



The Tale of Custard the Dragon

About the Poet

Frederic Ogden Nash (1902-1971) was an American poet famous for his light verse. He was known as the producer of humorous poetry. He received Sarah Josepha Hale Award in 1964.



The Tale of Custard the Dragon

Introduction

Ogden Nash has written a poem about a little girl Belinda who owns many pets, namely, a black kitten named Ink, grey mouse named Blink, yellow dog named Mustard and a coward dragon named Custard. The poet has described every character to be brave except the dragon who is a coward. But the whole situation changes when a pirate attacked Belinda's house. No one else had the guts to face him, it was the dragon that killed the pirate. All the characters are happy because they are saved by the dragon but quickly change their thoughts and describe themselves to be more powerful had the situation not been so confusing for all of them.

Summary of the poem

The tale of custard the dragon is a ballad. It is a humorous poem about a cowardly dragon named custard. Custard is a pet of Belinda, a little girl who lives in a little white house with her pets. She had a black kitten named ink, a grey mouse named blink, a yellow dog mustard and a cowardly dragon custard. The poet says that all of them are very brave except the dragon. Others were described as brave and are compared with animals like bear, tiger or lion but the dragon is very timid. He always demands a safe place for himself. All the other characters make fun of him. But one night they are surprised by the entry of a pirate in the house.

Summary of the poem

All of them get frightened and start hiding here and there. But to everyone's surprise, the dragon not only tackles him but also eats him up. As all of them are saved by custard, they thank him. But at the end, they realize that they used to make fun of the dragon because of his being timid. So, all of them suddenly start saying that they are more brave and could have handled the situation in a much better way. Here the poet has tried to say that sometimes a timid person is the actual hero in the toughest situations of life.

Poem and Explanation

Stanza 1

Belinda lived in a little white house,

With a little black kitten and a little grey mouse,

And a little yellow dog and a little red wagon,

And a realio, trulio, little pet dragon.

Wagon: a vehicle used for transporting goods or another specified purpose.

The poet says that once there was a little girl named Belinda. She lived in a little white house. She lived with some creatures who were her pets. They were a black kitten, a grey mouse, a yellow dog, a little red wagon and a creature that the poet says was really and truly a dragon.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (house-mouse, wagon-dragon)

Repetition: use of the word 'little'

oxymoron: use of two words with opposite meanings ' "pet dragon"

Anaphora: repeated use of word at the start of two consecutive lines. (And a little ...And a realio)

Refrain: Repetition of a sentence again and again (And a realio, trulio,)

poetic license: realio, trulio for real, true. The spellings have been changed to create a musical effect

Stanza 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.

Word meanings

Mustard: a yellow coloured flower

Coward: weakling

The poet explains the name of all the animals that are tamed by Belinda. He says that the name of black kitten is ink. The name of grey mouse is blink. The little yellow dog had yellow colour and so she calls him mustard and the dragon that was a coward means was a weakling was called custard.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (ink-blink, mustard-custard)

simile: dog compared to mustard “And the little yellow dog was sharp as Mustard”

Alliteration: “coward, and she called him Custard” – “c” sound

Anaphora: repeated use of word at the start of two consecutive lines (And the little grey...And the little yellow)

Repetition: use of word little

Stanza 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.

Word meanings

Spikes: thin pointed surface

Scales: Thin bony plates protecting the skin of fish and reptiles.

Underneath: situated directly below

Fire place: An outdoor structure of brick, stone or metal for an open fire

Dagger: A sharp knife

The poet describes the dragon that it had big sharp teeth and spikes on top. This means that its skin was pointed on the top. On the lower part it had scales which were bony plates to protect the skin. His mouth has been compared to a fireplace because it is assumed that dragons can release fire from the mouth. Even his nose is compared to a chimney which is used to pass out smoke. His feet are like a sharp knife i.e. a dagger.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (teeth-underneath, nose-toes)

Simile: Dragon's mouth is compared with fireplace (mouth like a fireplace)

Refrain: Repetition of a sentence again and again (And a realio, trulio,)

Metaphor: "chimney for a nose". The nose is like a chimney.

