

Reading Comprehension Worksheet

Read the passage. Then answer each question.

DAMON AND PYTHIAS

In Syracuse there was a ruler so harsh that the people plotted to drive him out of the city. The plot was discovered, and the king commanded that the leaders be put to death. One of the leaders whose name was Damon lived at some distance from Syracuse. He asked that before he was put to death he be allowed to go home to say goodbye to his family. He promised he would come back to die at the appointed time.

The king did not believe that Damon would keep his word, and he said, "I will not let you go unless you find some friend who will come and stay in your place. Then, if you are not back on the day set for execution, I shall put your friend to death in your stead." The king thought to himself, "Surely no one will ever take the place of a man condemned to death."

Now, Damon had a very dear friend named Pythias who came forward at once and offered to stay in prison while Damon was allowed to go away. The king was very much surprised, but he had given his word. Damon was therefore permitted to leave for home while Pythias was shut up in prison.

Many days passed, the time for the execution was close at hand, and Damon had not come back. The king, curious to see how Pythias would behave now that death seemed so near, went to the prison.

"Your friend will never return," he said to Pythias.

"You are wrong," was Pythias' answer. "Damon will be here if he can possibly come. But he has to travel by sea, and the winds have been blowing the wrong way for several days. However, it is much better that I should die than he. I have no wife and no children, and I love my friend so much that it would be easier to die for him than to live without him. So I am hoping and praying that he may be delayed until my head has fallen."

The king went away more puzzled than ever.

The fatal day arrived but Damon had not come. Pythias was brought forward and led to the scaffold. "My prayers are heard," he cried. "I shall be permitted to die for my friend. But mark my words: Damon is faithful and true; you will soon know that he has done his utmost to be here!"

Just at this moment, a man came galloping up at full speed on a horse covered with foam. It was Damon. In an instant he was on the scaffold and had Pythias in his arms. "My beloved friend," he cried, "praise the gods that you are safe. I have suffered so much agony from the fear that my delay was putting your life in danger!"

There was no joy in the face of Pythias because he did not care to live if his friend must die. But the king had heard all. At last he was forced to believe in the unselfish friendship of these two. His hard heart melted at the sight, and he set them both free, asking only that they would be his friends also.

Questions

1. Why does the king want Damon to be put to death?
2. What is taking Damon so long to return?
3. What do Pythias' words and actions tell you about him?
4. What did the king learn from Damon and Pythias?