The Husband’s Message

Vocabulary Skills: New Words in Context

1. Cunningly (line 5) means that the letter was carved with
   a. deception
   b. confusion
   c. expertise
   d. no straight lines

2. Sow (line 9) is another word for
   a. farmer
   b. piglet
   c. field
   d. plant

3. Vendetta (line 20) refers to
   a. bitter quarrel
   b. a vendor of rune staves
   c. an offensive joke
   d. a nasty satire

4. When the husband nurses (line 30), he is
   a. questioning the purpose of his life
   b. holding a thought in his mind
   c. discovering that he loves his wife
   d. investigating the rune stave

5. Bestow (line 34) means that the husband wants to
   a. open gifts
   b. request gifts
   c. give gifts
   d. reclaim gifts

Comprehension

6. The husband’s message on the rune stave is written by
   a. the husband
   b. a loyal retainer of the husband
   c. a mysterious stranger
   d. a relative involved in the feud
7. “The Husband’s Message” is primarily about
   a. broken oath of loyalty
   b. a difficult sea voyage
   c. the loss of an important letter
   d. the desire to be reunited with a loved one

8. Judging from what the speaker says about his master, the husband has
   a. prospered in a foreign land
   b. experienced many misfortunes after the feud
   c. become the captain of a large ship
   d. taken his wife’s rings and other ornaments

9. The husband wants his wife to
   a. travel around the world
   b. send their children to him
   c. forget him
   d. join him

10. The tone of the poem can best be described as
    a. fearful
    b. bitterly combative
    c. lovingly sincere
    d. apologetic

11. Using context clues and the technique of restatement, retell the following lines from “The Husband’s Message” in your own words.
    “But now one of the sons of men, living far from here, Sends me on errands over the salt-streams, Commands me to carry a cunningly-carved letter. At my master’s command I have often crossed the sea, Sailed in the ship’s hold to strange destinations.”

12. List of some possible themes of this poem.
Responses will vary. In a model response, students should fulfill the following criteria: • demonstrate understanding of the prompt • clearly explain why the husband exemplifies the qualities of an epic hero • support their ideas with at least two references to details in the poem. For example: • The husband has the high ideals that are typical of epic heroes. Even after years away from home, he still loves his wife enough to send for her; he keeps the oath they made long ago. • The husband also is generous and kind; he anticipates giving rings to his friends and warriors. • He is courageous, strong, and ambitious; he left home to sail across strange seas to unknown lands, and he established himself successfully in a foreign country.

Elegiac Elements in “The Husband’s Message” Why Elements Would Be Appropriate in an Elegy
1. The husband was forced to leave his wife and home. 1. The husband has experienced years of wandering and sorrow. The subjects of sadness and loss are typical of elegies.
2. The wife is supposed to depart when she hears the cuckoo’s “sad” and “mournful” sound.
2. This image implies that the wife’s departure will not be entirely joyful. She will have to leave family and friends behind, even though she will look forward to seeing her husband again. Images that emphasize regret are common in elegies.

1. d 6. b
2. c 7. a
3. c 8. a
4. d 9. d
5. d 10. a
5. c 10. c 15. c

A man who lives in a distant land ordered me to deliver a cleverly carved letter to you. To accomplish this task, I crossed salty rivers. In the past, I often traveled across the sea at my employer’s request. On these trips, my living quarters were below the ships’ decks. I was sent to unusual places.