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The Day It Snowed Tortillas

by Joe Hayes

Before You Read

Before you read "The Day It Snowed Tortillas," study the words below. Make sure you know what each word means. This will help you understand the story.

pancakes: thin, flat cakes made of flour, milk, and eggs

squeeze: push to make something fit into

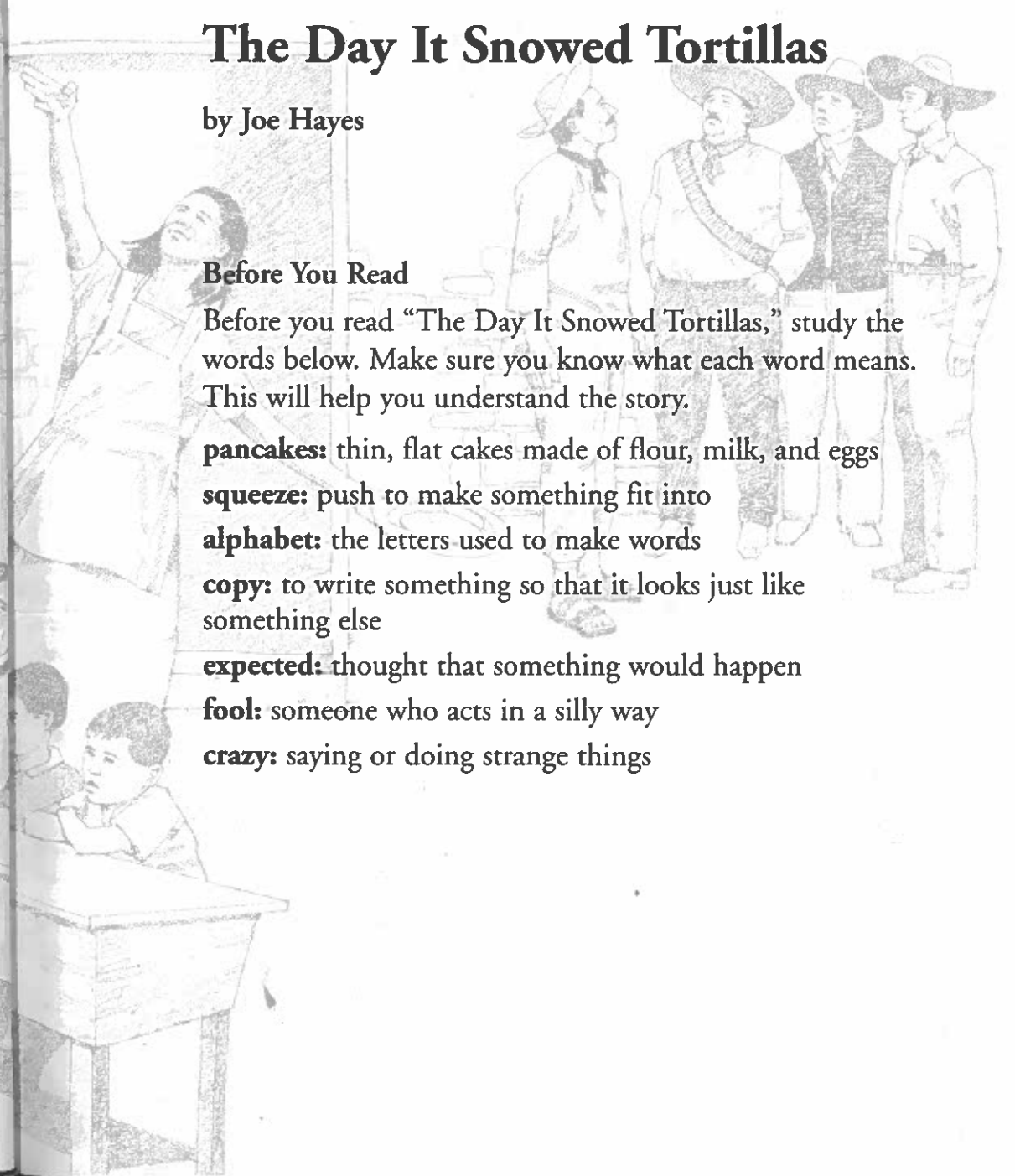
alphabet: the letters used to make words

