

The Three Princes and the Young Princess

Background

The Arabian Nights or The One Thousand and One Nights conjure up images of exotic oriental romance. We are probably most familiar with the story of Aladdin but other famous tales in the collection include Ali Baba, Sinbad and the frame story of Scheherazade.



Stimulus

Images



Geography of the Middle East and Asia -
Deserts, oases, Himalayas, Hindu Kush Ganges Delta (Bengal)
Islamic architecture, design and calligraphy

Tactile and sensory artefacts - exotic fruit, whole spice, silk and woven fabric

Discussion prompts

What is the most exotic food you have ever eaten? What were the ingredients?
What goes into a fruitcake? Where do the spices and dried fruits originate?
How is silk made? What kinds of garments are made of silk?
Did you know that the following words are borrowed from the Arabic language?
Apricot, alcohol, amber, candy, coffee, cotton, lemon, giraffe, magazine, sofa...
Did you know that our number system and algebra come from Arabic culture?



VCOP Challenge

Identify the tricky words in the story.
Use a dictionary, thesaurus or the Internet to find their meaning or alternative words (synonyms).
Work in pairs or small teams to create a sentence combining three or more of these.

Example - The sultan's palace displayed a fine array of gilded figures set against shimmering turquoise tiles.



Creative Tasks

Create a kaleidoscope. (See pdf document in story folder)
Use the calligraphy example in the story folder to create a repeated decorative pattern.

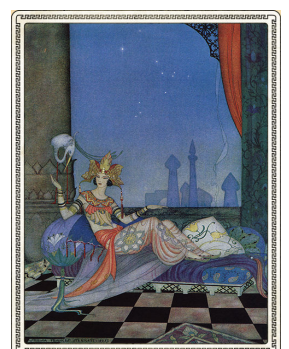
IDL links

Social studies: Use atlases, globes or the Internet to find the locations in the story. Use Kolkata in India as a starting point and identify the physical features that each of the princes would have to cross, such as rivers, mountains or deserts, to reach their destinations. Using the map scale, can you calculate the distance of each return journey?

Home economics: Most kitchen cupboards contain a selection of spices and you might also see them in the ingredients of packaged food. How many spices can you name and for what traditional recipes are they used?

Story:

Listen to or read part one of *The Three Princes and the Young Princess*
Interrogate the characters. Why do they behave the way they do?
How would you behave in their place?
How does the story end?
Decide the conclusion writing a minimum of three sentences.
Then listen to part two.



The Three Princes and the Young Princess

A tale from One Thousand and One Nights

A long time ago, there was a sultan who ruled over the Indian province of Bengal and he had three sons. The eldest was called Hussein, the second Ali and the youngest was Ahmed. Like their father, all three sons were blessed with wisdom and kind hearts. The sultan had a distant cousin, who ruled over the neighbouring kingdom of Assam, but he had only one child, a daughter named Nouronnihar.

Sadly, when the Princess was still very young, her father and mother both died unexpectedly. The sultan of Bengal took in little Nouronnihar and raised her in his palace, where she grew up happily in the company of the three young princes.



As Nouronnihar grew older, she proved to be every bit as wise and thoughtful as her royal companions, but the sultan began to notice that his sons were falling in love with her. As soon as the princess was old enough, all three sons approached their father to ask for her hand in marriage. The sultan found it impossible to choose between the three and Nouronnihar loved them all equally too. For many weeks, they tried to think up a suitable challenge to decide on who would be the most worthy husband for the princess. Now, the sultan had a passion for rare and unique items, so Nouronnihar suggested that the princes should each go out into the world to search for one such precious object. She and the sultan would act as judges and the prince who brought back the most extraordinary item would claim her hand. Everyone thought this was an excellent plan, but before they left, the three sons met in a quiet inn at the edge of the city, where they shared a fine meal together. They all agreed to meet again at the same place in exactly one year's time, before presenting their finds. They bade farewell to each other, mounted their horses and set out on their journeys.



Prince Hussein, the oldest son, traveled to Bharuch on the other side of India. He had heard wonderful tales of this famous port, set like a jewel beside the shining waters of the Arabian Sea. After three months of travel, he finally arrived to find the city every bit as splendid as he had been told. Hussein hired lodgings in the merchants' quarter close to the grand bazaar, where goods of every description were on display and traders from far and near swarmed like bees within a hive.

