Odin's Reward - extract

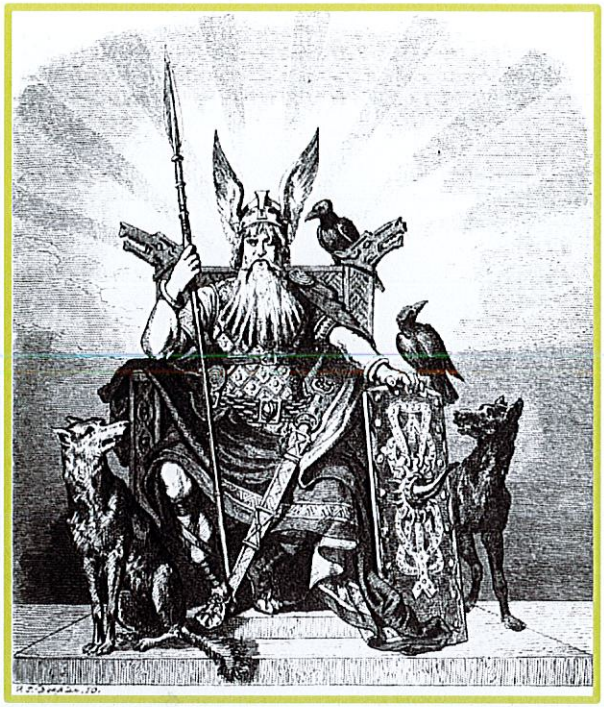
This is a story from Norse mythology about Odin, the chief of the Aesir (the gods of Asgard).

One night when all was quiet in Asgard and the Aesir had gone to rest, Odin, the Allfather, sat awake on his high throne, troubled with many thoughts. At his feet crouched his two faithful wolves, and upon his shoulders perched the two ravens of thought and memory, who flew far abroad every day, through the nine worlds, as Odin's messengers.

The Allfather had need of great wisdom in ruling the worlds; after thinking a long time on the matters which needed his care, he suddenly started up, and went forth with long strides from his palace of Gladsheim into the night. He soon returned, leading his beautiful, eight-footed steed, Sleipnir, and it was plain that Odin was going on a journey. He quickly mounted Sleipnir, and rode swiftly away toward Bifröst, the rainbow bridge, which reached from Asgard, the city of the gods, down through the air to the lower worlds.

When Sleipnir stepped upon the bridge it trembled, and seemed hardly strong enough to bear the horse and his rider; but they had no fear of its giving way, and Sleipnir galloped swiftly onward.

Soon Odin saw Heimdall, the watchman of the bridge, riding toward him on a fine horse, with a golden mane that reflected light upon the noble face of his rider.



"You must be bound on some important errand, Father Odin, to be riding forth from Asgard so late at night," said Heimdall.

"It is indeed a most important errand, and I must hasten on," replied Odin. "It is well for us that we have such a faithful guardian of the 'trembling bridge'; if it were not for you, Heimdall, our enemies might long ago have taken Asgard by storm. You are so watchful, you can hear the grass grow in the fields, and the wool gather on the backs of the sheep, and you need less sleep than a bird. I myself stand in great need of wisdom, in order to take care of such faithful servants, and to drive back such wicked enemies!"

They hurried over the bridge until they came to Heimdall's far-shining castle, at the farther end of it. This was a lofty tower which was placed so as to guard the bridge, and it sent forth into the land of the giant enemies such a wonderful, clear light, that Heimdall could see, even in the darkest night, any one who came toward the bridge. Here Odin stopped a few moments to drink the mead which the good Heimdall offered him.

Then said Odin, "As I am journeying into the land of our enemies, I shall leave my good horse with you; there are not many with whom I would trust him, but I know that you, my faithful Heimdall, will take good care of him. I can best hide myself from the giants by going on as a wanderer."

With these words the Allfather quitted Heimdall's castle, and started off toward the north, through the land of the fierce giants.

During all the first day there was nothing to be seen but ice and snow; several times Odin was nearly crushed as the frost giants hurled huge blocks of ice after him.