copy: to write something so that it looks just like something else

expected: thought that something would happen

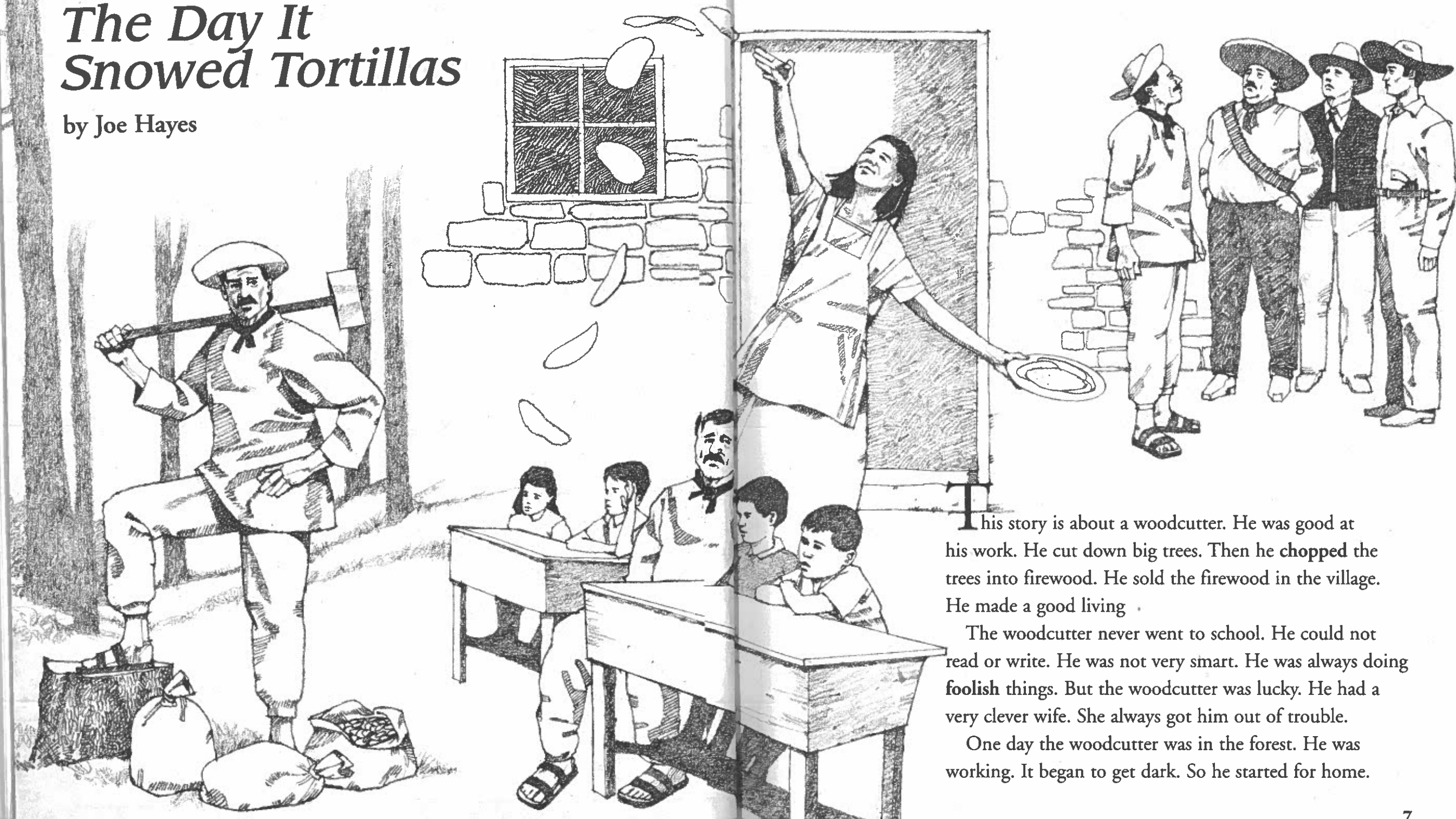
fool: someone who acts in a silly way

crazy: saying or doing strange things



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This story is about a woodcutter. He was good at his work. He cut down big trees. Then he chopped the trees into firewood. He sold the firewood in the village. He made a good living .

The woodcutter never went to school. He could not read or write. He was not very smart. He was always doing foolish things. But the woodcutter was lucky. He had a very clever wife. She always got him out of trouble.

One day the woodcutter was in the forest. He was working. It began to get dark. So he started for home.

On the way there, he noticed three bags. They were by the side of the road.

The woodcutter picked up the first bag. He looked inside. It was filled with pieces of gold. He looked into the second bag. It was full of gold too. And so was the third.

He loaded the bags onto his donkey. Then he took them home to show his wife.

His wife saw that the bags were filled with gold. She was very surprised.

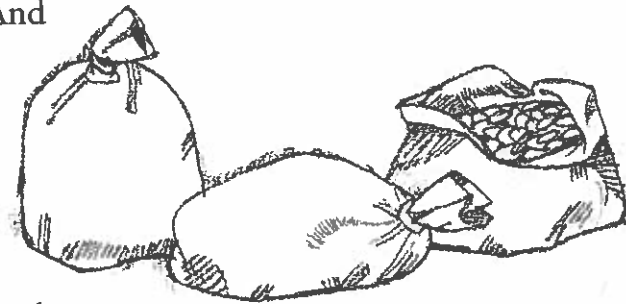
“Listen to me,” she said. “Do not tell *anyone* that you found this gold! It must belong to some robbers. They probably hid it in the forest. If they find out we have this gold, they will come here. They will kill us! They will take back the gold.”

