

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Jack and the Giant Pepper

Once there was a boy named Jack. He lived in the forest with his mother and their pet panda bear, Archibald. They were happy, but they were very poor. One day, Mom said, "Dearest Jack, our cash flow is seriously plugged. You'll have to sell Archibald at the market. Buy food and seeds. This is all we have, so don't buy any nonsense!"

Jack liked his panda, but he was nearly starved. So he hiked with Archibald through the forest to the market. Suddenly, a little purple man in a shiny silver tweed suit jumped onto the path. His face was a wrinkly old potato, but his eyes were sharp and bright as knifepoints. "Gushing grape juice!" he croaked. "That's the finest panda in the county! How'd you like to trade it for something magical?"

*Magical.* Jack's scalp tingled. "Actually, I'm shopping for food and seeds."

"Seeds! How about a *real* seed?" The man opened his fist, and on his palm a seed sparkled like a ruby. "This seed'll grow into the biggest pepper in the world."

"A giant pepper plant!" Jack said. "I could climb up the vine to the cloud lands where the giant lives! I could steal his treasures and never work again! Wow! It's a deal, grape man!"

Jack traded the panda and ran home with the magic seed.

"One seed?" Mom said. "What are we supposed to eat while it grows?"

"Oops," Jack said. As usual, his belly chose the wrong moment to growl.

"Now we really will starve," Mom said. There was nothing to do but plant the seed. The next morning, the magic plant had already grown! But it wasn't a giant vine, it was a giant *pepper*. The plant was normal. The pepper was the size of a house.

"Oh, that's great," Jack said. "I can't climb a big pepper to the giant."

"Sell it," Mom said. "It won't fetch as much as the panda, but anything's better than three months of pepper casserole. I trust you know what to buy this time, son."

So Jack rolled the pepper to market. It was ridiculously heavy, and of course he had to roll it up a big hill. Suddenly, up came the old man. He was riding Archibald.

"That pepper for sale?" asked the man.

"Not to you," Jack said.

"Not even for a magic toothbrush?" The old man smiled. His teeth shone like the moon. "How would you like to never brush your teeth again?"

Jack hesitated. He did hate brushing his teeth. Then he said, "Sorry, I have this thing about getting humiliated twice by the same purple guy."

The man's dark eyes narrowed and gleamed. "Young man, I want that pepper."

"Don't we all," Jack said. He put his shoulder to the massive pepper.

"Give it here!" the man screamed. He leapt from the panda, his fingers gnarled claws tearing at Jack. Jack dodged. The man crashed *into* the pepper and it rolled away with him down the hill.

So Jack rode the panda home. He'd never thought to ride him before.

"Not another panda!" Mom said. But Jack explained everything. "Well, I'm happy to see Archibald," Mom said, "but we still need cash. You'll have to sell him. Again."

"I've been thinking," Jack said. "It's not everyone that has a riding panda. Why don't we give lessons?" And so they did. All the neighboring villagers cheerfully shelled out big bucks to learn how to ride a panda. From then on, Jack had plenty of money. And he never saw the purple old man again.

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## Exercise A: Detail Check

Before we get into the Deeper Meanings of our tale, let's do a little detail hunting to make sure everyone's awake. Your answers don't have to be in complete sentences.

1. How long did it take the magic pepper to grow?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. The magic seed sparkled like which gem?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Describe the old man's appearance.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What did Jack's mother want him to buy?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. How much time goes by from the first thing Mom says to the last thing Jack says? Give your answer in time units (e.g., days).

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What problem did Mom point out with Jack's plan to buy the magic seed, grow a huge plant, and climb it to raid the giant's house?

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7. Did Mom instantly recognize Archibald when Jack brought him back? Explain how you know.

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8. How did the old man exit Jack's life?

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## Exercise B: Rousing Understanding

Okay, good, we're awake. Now let's look at the story on a slightly more meaningful level. (We're not at the Deeper Meanings stage yet.)

1. **Metaphor.** A metaphor is a comparison that doesn't bother with "like" or "as". If you say, "That guy's a werewolf," we presume you're being metaphorical and you mean "he's vicious" (rather than "he's a superhuman monster"). Each word below appears in the story as a metaphor. Write what the metaphor refers to, then explain how the ideas of the metaphor connect.

a. **potato** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

b. **claws** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. **Simile.** A simile is a comparison that *does* use "like" or "as". "Red as a rose", "in like a lion", and "fat as a," er, "corporate bonus" are all similes. Write three similes from the story.

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Why doesn't Jack trade in the pepper for the magic toothbrush?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. Why could you think that Jack's mother plans ahead?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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## Exercise C: Imagine

For these questions, the only rule is that you have to use complete sentences. You can finish a question on the back of the page if you need the space.

1. Who would you rather spend the afternoon with, Jack or Mom? Explain.

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2. What if you needed someone to care for your pet for two weeks? Who would you rather leave it with, Jack or Mom? Explain.

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3. Make up a quick story for what happened to the old man when the pepper finally stopped rolling.

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4. Imagine that Jack's fairy godmother appears and offers him a magic pennyseed that will grow into a magnificent tree that will never stop sprouting nickels, dimes, and DVD players. In exchange, Jack must give up Archibald. What does Jack answer?

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## Exercise D: Deeper Meanings

At last, we're ready to tackle the Great Truths enshrined in this profound tale. Again, please use complete sentences and feel free to use the back of the page. **Explain each answer with at least one example from the story** unless otherwise noted.

1. Do you think Jack and his mother really were happy together?

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2. Stories often (or always, depending on your definition) have a central **conflict**. For instance, you could sum up the conflict of that ingenious classic, *The Three Little Pigs*, as: "Three pigs crave safety, but a wolf threatens to eat them." How might you sum up the conflict of this story, *Jack and the Giant Pepper*? (no example needed)

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3. Heroes often have a main defect they struggle with throughout the story. What is Jack's main defect, and does he beat it?

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4. What do you think is the theme (Deep Meaning) of this story?

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*Jack and the Giant Pepper* (middle school) Answer Key:

**Exercise A**

1. one night
2. ruby
3. a little purple man in a shiny silver tweed suit
4. food and seeds
5. 2 days
6. They had nothing to eat while the plant grew.
7. No, because she said, "Not another panda!"
8. He rolled away in the giant pepper.

**Exercise B**

1. a. old man's face. Both old potatoes and his face are wrinkled. [*"His face was a wrinkly old potato..."*]  
b. the man's hands. Both animals and the old man have sharp and dangerous fingers
2. his eyes were sharp and bright as knifepoints  
a seed sparkled like a ruby  
pepper was as big as a house
3. He doesn't want to be fooled again.  
*Or He's determined to buy food and seeds.  
Or any other sensible answer.*
4. She wanted seeds to grow food for later.

**Exercise C**

*All answers vary.*

**Exercise D**

1. *Answers vary.*
2. *Answers vary, but we suggest, "Jack will soon starve, but an old man tries to trick him out of his one chance to get money."*
3. *Answers vary.* Some students may think his main defect is wanting to use magic to solve his problems, and he beats this by rejecting the magic toothbrush. Others (probably fewer) may think he wants an easy way out of hard work, and it's not entirely clear he conquers this tendency by deciding to teach panda riding for a living.
4. *Answers vary.*