

Analyze Theme: In this story, two brothers respond to a challenge by making very different choices. As you read, use the clues in the story to help you understand what the writer is saying about their choices. Annotate the text and answer questions.

The Two Brothers

Short Story by *Leo Tolstoy*



Two brothers set out on a journey together. At noon they lay down in forest to rest. When they woke up they saw a stone lying next to them. There was something written on the stone, and they tried to make out what it was.

“Whoever finds this stone,” they read, “let him go straight into the forest at sunrise. In the forest a river will appear; let him swim across the river to the other side. There he will find a she-bear and her cubs. Let him take the cubs from her and run up the mountain with them, without once looking back. On the top of the mountain he will see a house, and in that house will he find happiness.”

When they had read what was written on the stone, the younger brother said:

“Let us go together. We can swim across the river, carry off the bear cubs, take them to the house on the mountain, and together find happiness.”

“I am not going into the forest after bear cubs,” said the elder brother, “and I advise you not to go. In the first place, no one can know whether what is written on this stone is the truth—perhaps it was written in jest. It is even possible that we have not read it correctly. In the second place, even if what is written here is the truth—suppose we go into the forest and night comes, and we cannot find the river. We shall be lost. And if we do find the river, how are we going to swim across it? It may be broad and swift. In the third place, even if we swim across the river, do you think it is an easy thing to take her cubs away from a she-bear? She will seize us, and, instead of finding happiness, we shall perish, and all for nothing. In the fourth place, even if we succeeded in carrying off the bear cubs, we could not run up a mountain without stopping to rest. And, most important of all, the stone does not tell us what kind of happiness we should find in that house. It may be that the happiness awaiting us there is not at all the sort of happiness we would want.”

“In my opinion,” said the younger brother, “you are wrong. What is written on the stone could not have been put there without reason. And it is all perfectly clear. In the first place, no harm will come to us if we try. In the second place, if we do not go, someone else will read the inscription on the stone and find happiness, and we shall have lost it. In the third place: if you do not make an effort and try hard, nothing in the world will succeed. In the fourth place: I should not want it thought that I was afraid of anything.”

The elder brother answered him by saying: “The proverb says: In seeking great happiness small pleasures may be lost.’ And also: ‘A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.’”

The younger brother replied: “I have heard: ‘He who is afraid of the leaves must not go into the forest.’ And also: ‘Beneath a stone no water flows.’”

Then the younger brother set off, and the elder remained behind.

No sooner had the younger brother gone into the forest than he found the river, swam across it, and there on the other side was the she-bear, fast asleep. He took her cubs, and ran up the mountain without looking back. When he reached the top of the mountain the people came out to meet him with a carriage to take him into the city, where they made him their king.

He ruled for five years. In the sixth year, another king, who was stronger than he, waged war against him. The city was conquered, and he was driven out.

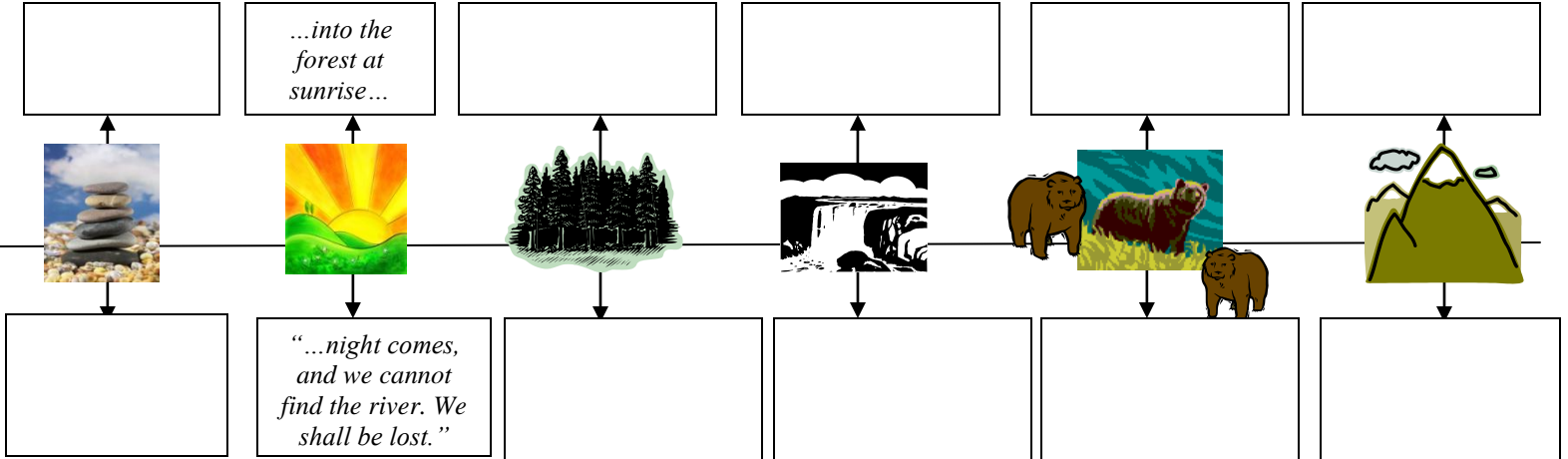
Again the younger brother became a wanderer, and he arrived one day at the house of the elder brother. The elder brother was living in a village and had grown neither rich nor poor. The two brothers rejoiced at seeing each other, and at once began telling of all that had happened to them.

