

Directions

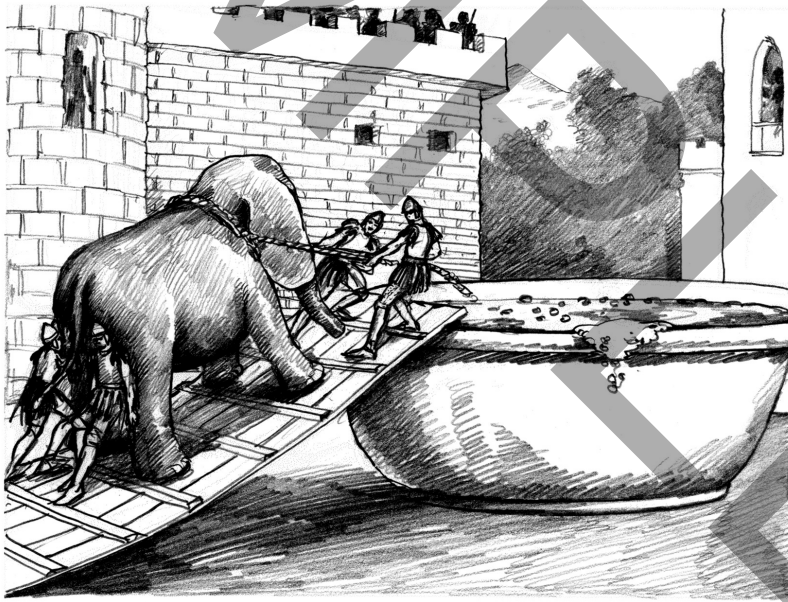
Read this story. Then answer questions 15 through 21.

The Elephant's Bathtub

A folktale from Myanmar

Retold by Edna Ledgard

- 1 Once, on the banks of the great Irrawaddy, not far from the shining new temples of Pagan, two friends built their houses side by side. Shwe Ko was a dhobi, or washerman. He used the rocks and the swift, swirling water of the mighty river to wash cotton as soft and shiny as the summer clouds. Ba Sein was a potter. He used the fine gray river clay to form bowls of all shapes and sizes. He made jugs to hold water, jars to hold rice, bowls for cooking, and basins for bathing. Each piece from his kiln was the soft red of evening and etched with exquisite designs.
- 2 People from far and near gladly paid Shwe Ko to make their clothes clean and white. And everyone came to buy Ba Sein's fine pots. So, over the years, the two friends prospered. Each had all he needed, and a little more.



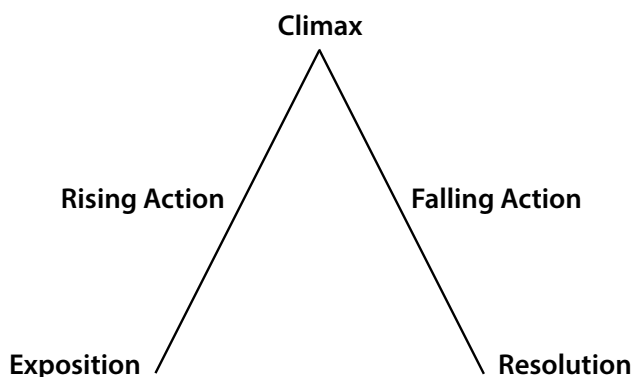
- 3 Shwe Ko smiled at his family and was content. But Ba Sein was jealous.
- 4 A potter's work is more noble than a dhobi's, he thought. It is not right that Shwe Ko has as much as I.

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- 5 One evening, as the two men sat gossiping and drinking tea, Shwe Ko noticed a row of pale gray clouds parading majestically above the pink glow of the Snow Mountains. "Look," he cried, "do the clouds not remind you of the sacred elephants of the Sky Gods? See how they march, trunk to tail, tail to trunk. Perhaps this means the Royal Hunters will at last find a holy white elephant for the King."
- 6 Now, the King of Pagan had many fine elephants, strong gray-blue beasts that worked faithfully in his teak forests. But like Ba Sein, he was not satisfied. After all, did not the King of Thailand own two sacred white elephants, and the King of Laos three? Yet not even one white elephant stood in the Royal Stables of Pagan!
- 7 A white elephant is very rare. Only once in a long, long while, in the dark, secret shadows of the jungles, is such a creature born. Its skin is as soft as a silver mouse and pale as clouds at dusk. And it is touched with blushes of pink, especially on its fine great ears. It is called holy and is believed to be the gift of the Sky Gods.
- 8 Ba Sein took another sip of tea and nodded. "The King has offered a great reward to anyone who brings him such a beast."
- 9 To himself he thought, *If I could be that man, then I would be richer than my neighbor.* As he sat watching the elephant clouds, an evil idea came to him.
- 10 The next day he traveled to the palace to speak to the King. "Most Reverend Majesty," he said, "your hunters have long searched for a sacred white elephant. I know how you may have such an animal."
- 11 "Tell me," the King commanded.
- 12 "Sire, my neighbor can wash clothes as white as the summer clouds. He has magical powers from the Sky Gods. Command him to take your finest gray elephant and scrub him. Then you will have a sacred white elephant."
- 13 The King liked the idea and immediately ordered the washerman brought before him.
- 14 "Dhobi," he commanded, "you are to take my finest gray elephant and wash him as white as the elephants of the Sky Gods. If you fail, you shall be banished to the Snow Mountains."
- 15 At first the good-natured Shwe Ko laughed. He thought the King's command was only a joke. But when he saw Ba Sein standing near the throne with a cruel smile on his face, he knew he had been tricked. As he looked sadly at the potter, an idea came into his head.
- 16 Shwe Ko bowed very humbly. "Sire," he said, "to wash this handsome animal so white, I will need a very large basin. My neighbor, Ba Sein, is known far and wide for his excellent pottery. Command him to make a bathtub large enough for this fine animal. Then I will gladly wash him as gleaming white as the summer clouds."
- 17 Caught by his own treachery, Ba Sein cried, "Surely, Sire, the river is large enough. Let my neighbor wash him there."

