come to bid my wife and children and Rome farewell. Tomorrow I will start back to Carthage and to prison, for I have promised.”



Then the men tried to persuade him to stay. "Let us send another man in your place," they said.

"Shall a Roman not keep his word?" answered Regulus. "I am ill, and at the best do not have long to live. I will go back, as I promised."

His wife and little children wept. His sons begged him not to leave them again.

"I have given my word," said Regulus. Then he said good-bye, and went bravely back to the prison in Carthage.

9. Who was Regulus?

- A. a leader from Carthage
- B. a general from Rome
- C. a prison guard
- D. a man who made laws

10. Why did Regulus leave Rome?

- A. He had to find a job so he could support his family.
- B. The people of Carthage asked him to move to their country.
- C. He wanted to travel to see other countries.
- D. He believed that his first duty was to fight for his country.

11. What happened to Regulus during the war?

- A. He left his family in Carthage.
- B. He was injured in a battle.
- C. He won the war.
- D. He was captured.

12. Why did the rulers of Carthage let Regulus return to Rome?

- A. His wife was sick and he needed to go home.
- B. They knew he would keep his promise to them.
- C. His children begged them to send him home.
- D. They knew that the Romans would make him return.



13. What consequence did Regulus face when he chose to tell the Romans to keep fighting?
- A. He had to beg the Roman leaders to let him return to Carthage.
  - B. He had to face imprisonment in Rome.
  - C. He had to send his wife and sons to Carthage.
  - D. He had to go back to Carthage and return to prison.

14. Which one of the following words best describes Regulus when he returned to Carthage?
- A. tired
  - B. frightened
  - C. courageous
  - D. dishonest

15. What might a soldier from Carthage say about Regulus?
- A. "He is a weak man and a poor general."
  - B. "He is a fine soldier whom we should ask to fight for us."
  - C. "He is a good peacemaker."
  - D. "He is a man of honor."

16. What inference can you make about Regulus?
- A. He is a very good father.
  - B. He wants to help Rome succeed.
  - C. He wants to die in Carthage.
  - D. He has won many battles in his life.

17. Which of the following is a possible theme for the story?
- A. It is important to encourage your country to win a war.
  - B. By no means should you ever be captured in war.
  - C. Never forget your family and friends.
  - D. An honest person keeps his word.

Read the story and answer the questions that follow.

### Reading Passage #3

The revolution in transportation started with roads. In ancient times, the Romans had built splendid roads, but those crumbled during the Middle Ages. In Britain, the responsibility for road repair passed to church parishes. Local volunteers did the work. They didn't care if the roads were bumpy since they rarely traveled far from home. *paragraph 1*

In the late 1700s, for most people travel over land was travail, which means toil, agony, hardship. Travelers suffered bone-jarring journeys over muddy, rutted roads. Passengers in horse-drawn coaches often got out to walk alongside the coach for stretches, because walking hurt less. *paragraph 2*

Eventually a few big landowners began pooling their money and hiring workers to build private roads called turnpikes. The word turnpike came from medieval times, when revolving gates tipped with sharp pikes were used to block certain roads. Those who wanted to use the roads had to pay a toll, and the tolls paid for construction and road repair. *paragraph 3*

In 1815, a Scotsman named John McAdam started putting into practice some scientific principles he'd been working on for road-building. He laid a foundation of crushed rock that raised a roadbed a few inches above the surrounding ground. Such roads drained well and held up to heavy traffic. Other road builders began to use McAdam's system. On these better roads, merchants could haul heavier loads with fewer horses. Trade increased, prices fell, and over the course of a century, passenger traffic between British cities multiplied more than 10 times over. *paragraph 4*

John McAdam's process for road surfacing is with us still. In fact, his name has become a word—macadam—used for roadways built by the principles McAdam developed. Macadam roads or driveways employ layers of small stones or finely ground rock over well-drained soil. he had left his home to fight in this cruel war. *paragraph 5*



18. Which of the following choices would make a good title for this article?
- A. The Importance of Turnpikes Today
  - B. Famous Industrialists
  - C. Improving Roads Throughout History
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19. How can you tell that this is a nonfiction passage?
- A. because it has a main character
  - B. because it gives facts and information
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20. Where might you look for the definitions of the boldfaced words if you were reading this passage in a textbook?
- A. glossary
  - B. index
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21. Which of the following is a fact?
- A. People enjoy driving on macadam roads because they are not bumpy.
  - B. Tolls on turnpikes paid for construction and repairs to the roads.
  - C. Most of the local volunteers who built roads in the 1700s were lazy.
  - D. Building roads is interesting and enjoyable work.

22. Which sentence best states the main idea of paragraph 4 in the passage?
- A. Roads built with McAdam's methods had a great effect on both road development and the British economy.
  - B. John McAdam was one of Scotland's greatest inventors.
  - C. Crushed rock is an important component in making roads.
  - D. Heavy traffic caused roads to break apart into small bits of rock.

23. Why were merchants able to carry larger loads with fewer horses on macadam roads?
- A. The horses were able to move faster on the new roads.
  - B. The new roads were able to withstand heavier traffic.
  - C. The price for using the new roads fell.
  - D. People who rode horses on the new roads did not suffer as much as before.

TOTAL SCORE: \_\_\_\_\_ out of 23 correct





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But he was very rich, and he lived in a fine palace where there were many beautiful and costly things. And he was waited upon by a host of servants who were always ready to do his bidding.

One day, a friend of his, whose name was Damocles, said to him, “How happy you must be! You have here everything that any man could wish.”

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