Lesson 14

Jason and the Golden Fleece

Several sports teams call themselves the Argonauts. The Toronto Argonauts is a football team. At the University of West Florida, both the women’s basketball team and the men’s baseball team are Argonauts. Why? What does the word mean? We’ll discover the answer as we learn about Jason and the Golden Fleece.

The story of Jason is at least three thousand years old and has many different versions. Here is one of them. Jason was Greek, the son of a king. One day the king disappeared. Jason’s mother feared that her husband had been killed. She believed that his own brother, Pelias, was responsible for his death. When Pelias announced that he was going to be king, she became afraid he might hurt her small son. She smuggled Jason out of the palace. Then she handed the little boy to Chiron, a centaur. Chiron had the body of a horse but the arms, chest, and head of a man. He cared for Jason well and taught the boy everything he knew.

Jason grew up to be a fine young man. He was brave, clever, and strong. When Chiron told Jason that the time had come for him to take away Pelias’s job, Jason set off at once for the palace. He boldly told his uncle why he had come. Pelias, however, was cunning as well as wicked. He pretended to agree to step aside and let Jason be king. But first, he had some advice for his nephew. “The people need to respect their king,” he said. “So before you take over from me, you should do something that will make you famous. You should bring back the Golden Fleece and hang it here in the palace. Then the people will have a king they can be proud of.”

Jason knew at once what his uncle was talking about because the Golden Fleece was famous. It was a sheepskin that was made of pure gold. A dragon that never slept guarded it. The Golden Fleece
belonged to the king of Colchis, whose kingdom was at the far end of the Black Sea.

Long journeys by sea were full of danger. Pelias knew that Jason would have to sail through a narrow opening into the Black Sea. Then he had to sail past the jagged rocks that had sent so many boats to the bottom. He might never reach Colchis. If he did, he might never make it back alive. At least, this is what Pelias was hoping for when his nephew agreed to make the trip.

Jason put together a crew of fifty of the bravest, cleverest, and strongest men in Greece. The name of their boat was the Argo, and so the men were called the Argonauts. After many adventures and brave deeds by the crew, they reached Colchis. The king of Colchis refused to hand over the Golden Fleece. His daughter Medea, however, fell in love with Jason. She had magical powers and decided to use them to help him. She made the dragon doze so that Jason could snatch the fleece away. Together they left Colchis aboard the Argo.

After many more adventures, the Argonauts, Jason, and Medea made it back safely to Greece. Because Jason had been gone months, even years, Pelias was positive he was dead. Drowned at sea perhaps? Eaten by the dragon? He was very surprised when, one bright sunny day, Jason walked into the palace with the Golden Fleece on one arm and Medea on the other. Jason did become king, and Medea became queen. Sadly, they did not live happily ever after, but that is another story.

Answer each of the following questions in the form of a sentence. If a question does not contain a vocabulary word from the lesson’s word list, use one in your answer. Use each word only once.

1. Who was responsible for stealing the Golden Fleece?

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bold cunning deed doze jagged positive respect responsible smuggle version
2. What was the greatest danger while sailing into the Black Sea?
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3. Why was Pelias unable to find the little boy Jason?
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4. What did Medea do that was very bold?
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5. Describe one of Jason’s brave deeds.
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6. Give an example of Jason’s positive attitude.
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7. Why is it likely that Jason’s mother did not have respect for Pelias?
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8. How did Medea use her magic power to help Jason?
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9. Why might someone else tell the story of Jason differently?
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10. How did Pelias show **cunning**?

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**FUN FACT**

- **Bold** people are those who speak or act in ways that make them stand out from others. Do you see how each of the vocabulary words in the passage stands out from the other words around it? That is why **this kind of type** is called **bold** or **boldface**.