- 18 “Sire,” Shwe Ko replied, “the river water is cold and flows swiftly. It will carry away the suds. I need much hot, soapy water to make this elephant as white as you wish. Surely this skillful potter can make the tub I need.”
- 19 The King had heard enough and commanded Ba Sein to make the great bathtub. For weeks the potter gathered clay and shaped it. For many more weeks he built a great fire pit to bake it in, and the baking itself took more weeks yet. When the tub was finished, the King’s servants filled it with water and built a fire underneath. Then Shwe Ko stirred in soap and made rich white suds.
- 20 When all was ready, the King and his court arrived. The King’s golden throne was placed beside the great bathtub. Drums beat and pipers played as the elephant was brought forward. But when it stepped inside, the thin clay shattered, breaking the tub into a thousand pieces. Soap and water splashed everywhere, even onto the King’s gold-edged robes.
- 21 Shwe Ko was safe. He would not go to the Snow Mountains that day.
- 22 “Make a thicker tub,” commanded the King. And so, Ba Sein had to begin all over again. He made tub after tub. Some were so thick the water could not be heated. Others were too thin again and broke.
- 23 For a year and more, Ba Sein tried to make a bathtub for the elephant. It kept him so busy that he had no time to make pots to sell. His family became poor. Their clothes became old and worn, and their stomachs ached for food.
- 24 Perhaps the Sky Gods took pity as they watched the potter become more and more wretched, for one day the Royal Hunters found a newly born and most beautiful white elephant calf in the Snow Mountains. They brought it to the King, who was so pleased that he proclaimed a great festival in honor of the Sky Gods. He never again gave a thought to the potter or the dhobi.
- 25 When Shwe Ko heard the news, he gathered a large basket of rice and went to Ba Sein’s house. “Neighbor,” he said, “let us rejoice with the King and forget the pain of the past.”
- 26 Ba Sein, his head hung low, thanked Shwe Ko and accepted the gift.
- 27 Only the Sky Gods know whether Ba Sein ever became less envious, but from that day, the potter and the dhobi were good neighbors. And whenever they met, they greeted each other with a wish for the good health of the King’s white elephant.
- 28 As for the bathtub, neither man ever mentioned it again.

- 15 Look at the below plot diagram.



Which of the following events belongs at the Climax?

- A As the elephant steps into the first tub, he breaks it to pieces.
- B Shwe Ko realizes that Ba Sein has set him up to be banished.
- C Ba Sein's family grows poor and hungry because he stops selling pottery.
- D The King of Pagan wants a white elephant like the other kings have.

- 16 Which sentence would help you the **most** if you wanted to draw a picture illustrating the story?

- A "Sire, my neighbor can wash clothes as white as the summer clouds."
- B Soap and water splashed everywhere, even onto the King's gold-edged robes.
- C He never again gave a thought to the potter or the dhobi.
- D As for the bathtub, neither man ever mentioned it again.

- 17 Which is the **most** important conflict in the tale?

- A The king forgets all about the test once the hunters bring him a baby elephant.
- B Ba Sein is unable to build a bathtub that can hold both an elephant and hot water.
- C The King of Pagan wants a white elephant any way he can get one.
- D Ba Sein doesn't want Shwe Ko to be as well-off as himself.

GO ON

18 Like most fiction, this passage includes

- A a setting in the distant past
- B narration by one of the characters
- C dialogue between characters
- D events that could not happen

19 Read this sentence from “The Elephant’s Bathtub.”

Its skin is as soft as a silver mouse and pale as clouds at dusk.

This sentence contains which of the following types of figurative language?

- A simile
- B metaphor
- C hyperbole
- D personification

20 Because this tale is told from the third-person-omniscient point of view,

- A the reader never knows what Shwe Ko is thinking
- B the reader never knows what Ba Sein is thinking
- C the reader has to infer or guess what motivates the King of Pagan
- D the reader can share the thoughts of both Ba Sein and Shwe Ko

21 In “envious” the suffix indicates that the word is probably

- A** an adverb
- B** a noun
- C** a verb
- D** an adjective

SAMPLE

GO ON