Then she thought to herself, “I know my husband. He can never keep a secret. He may talk about the gold. What should I do?”

She thought of a plan. She told her husband, “You must do something right now. Go into the village. Bring back some large sacks of flour. I need a lot of flour. Bring back a hundred pounds of flour.”

The woodcutter went off to the village. He was not happy about going. He said to himself, “I worked in the forest all day. Now I must bring back a hundred pounds of flour. I am tired of all this work.”

He went to a store and bought the flour. He brought it home to his wife.



“Thank you,” she said. “Thank you very much. You have worked very hard. You must be tired. Why don’t you lie down for a while?”

The woodcutter liked that idea. He lay down on the bed. Soon he fell fast asleep.

The woman waited until her husband was asleep. Then she went to work. She took the flour. She began to make tortillas. Tortillas are thin, flat cakes. They look a little like pancakes. They are good to eat.

She kept making tortillas. She made more and more tortillas. They filled up the whole kitchen. She used up the hundred pounds of flour. She made piles and piles of tortillas.

Then she took the tortillas outside. She threw them all over the ground.

The woodcutter was very tired. He slept all that evening. He slept through the night. He did not wake up until the next morning.

The woodcutter got up. He stepped outside. He saw that the ground was covered with tortillas. He called to his wife. “What happened here? What does this mean?”



His wife went to the door. She looked outside. She said, "Oh, dear! It must have snowed tortillas last night!"

"Snowed tortillas?" said the man. "I never heard of such a thing."

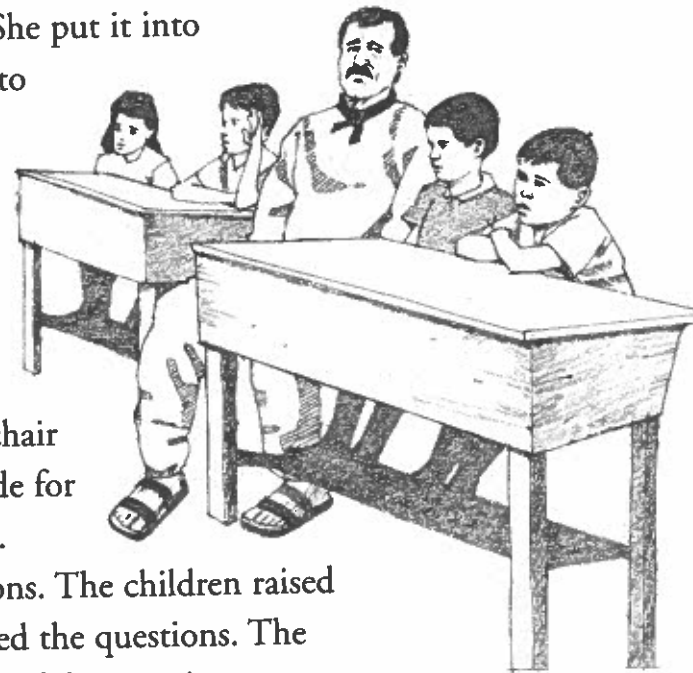
"What?" she answered. "You never heard of it snowing tortillas? Well! You never went to school. There are a lot of things you do not know. You better go to school. There are some things you must learn."

So she made him some lunch. She put it into a bag. Then she made him go off to the school.

The woodcutter got to the school a little later. But he did not know how to read. He did not know how to write. So they put him in the first grade. He had to squeeze into a chair. The chair was too small for him. It was made for a child. It was hard for him to sit.

Then the teacher asked questions. The children raised their hands. The children answered the questions. The woodcutter could not answer any of the questions.

He had to go to the blackboard to write. But he did not know the alphabet. A little boy was standing next to him. The boy wrote his name on the board. The woodcutter tried to copy what the little boy wrote. The woodcutter wrote the boy's name. The other children saw that the man was writing the boy's name. He was not writing his own. They began to laugh.



The woodcutter could not stand it any longer. He rushed out of the school. He hurried home. He told his wife, "I have had enough school. I am going to work. I am going to cut firewood."

"Fine," she called after him. "You go do your work."

A week later, the robbers came to the woodcutter's house. His wife was not surprised. She thought that they would come. She expected them.

The robbers were very angry. They said to the woman, "Where is the gold that your husband found?"

The woman shook her head. She looked surprised. "Gold?" she said. "I do not know what you mean. I do not know anything about any gold."