“You see,” said the elder brother, “I was right. Here I have lived quietly and well, while you, though you may have been a king, have seen a great deal of trouble.”

“I do not regret having gone into the forest and up the mountain,” replied the younger brother. “I have nothing now, but I shall always have something to remember, while you have no memories at all.”

Directions: You will be assessed, not only on your understanding and analysis of theme in this selection, but also on your ability to communicate your thoughts in writing. Write complete, coherent sentences to every answer (1-6).

1) Summarize the stone's prophecy on the graphic organizer below. Use the images to guide the chronology of the events.



2) Summarize the elder brother's arguments against the various steps in the stone's prophecy. Use the boxes above.

3) The setting—the forest, the river, the bears, and the mountain all represent danger to the elder brother. What does his reaction to the setting's challenges tell you about him?

4) Describe each brother's outlook on life. Write a theme statement that applies to each of the brothers' views of life and risk-taking. How are the brothers' attitudes different?

Elder Brother's Outlook. Why does the mountain represent the elder brother? _____



Theme Statement: _____

Younger Brother's Outlook. Why does the river represent the younger brother? _____



Theme Statement: _____



How are the brothers' attitudes different? _____

5) How do the brother's resolve their conflict?

6) Reread the last two paragraphs of the story. How does each brother feel about the choice he made? Explain whether the brothers' attitudes have changed.

7) Consider what the writer might be saying about the choices people make. Write a statement that expresses the main theme of the entire story.

8) **Apply for a Job!** Consider the two brothers and the differences in their characters. Make a list of occupations that would suit each brother based on their strengths (engineer, astronaut, poet, teacher, doctor, and so on) and give reasons for each job match.

|  Elder Brother | |  Younger Brother | |
|--|-------------------|---|-------------------|
| Possible Occupation | Reasons for Match | Possible Occupation | Reasons for Match |
| | | | |
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Directions: Read and paraphrase the poem. Analyze the theme and answer the comprehension questions that follow.

Your World

--by Georgia Douglas Johnson



Your world is as big as you make it.
I know, for I used to abide
In the narrowest nest in a corner,
My wings pressing close to my side.

But I sighted the distant horizon
Where the sky line encircled the sea
And I throbbed with a burning desire
To travel this immensity.

I battered the cordons around me
And cradled my wings on the breeze
Then soared to the uttermost reaches
With rapture, with power, with ease!

9) The topic of the poem is –

- A. leaving home
- B. choosing independence
- C. enjoying nature
- D. making friends

What is another possible topic?

10) What statement best describes the theme?

- A) Sometimes it is good to live alone.
- B) Happiness comes from traveling.
- C) Experience is the best teacher.
- D) You are as free as you want to be.

11) The description in lines 11-12 suggest that the speaker has—

- A) become an important person
- B) experienced new adventures
- C) live a life of luxury
- D) decided to return home

12) Reread line 9

“I battered the cordons around me.”

You can infer that the speaker—

- A) did not want to change
- B) needed to feel safe in life
- C) had to overcome obstacles
- D) traveled around the world

13) The “nest” in line 3 symbolizes the speaker’s—

- A) small apartment
- B) entry-level job
- C) small world
- D) fears

What do the “wings” in line 4 symbolize? _____

14) From the description in lines 2-4 you can infer that the speaker’s life used to be—

- A. safe and predictable
- B. happy and comfortable
- C. lonely and harsh
- D. busy and exciting

15) The “horizon” in the second stanza symbolizes—

- A) the future
- B) opportunities and possibilities
- C) a tropical island
- D) relaxation and peace

16) What is the author’s purpose for writing the poem?

- A) to reflect on past decisions
- B) to inform readers about the danger of traveling
- C) to describe a unique species of bird
- D) to inspire readers to think differently about their lives

What is the author’s tone? _____