

padhai | Class X

English

Notes



**Full
Explanations**



**Character
Sketch**



**Word
Meanings**



**Tone, Central
idea, devices....**

First Flight

The Tale of Custard the Dragon

–OGDEN NASH

Detailed Explanation:

The poem is a **light-hearted narrative ballad** that tells the story of a girl named **Belinda** and her peculiar group of pets. Belinda resides in a small white house along with a kitten called **Ink**, a mouse named **Blink**, a dog named **Mustard**, and a dragon named **Custard**.

At the outset, the poet introduces all the characters in a playful and amusing manner. Belinda and her animals repeatedly **claim to be extremely brave**. Their courage is described through exaggerated, hyperbolic comparisons—for instance, Belinda is said to be “as brave as a barrel full of bears,” Ink and Blink are imagined chasing lions, and Mustard is compared to a fierce tiger. These overstatements produce humour and subtly suggest that their bravery may be more about boasting than reality.

In contrast, Custard the dragon is portrayed as **physically terrifying**, with **sharp teeth, spikes, scales, and dagger-like claws**. However, despite his frightening appearance, he is labelled a **coward** because he constantly asks for a “nice safe cage.” The other characters mock him, tease him without mercy, and even give him nicknames like “**Percival** giving a strong allusion.” This behaviour reflects a common human tendency to make fun of those who seem fearful or different.

The narrative takes a sudden turn when a dangerous **pirate** enters Belinda’s house through the window, armed with **pistols and a sword**. At this moment, the supposedly brave characters lose all their courage. Belinda cries out in fear, Mustard runs away, Ink hides beneath the house, and Blink retreats into his mouse hole. This reversal creates strong situational irony, as those who had earlier boasted of bravery now behave like cowards.

At this critical moment, Custard—the one considered cowardly—emerges as the true hero. He rises suddenly, makes loud snorting sounds like an engine, lashes his tail, and attacks the pirate “**like a robin at a worm**.” These similes, along with vivid sound imagery, make the scene both dramatic and humorous. Custard quickly defeats the pirate by swallowing him completely.

After the danger has passed, Belinda embraces Custard, and all the animals celebrate his courage. However, the humour continues as the other characters begin to justify their earlier behaviour, claiming they would have acted more bravely if they had not been caught off guard. Custard himself modestly agrees that the others are braver than he is.

The poem concludes by **returning to the original situation**: the characters resume boasting about their bravery, while Custard once again asks for a safe cage. This ending reinforces the satirical idea that **people often exaggerate their courage**, whereas those who are truly brave tend to remain **modest**. Through humour, exaggeration, and irony, the poet conveys that real bravery is revealed only in moments of actual danger, not through empty claims.

Poetic Device Explanations

Simile

The poem makes extensive use of similes to create lively and amusing images. For example, Custard is described as “snorting like an engine” and attacking “like a robin at a worm.” These comparisons connect his actions to familiar images, highlighting his sudden energy and courage while preserving the playful tone.

Imagery

Strong visual imagery is evident in the description of Custard’s body: “big sharp teeth,” “spikes on top,” “scales underneath,” and “daggers on his toes.” These details allow readers to imagine a powerful and dangerous creature vividly. The contrast between this fearsome appearance and his timid behaviour produces humour and irony.

Hyperbole (Exaggeration)

The poet uses exaggeration in statements such as Belinda being “as brave as a barrel full of bears,” Ink and Blink chasing lions, and Mustard being like a fierce tiger. These unrealistic claims create comic exaggeration and indicate that the characters’ bravery is more imaginary than real.

Alliteration

Alliteration can be seen in phrases like “Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears,” where the repetition of the ‘b’ sound adds rhythm and musical quality while emphasizing the exaggerated statement.

Onomatopoeia and Sound Imagery

Words such as “clatter,” “clank,” and “jangling” imitate actual sounds, making the action scene vivid and dynamic. These sound effects help readers experience the intensity of the moment when Custard confronts the pirate.

Repetition

The recurring phrase “realio, trulio” adds to the rhythm of the ballad and enhances its humorous and playful quality. This repetition reinforces the light tone of the poem.

Irony

Irony plays a central role in the poem. The characters who claim to be brave flee in fear when confronted with danger, whereas the dragon, considered cowardly, proves to be the real hero. This ironic contrast exposes the difference between false claims and genuine courage.

Contrast

The poem is built on contrasts such as appearance versus reality and boasting versus action. Custard looks frightening but is called a coward, while the others appear brave but act fearfully. This contrast strengthens the poem's message about the true nature of bravery.

Central Message / Theme

The poem communicates that real courage is demonstrated through actions rather than words or self-praise.

It presents several key ideas:

People often pretend to be brave when there is no real threat.

True bravery becomes visible only when one faces genuine danger.

Individuals who are genuinely courageous are usually modest and do not boast.

Society may ridicule or misunderstand those who seem timid, even though they may possess real strength.

Through humour and irony, the poet conveys that courage is proven by deeds, not by claims.

Poet's Tone / Attitude

The tone of the poem can be understood as follows:

Humorous and playful:

The poet employs exaggeration, amusing comparisons, and comic situations to entertain the reader. The rhythmic structure of the ballad enhances its lively mood.

Satirical:

At the same time, the poet subtly criticizes those who boast about their bravery but fail in real situations.

Ironic:

Much of the humour arises from ironic situations, particularly when the so-called coward turns out to be the bravest character.

Overall, the tone remains light and engaging while conveying a meaningful insight into human behaviour.

Word Meanings

Belinda – the girl who owns the animals

Ink – the kitten's name

Blink – the mouse's name

Mustard – the dog's name

Custard – the dragon's name

realio, trulio – truly; really (used in a playful manner)

daggers – sharp, pointed weapons

unmerciful – extremely harsh; without mercy

Percival – a teasing name used mockingly for Custard

paled – became pale due to fear

cutlass – a short, curved sword used by sailors

grog – an alcoholic drink associated with sailors

flagon – a large container used for holding drinks

gyrate – to move or spin in a circular motion

flustered – nervous, confused, or agitated

strategically – done with careful planning for safety or advantage



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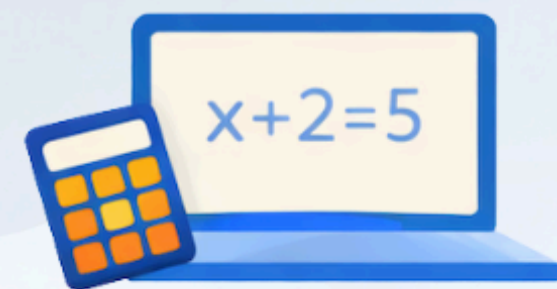
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