

Comparing Themes and Patterns Across Cultures

Name: _____

Date: _____

Score: ____ / 10



Quick Review

Tales from different cultures often share PATTERNS — a clever trickster, a hero on a journey, a contest of strength vs. wit. Comparing two tales helps you see the THEME they both teach.

PART 1 — READ

Read the passage. Then answer the questions.

Two Tales of Cleverness

[From a Trickster Tale — retold from West Africa]

Long ago, Spider lived at the edge of a village where the wells had all gone dry. Lion sat by the only good well and let no one drink from it unless they paid him a goat. Spider had no goat. He had only an empty calabash, a bit of honey, and many bright ideas. Spider painted the inside of his calabash with honey and set it under a fig tree near the well. Bees flew in and stayed. Then Spider went to Lion and bowed low. "Great Lion," he said, "I have brought you a singing pot. It hums sweet songs for any king strong enough to lift it." Lion roared with pride and bounded to the fig tree. He lifted the calabash — and the bees rushed out. While Lion ran in circles, Spider opened the well for the village, and every family carried home cool water that night.

[From a Fable Tale — retold in the style of Aesop]

A young Mouse and a hungry Eagle once met by a river. The Eagle planned to eat the Mouse for supper. "Wait," said the Mouse. "I am much too small for an Eagle as great as you. But I know where a fat fish sleeps under a flat rock. Carry me on your back, and I will show you." The Eagle, pleased to be called great, agreed. The Mouse climbed onto his back. As they flew over the river, the Mouse leaped off into the reeds where the Eagle could not follow. From the safe grass, the Mouse called up, "A clever word saved my life today, great Eagle. A full belly is no match for a quick mind."

PART 2 — PRACTICE

Use the two tales to answer each question.

1. Which sentence BEST states a THEME that BOTH stories share?
 - A. A clever plan always helps a whole village survive a hard time.
 - B. A clever character can outwit a stronger one.
 - C. Pride teaches strong animals to share their food with the weak.
 - D. Animals that travel together often become lifelong friends.



2. Spider and Mouse are MOST alike because both —
 - A. use a clever trick — a fake offer — to fool a stronger animal.
 - B. gather many friends together to help them defeat a bigger animal.
 - C. share their food with the bigger animal at the end of the tale.
 - D. end up trapped by the bigger animal despite their cleverness.
3. How are LION and EAGLE alike in the two tales?
 - A. Both lose because they grow too tired to keep fighting.
 - B. Both refuse to listen to flattery from a smaller animal.
 - C. Both are strong, proud, and fooled by flattery.
 - D. Both share their meals fairly with the smaller animals.
4. Which detail from the FIRST tale BEST supports the shared theme?
 - A. The wells in the village had all gone dry that year.
 - B. Lion let no one drink from his well unless they paid him a goat.
 - C. Spider had no goat of his own to trade for water.
 - D. Spider painted his calabash with honey so bees would swarm into it.
5. Which detail from the SECOND tale BEST supports the shared theme?
 - A. The Eagle was hungry and looking for supper by the river.
 - B. The Mouse said, "A full belly is no match for a quick mind."
 - C. The Eagle agreed to carry the Mouse on his back over the river.
 - D. They first met each other near a wide river one afternoon.
6. How are the two tales DIFFERENT?
 - A. Spider's trick helps an entire village get water; Mouse's trick saves only himself.
 - B. Spider acts alone with no help; Mouse has many other animals helping him.
 - C. Spider's tale ends with a stated moral; Mouse's tale does not state any moral.
 - D. Spider is the strong character; Mouse is the strong character too, just smaller.
7. Which PATTERN from world tales appears in BOTH stories?
 - A. A magical object that grants three wishes to its owner.
 - B. A long sea voyage past many strange islands.
 - C. A small, weaker character defeating a larger one through cleverness.
 - D. A young hero who inherits a kingdom from a wise old king.
8. Compare Spider and Mouse in TWO ways: one way they are SIMILAR and one way they are DIFFERENT. Use details from each tale.



9. What CULTURE-based difference can you notice between the two tales?
- A. One is told entirely in verse; the other is told in stage directions.
 - B. One was first written down this year; the other one last week.
 - C. One has a happy ending; the other has no ending written down at all.
 - D. One follows a West African Spider-trickster pattern; the other follows an Aesop-style animal fable with a stated moral.
10. Which NEW story would BEST fit the SAME pattern as these two tales?
- A. A king builds the tallest tower in his land using a thousand workers.
 - B. A small rabbit fools a bigger wolf by promising a magic moon at the bottom of a well.
 - C. Two best friends paint a fence together on a hot afternoon.
 - D. A giant prince inherits a castle full of gold from his father.



Answer Keys

- 1 A B C D
- 2 A B C D
- 3 A B C D
- 4 A B C D
- 5 A B C D


- 6 A B C D
- 7 A B C D
- 8
- 9 A B C D
- 10 A B C D

Explanations

1. B	In both tales, a smaller character (Spider, Mouse) outwits a larger one (Lion, Eagle). A fits ONE tale only — the village in Spider's story (Mouse only saves himself); C is the opposite of what the tales show (pride is mocked); D is not in either tale.
2. A	Spider's "singing pot" and Mouse's "hidden fish" are both fake offers. B is false — both work alone; C is false — there is no sharing; D is the OPPOSITE of what happens (both escape, both win).
3. C	Spider calls Lion "Great Lion" / a king; Mouse calls Eagle "as great as you." Pride and flattery undo both. A invents tiredness; B is the OPPOSITE; D is false.
4. D	Spider's clever plan with the honey and bees is what defeats Lion's strength — the action that PROVES the theme. A is setup (the problem); B is the conflict; C is Spider's challenge — none of those three SHOW cleverness winning yet.
5. B	The Mouse states the shared theme in plain words. A is setup; C is part of the trick, but the spoken moral states the theme directly; D is just the setting.
6. A	The Spider tale ends with the whole village carrying water home; the Mouse tale ends only with Mouse safe. B is false (both work alone); C is the opposite — Mouse states the moral, Spider does not; D contradicts both tales (both small animals are weak in strength).
7. C	This is the trickster pattern, common in folk tales worldwide. A, B, and D are real folktale patterns but appear in NEITHER of these two stories.
8.	Answer: Strong answers give one similarity AND one difference, each with a detail: e.g., "SIMILAR: Both use flattery and a fake offer to trick a larger animal — Spider offers Lion a 'singing pot,' Mouse offers Eagle a hidden 'fat fish.' DIFFERENT: Spider's trick helps the whole village get water, while Mouse's trick saves only himself." Also acceptable: similar = both call the bigger animal great/king; different = Spider acts to fix a community problem, Mouse acts to save his own life. NOT acceptable: answers that name only a similarity OR only a difference; vague answers without text details (e.g., "they are both clever" with no example); or comparisons that don't actually involve Spider AND Mouse. Find one thing they DO the same and one thing that ends differently.
9. D	The intro labels identify the cultural styles: Spider-trickster tales are a West African tradition; short animal fables with a stated moral are an Aesop pattern. A, B, and C are all false claims about the tales.
10. B	A small animal outsmarting a larger one with a clever trick matches the shared trickster pattern exactly. A and D have no trickster — they're about power/inheritance; C is about friendship, not a contest of wits.



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