Stanza 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.**

Word meanings

Barrel: drum

Chased: hunt, follow

Rage: anger

So, now the poet explains the inner strength or the bravery of various characters of the poem. He says that Belinda was as brave as a group of bears and ink and blink were so brave that they could hunt lions. So here he has shown the bravery of the kitten and the little mouse that could hunt even a lion. The dog was very brave just like an angry tiger. But to contrast of all of them was Custard. Custard, the dragon was not brave he was so afraid of everything that he always demanded a safe cage.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (bears-stairs, rage-cage)

Alliteration: Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears “b” sound is repeated Simile:

Belinda’s bravery is compared to that of a barrel full of bears (as a barrel full of bears),

Mustard’s bravery is compared to that of an angry tiger (Mustard was as brave as a tiger in a rage)

Assonance: use of vowel sound ‘a’ (Belinda was as brave as a barrel full of bears)

Stanza 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.

Word meanings

Tickled: stroke, here it means to tease

Unmerciful: cruel

Percival: A knight in King Arthur's court

Belinda used to stroke the dragon in a very cruel way. Ink, blink and mustard made fun of him by comparing him to a knight named Percival who was thought to be brave but ran away due to lack of courage. They used to tease the dragon while sitting in their little red wagon.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (unmerciful-Percival, wagon-dragon)

Refrain: Repetition of a sentence again and again (And a realio, trulio,)

Repetition: use of the word 'tickled him'

Allusion: reference to any person or place (Percival)

Personification: Ink, Blink and Mustard, they rudely called him Percival

Stanza 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.

Word meanings

Giggled: to laugh

Weeck: Here it is the sound made by the mouse

The poet says that Belinda used to laugh so loudly that her voice echoed in the house. Blink, the mouse used to laugh and make a sound of weeck. On the other hand, ink and mustard would tease him by asking the dragon his age whenever he used to demand for a nice safe cage.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (house-mouse, rage-cage)

Onomatopoeia: usage of sound words to create a dramatic effect (giggled, weeck)

Repetition: Custard cried for a nice safe cage

Stanza 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**

Word meanings

Nasty: bad or unpleasant

Growled: bark

Pirate: A person who robs ship in the sea

Winda: it is used for window

So, while all of them were making fun of the dragon, they heard a sound of someone entering the house. When they looked towards the window they saw a pirate climbing up the wall.

The dog barked at him and the kitten meowed to him. Belinda cried ‘ooh’ because all of them were scared of the pirate (who robs ships).

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (sound-around, Belinda-winda)

Consonance: use of consonant sound 's' (Suddenly, suddenly they heard a nasty sound)

Onomatopoeia: usage of sound words to create a dramatic effect (Mustard growled, Meowch, cried ink)

Poetic license: window is written as 'winda' to create rhyme.

Stanza 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

Word meanings

Pistol: a handgun

Cutlass: a short sword with a curved blade.

The poet describes the appearance of the pirate. He says that the pirate was holding handguns in both his hands and had a little sword too. He was holding his sword with his teeth. He had a black beard and his one leg was made of wood. This means that though the pirate was a disabled person but still he was frightening all the other characters. Moreover, he intended to harm them.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (right- bright, wood- good)

Alliteration: beard was black “b”, he held his “h”

Imagery: An image is created about the appearance of the pirate.

Stanza 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

Word meanings

Paled: turn yellow due to fear

Yelp: a short sharp cry

Trickled: here, run

Strategically: planned

Mouseholed: here it is the hole where the mouse lives.

When all of them saw the pirate they got frightened. Belinda was so frightened that she turned yellow due to fear and started crying for help. Mustard the dog started crying for help too. The kitten ink ran down towards the bottom of the house as if he had already planned for it. The mouse ink ran into his little mouse hole in order to save himself.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (help-yelp, household – mousehold)

transferred epithet: terrified yelp

Repetition: help help

Poetic license: use of the word mousehold to rhyme with household

Stanza 10

But up jumped Custard, snorting like an engine,

Clashed his tail like irons in a dungeon,

With a clatter and a clank and a jangling squirm,

He went at the pirate like a robin at a worm.