"Come on!" the robbers said. "Your husband has been talking to everyone in the village. He said that he found three bags of gold. Those bags belong to us. You better give them back!"

The woman shook her head again. She asked, "Did my husband say that? Oh, that poor man! I do not know what to do about him. He says the strangest things. I do not know anything about your gold."

"We will see," said the robbers. "We will find out soon enough. We will wait here until he comes home." So the robbers waited around all day. While they waited, they cleaned their guns.

Toward evening, the woodcutter came up the path with his donkey. The robbers ran out. They grabbed the man. They began to shake him.

They asked, "Where is the gold you found? You better tell us! You better tell us right away!"

The woodcutter thought for a moment. "Gold?" he said. "Oh, yes. Now I remember. My wife hid the gold."

He called out, "Wife. What did you do with that gold?"

His wife looked very surprised. "What gold?" she said. "I do not know what you are talking about."

"Sure you do. Don't you remember? I brought home three bags of gold. It was the day before it snowed tortillas. Remember? It snowed tortillas all night. And in the morning, you sent me to school."

The robbers looked at each other.

They said, "Did he say that it snowed tortillas? Did he say that she sent him to school?"

They sadly shook their heads. "Why are we wasting our time? This man is a fool. He does not know what he is talking about."

So they went away. They thought that the woodcutter was crazy. They did not believe a word that he said.

From that day on, it did not matter if the woodcutter was smart. It did not even matter if he was a good woodcutter. For he was a rich man. He and his wife had the gold all to themselves. And the three robbers never came back.



TELL ABOUT THE STORY.

Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer. Each sentence tells a *fact* about the story.

- The woodcutter was
 a. very weak.
 b. very strong.
 c. very smart.
- The wife told the woodcutter to bring back
 a. more wood.
 b. some tortillas.
 c. a hundred pounds of flour.
- At school the woodcutter
 a. read a story.
 b. answered many questions.
 c. could not answer any questions.
- The robbers came to the house to
 a. get their gold.
 b. eat dinner.
 c. buy firewood.

ADD WORDS TO SENTENCES.

Complete the sentences below. Fill in each blank with one of the words in the box. Each word can be found in the story. There are five words and four blanks. This means that one word in the box will not be used.

In 1848 gold was _____¹ in California. People hurried there from everywhere, hoping to find _____². San Francisco was just a _____³ town in 1848. By 1849 it _____⁴ become a growing city.

gold small
idea
found had

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LEARN NEW WORDS.

The vocabulary words are printed in **dark type** in the story. You may look back at the words before you answer these questions. Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

1. He chopped the trees into fire wood. The word *chopped* means
 a. cut.
 b. climbed.
 c. sold.
2. The woodcutter did foolish things and got into trouble. The word *foolish* means
 a. good.
 b. wise.
 c. silly.
3. He noticed three bags by the side of the road. The word *noticed* means
 a. saw.
 b. wanted.
 c. lost.
4. The woodcutter bought some large sacks of flour. What are *sacks*?
 a. boxes
 b. bags
 c. cakes

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EXPLAIN WHAT HAPPENED.

Here is how to answer these questions. First think about what happened in the story. Then *figure out* (work out) the right answer. This is called *critical thinking*.

1. The wife was afraid that her husband would
 a. spend the gold.
 b. give away the gold.
 c. tell people about the gold.
2. How many tortillas did the woman make?
 a. She made one or two.
 b. She may just a few.
 c. She made many.
3. Why did the woodcutter hurry out of the school?
 a. He did not like it there.
 b. He left his lunch at home.
 c. The teacher said to go home.
4. Why did the robbers think the woodcutter was a fool?
 a. He said his wife hid the gold.
 b. He said it snowed tortillas.
 c. They talked to his teacher.

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SPOT STORY ELEMENTS.

Some story elements are **plot**, **character**, and **setting**. (See page 3.) Put an *x* in the box next to the right answer.

1. What happened first in the *plot*?
 a. The woodcutter went to the school.
 b. The woodcutter found three bags of gold.
 c. The woodcutter bought the flour.
2. What happened last in the *plot*?
 a. The robbers came to the house.
 b. The woodcutter fell asleep.
 c. The woman made tortillas.
3. Which word best describes (tells about) the *character* of the wife?
 a. angry
 b. clever
 c. sad
4. Which sentence best describes the *character* of the woodcutter?
 a. He was lazy.
 b. He could read well.
 c. He was strong, but not smart.

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THINK SOME MORE ABOUT THE STORY.

Your teacher might want you to write your answers.

- Why did the woman make tortillas and then throw them on the ground?
- Show that the woman knew her husband very well.
- Suppose that the robbers did not believe that the husband was a fool. How do you think the story would have ended?

Write your scores in the boxes below. Then write your scores on pages 138 and 139.

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