The second day he came to mountains and broad rivers. Often when he had just crossed over a stream, the mountain giants would come after him to the other bank, and when they found that Odin had escaped them, they would send forth such a fierce yell, that the echoes sounded from hill to hill.



At the end of the third day, Odin came to a land where trees were green and flowers blooming. Here was one of the three fountains which watered the world tree, Yggdrasil, and near by sat the wise giant, Mimir, guarding the waters of this wonderful fountain, for whoever drank of it would have the gift of great wisdom.

Mimir was a giant in size, but he was not one of the fierce giant enemies of the gods, for he was kind, and wiser than the wisest.

Mimir's well of wisdom was in the midst of a wonderful valley, filled with rare plants and bright flowers, and among the groves of beautiful trees were strange creatures, sleeping dragons, harmless serpents, and lizards, while birds with gay plumage flew and sang among the branches. Over all this quiet valley shone a lovely soft light, different from sunlight, and in the centre grew one of the roots of the great world tree. Here the wise giant Mimir sat gazing down into his well.

Odin greeted the kind old giant, and said, "Oh, Mimir, I have come from far-away Asgard to ask a great boon!"

"Gladly will I help you if it is in my power," said Mimir.

"You know," replied Odin, "that as father of gods and men I need great wisdom, and I have come to beg for one drink of your precious water of knowledge. Trouble threatens us, even from one of the Æsir, for Loki, the fire-god, has lately been visiting the giants, and I fear he has been learning evil ways from them. The frost giants and the storm giants are always at work, trying to overthrow both gods and men; great is my need of wisdom, and even though no one ever before has dared ask so great a gift, I hope that since you know how deep is my trouble, you will grant my request."

Mimir sat silently, thinking for several moments, and then said, "You ask a great thing, indeed, Father Odin; are you ready to pay the price which I must demand?"

"Yes," said Odin, cheerfully, "I will give you all the gold and silver of Asgard, and all the jewelled shields and swords of the Æsir. More than all, I will give up my eight-footed horse Sleipnir, if that is needed to win the reward."

"And do you suppose that these things will buy wisdom?" said Mimir. "That can be gained only by bearing bravely, and giving up to others. Are you willing to give me a part of yourself? Will you give up one of your own eyes?"

At this Odin looked very sad; but after a few moments of deep thought, he looked up with a bright smile, and answered, "Yes, I will even give you one of my eyes, and I will suffer whatever else is asked, in order to gain the wisdom that I need!"

We cannot know all that Odin bravely suffered in that strange, bright valley, before he was rewarded with a drink from that wonderful fountain; but we may be quite sure that never once was the good Allfather sorry for anything he had given up, or any suffering he had borne, for the sake of others.

Comprehension questions

Name: ..... Date: .....

1. Who are Odin's messengers?

   .....

2. *'... he suddenly started up, and went forth with long strides from his palace of Gladsheim into the night.'*

   What does ***went forth*** mean?

   .....

3. What was unusual about Odin's horse, Sleipnir?

   .....

4. Look at the paragraph which begins: *"It is indeed a most important errand ..."*

   Name **one** extraordinary thing that Heimdall can do.

   .....

5. Look at the paragraph which begins: *'They hurried over the bridge ...'*

   Why was the clear light from the tower important?

   .....

6. What weather does Odin encounter on the first day of his journey?

   .....

7. Why was Mimir guarding the fountain?

   .....

8. *"Oh, Mimir, I have come from far-away Asgard to ask a great boon!"*

Which word most closely matches the meaning of the word **boon**?

☐ question ☐ curse ☐ delight ☐ favour

9. What treasures does Odin offer Mimir in exchange for wisdom? Name **two.**

1. .....

2. .....

10. Number the following events 1–5 to show the order in which they happened. The first one has been done for you:

	Frost giants throw blocks of ice at Odin.
1	Odin sits on his throne at night, awake.
	Mimir asks Odin for an eye in exchange for wisdom.
	Heimdall meets Odin on the rainbow bridge.
	Odin is chased by the mountain giants.