One wandering trader, dressed in a tattered cloak of camel hair and carrying a dusty old rug, passed through the bazaar calling out the price of thirty gold pieces. This was an astronomical sum for such a threadbare article and everyone in the market place ignored him, thinking he had lost his mind, but Hussein was intrigued. He beckoned the trader over and asked him why the rug was so expensive. The trader looked carefully around him and explained in a hushed voice that this was a magic carpet. If the owner sat upon it and imagined a destination, the carpet would transport you there in an instant. Hussein wasn't convinced, so the trader asked him where he was lodged in Bharuch. He unraveled the carpet, invited his customer to sit with him and in an instant they were transported to Hussein's rooms nearby. Without hesitation, the prince paid the trader thirty gold pieces, certain that this incredible object would win him the hand of Princess Nouronnihar.

Prince Ali, the second son, took a different route. His four-month journey took him across vast plains and deserts, until he eventually reached the city of Shiraz, the capital of Persia, famous for its spectacular palaces and gardens. Like Bharuch, the city bustled with merchants, offering a magnificent array of goods in a stunning display of colour and intoxicating fragrances. Among the market stalls, Ali came across a street vendor with the most curious selection of merchandise about his person. One item in particular caught his eye. Around the vendor's neck hung a cylinder, carved from mahogany and inlaid with mother of pearl. At one end was a glass eye piece and Ali assumed that this must be some kind of kaleidoscope. But when the vendor asked for forty gold coins, Ali was astonished and asked why it was so expensive. The vendor explained that if you looked into the eyepiece, the instrument could show your heart's desire and invited the prince to try it out. Sure enough, through the cylinder he could see



Nouronnihar in the company of her handmaidens back in the palace in Bengal. Gleefully, Ali paid the vendor the forty gold coins and set about his long journey home.

Prince Ahmed, the youngest son, took a more northerly route through the mountains of the Hindu Kush to the city of Samarkand, an important trading post on the famous Silk Road. This was, by far, the most hazardous journey, prone to bandit attacks or kidnap by slave traders and took him the best part of six months. When he finally reached his destination, the spectacular mosques of dazzling turquoise mosaic came into view and he knew that he had made the right decision. Samarkand sat at the crossroads of trade between east and west, and could not be rivaled for the variety of produce, from rich fabric, dyes, spices and herbs to precious gemstones and other treasures of the Orient.



Ahmed's curiosity was drawn to a humble market stall on which the centrepiece was a gilded pomegranate priced at fifty gold pieces. The trader explained that the pomegranate had magical healing properties and that its scent could cure any known disease. Ahmed demanded proof, so the vendor took him to a nearby house where an old woman was suffering from a severe fever and in danger of dying at any moment. Within seconds of smelling the pomegranate, the woman had recovered completely. The prince instantly handed the trader fifty gold pieces, delighted with his choice and set off on his homeward journey without delay. He did not wish to be late for the rendezvous with his brothers.

What happens next?

Prince Ahmed finally made it back to Bengal, just in time to meet with his brothers at the same inn where they had previously gathered. The three princes were equally excited to see each other's treasure. Ali was keen to show off his magic cylinder, as it could be demonstrated right there and then. However, when they looked into the eyepiece they were horrified. There was Princess Nouronnihar, who they all adored, but she was gravely ill, surrounded by her handmaidens and clearly close to death. Thinking quickly, the princes used Hussein's carpet to transport them to the palace and in an instant Ahmed was ready to offer Nouronnihar the pomegranate and held it to her nose. As soon as she smelled the magic scent, the young princess was quickly restored to health, much to everyone's relief.

Both Nouronnihar and the sultan were highly impressed with princes' finds, but realised that they had all played an equal part in saving her life, so it was quite impossible to choose a winner. Nouronnihar came up with a solution. The princes were to compete in an archery contest firing from the city ramparts towards a solitary date palm that lay some distance beyond. Given the exposed position of the tree and the gusting monsoon wind that blew down from the Himalayas, the outcome was very much in the hands of Fate. Both Ali and Hussein's arrows veered wildly away from the target, but Ahmed's aim caught a favourable wind, scoring him a direct hit on the palm tree. The result was beyond dispute. Fate had blessed the youngest prince. Nourinihar and Ahmed were married soon after at a lavish ceremony, amid great rejoicing, after which they all lived happily ever after.

