

Test: Comprehension

Name: _____

The Very Proper Gander

by James Thurber



*a male goose
charming, polite, but not sincere*

*to walk proudly
right, socially/morally acceptable*

*a female chicken
a place where birds sleep*

a cock; area on a farm

a bird of prey, raptor

Not so very long ago there was a very fine gander°. He was strong and smooth° and beautiful and he spent most of his time singing to his wife and children. One day somebody who saw him strutting up° and down in his yard and

5 singing remarked, "There is a very proper° gander." An old hen° overheard this and told her husband about it that night in the roost°. "They said something about propaganda," she said. "I have always suspected that," said the rooster°, and he went around the barnyard° next

10 day telling everybody that the very fine gander was a dangerous bird, more than likely a hawk° in gander's clothing. A small brown hen remembered a time when at a great distance she had seen the gander talking with some hawks in the forest. "They were up to no good," she said.

15 A duck remembered that the gander had once told him he did not believe in anything. "He said to hell with the flag, too," said the duck. A guinea hen recalled that she had once seen somebody who looked very much like the gander throw something that looked a great deal like a

20 bomb. Finally everybody snatched up° sticks and stones and descended on° the gander's house. He was strutting in his front yard, singing to his children and his wife. "There he is!" everybody cried. "Hawk-lover! Unbeliever! Flag-hater! Bomb-thrower!" So they set upon him and drove

25 him out of the country.

Moral: Anybody who you or your wife thinks is going to overthrow the government by violence must be driven out of the country.

to take sth quickly

to attack

Vocabulary

1. Say in your own words what the following words and phrases mean (in the context of the fable above):

propaganda (8)

to suspect (8)

forest (14)

to be up to no good (14)

to drive out (24-5)

government (27)

violence (27)

2. Give the opposite word(s) for:

strong (2)

proper (5)

likely (11)

3. Give synonymous word(s) for:

not so very long ago (1)

to recall (17)

to look like (18)

Vocabulary

1. *Say in your own words what the following words and phrases mean (in the context of the fable):*

propaganda (8)	Propaganda is the spreading of ideas or statements (often false or exaggerated) to gain support for a political leader or a party, etc.
to suspect (8)	To suspect something means to have an idea that something is probably true or likely to happen, especially something bad, but without having definite proof.
forest (14)	A forest is a large area of land that is thickly covered with trees.
to be up to no good (14)	The phrase “to be up to no good” describes the act of doing something wrong or dishonest or to plan to do such a thing.
to drive out (24-5)	“To drive out” means to make somebody or something disappear usually in a violent way.
government (27)	The word “government” refers to an institution (a large organisation, a group of people who are) which is responsible for controlling a country or a state.
violence (27)	The word “violence” denotes a behaviour that is intended to hurt or kill somebody.

2. *Give the opposite word(s) for:*

strong (2)	weak, powerless, feeble, faint, fragile
proper (5)	improper
likely (11)	unlikely, improbably, implausibly

3. *Give synonymous word(s) for:*

not so very long ago (1)	recently, lately
to recall (17)	to remember
to look like (18)	to be (seem, appear) similar to, to be alike, to resemble (to take after)

Comprehension

In the following, make sure that you use **your own words** as far as possible. Use **formal language** (no contracted forms!) and formulate answers in **complete sentences!** (50% language, 50% substance)

3. *What is the theme of the fable?*

- a misunderstanding (proper gander – propaganda)
- the spread of a rumour (gossip)
- jealousy
- politics (Hitler, Stalin, etc.)
- (Second World War: the date of composition is 1940)
- fable (moral)

Additional Questions:

1. *Have a close look at the action: How is the rumour started and how is it spread?*
2. *Characterise the gander. (How is he described, why does he behave the way he does and in what respect does he differ from the other animals?)*
3. *Characterise the animals as they appear in this text.*
4. *What is said about the other barnyard animals?*
5. *What do you think of the moral the author has chosen?*
6. *What does the author want to show with this fable?*
7. *Which elements does the writer use to make his fable a satire?*
8. *Do you see any parallels to current events?*
9. *Explain why this text is a fable.*
10. *Enumerate three characteristic features of fairy tales and draw a short comparison to fables.*

Short comment

“The Very Proper Gander” displays many of the same characteristics as “The Rabbits.” It tells of a beautiful gander who receives the compliment of being “a very proper gander;” a neighbour overhears this as something about “propaganda.” In the mob scene that ensues, the residents of the farm drive the gander and his family from the area. Wit and irony pervade the moral Thurber supplies: “Anybody who you or your wife thinks is going to overthrow the government by violence must be driven out of the country.” Thurber does not actually endorse such conduct; he merely points out its absurdity.