Word meanings

Snorting: make a sudden explosive sound through one's nose

Clashed: fought

Dungeon: underground prison

Clatter Clank: sound of hard object falling on each other

Jangling squirm: sound of hard object falling on each other

Robin: A bird

When all the other characters that were earlier defined as very brave got frightened, the dragon did the most unexpected thing. He jumped onto the pirate and made such a strong sound with his nose as if the engine was producing a sound. Not only this, he hit his tail on the ground with great force that it produced a heavy sound of metal being rubbed against each other in the underground prisons. He attacked the pirate just like robin bird that attacks the worms.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (engine-dungeon, squirm-worm)

Simile: sound of dragon is compared with sound of engine (snorting like an engine), Clashed his tail like irons in a dungeon, dragon's attack on pirate is compared to robin bird (like a robin at a worm)

Onomatopoeia: usage of sound words to create a dramatic effect (clatter, clank, jangling)

Imagery: The attack by the dragon is expressed in a way to make an image in our minds.

Stanza 11

**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.**

Word meanings

Gaped: stared with mouth wide open

Gulped: swallow

Grog: a drink

Flagon: a container made of silver in which drink is stored

Gobbled: swallowed hurriedly

The pirate got so shocked by the dragon's reaction that he opened his mouth wide with shock. To gather some strength, he drank some alcohol from a container in his pocket. After gathering some courage, he fired two bullets on the dragon but missed it. Custard the dragon ate every bit of this fierce looking pirate.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (dragon-flagon, hit-bit)

alliteration: gulped some grog “g”

Imagery: They have shown the reaction and actions made by the pirate on seeing the dragon.

Stanza 12

Belinda embraced him, Mustard licked him,

No one mourned for his pirate victim.

Ink and Blink in glee did gyrate

Around the dragon that ate the pirate.

Word meanings

Embraced: to hug

Mourned: feel sorrow for the death of someone

Victim: sufferer

Glee: delight

Gyrate: danced

When the pirate was dead, Belinda hugged the dragon and mustard licked him. No one was sad for the death of the pirate, they all were happy. Both ink and blink were running around the dragon in happiness. So, here the poet says that all the characters were happy and they were showing their gratitude towards the dragon as he had saved them.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (him-victim, gyrate-pirate)

alliteration: glee did gyrate “g”

Assonance: use of vowel sound ‘o’ (no one mourned for), use of vowel sound ‘I’ (ink and blink in glee did), use of vowel sound ‘a’ (that ate the pirate)

Stanza 13

But presently up spoke little dog Mustard,

I'd have been twice as brave if I hadn't been flustered.

And up spoke Ink and up spoke Blink,

We'd have been three times as brave, we think,

And Custard said, I quite agree

That everybody is braver than me.

Word meanings

Flustered: upset or confused

After they thanked and showed their love towards the dragon, they changed their mind. They were reminded of how they used to make fun of this coward dragon and now they all were praising him. So at once the dog said that it was just because of some confusion that he wasn't able to do anything otherwise he would have been twice as brave as custard. Both ink and blink also said that they would have been three times braver than custard. To this, the dragon said that he fully agreed to this that all of them were more powerful and braver than him.

Literary Devices:

Rhyme scheme: aabb (mustard-flustered, blink-ink, agree-me)

Stanza 14

Belinda still lives in her little white house,

With her little black kitten and her little grey mouse,

And her little yellow dog and her little red wagon,

And her realio, trulio little pet dragon.

Belinda is as brave as a barrel full of bears,

And Ink and Blink chase lions down the stairs,

Mustard is as brave as a tiger in a rage,

But Custard keeps crying for a nice safe cage

At last, the poet used the same lines again to show that after this terrific episode in which the dragon was the hero where all the other characters still undermined him by saying that they were more powerful than him and could have handled the situation in a much better way, the poet says that life started again in the same manner. Belinda still lives in that little white house with ink, blink, mustard and custard and all of them are very brave whereas the dragon is still a coward who always wants to stay safe in his cage.

Literary Devices

Refrain: Repetition of a sentence again and again (And a realio, trulio)

Repetition: stanza has been repeated



Thank
You