



Name _____

Date _____

READING SELECTION #10

The Greedy Town

¹ A long time ago, there was a small town way up in the North. It was so far north that it was the only village for hundreds of miles. There was very little to do in the village, so the people longed for a different kind of life filled with excitement, money, and fame.

² One day a peddler came into town on his horse-drawn wagon. Everyone, from grandmas and grandpas to little children, rushed to see him. They were curious to see what wonderful new things he was selling. They were hoping to find chocolates, tools, toys, pots and pans, and all sorts of new things.

³ “Ladies and gentlemen,” the peddler boomed, “today, I bring you the greatest, the most amazing, and the rarest treasure in the whole world!”

⁴ “What is it? Show us!” the villagers shouted. Children stood on their tiptoes to see.

⁵ The peddler reached for something at his feet that was covered with a dark cloth. He grunted as he lifted the mysterious treasure from its portable crate. With an extra-big smile, he whisked away the cloth and revealed the strangest thing the villagers had ever seen. It was big, heavy, and egg-shaped. It had alternating light and dark green stripes. The crowd at first cheered wildly, but then fell silent.

⁶ “Well, what *is* that thing? a man shouted.

⁷ “My good people, I hold before you one of the world’s only existing dragon eggs!”

⁸ “Dragon eggs?” the crowd shouted in surprise.

⁹ “Yes,” said the peddler, his bright teeth flashing in his wide smile. “For only one thousand dollars, you can hatch and raise your very own flying dragon! These beasts are feared the world over. But you, good people, have the opportunity to raise them from birth, to make them your pets, and to train them to do your bidding!”

¹⁰ “We can fly on their backs!” someone shouted.

¹¹ “We can travel the world and charge people to see them!” said another.

¹² “We’ll all be rich and famous!” shouted several people at once.

¹³ The crowd went wild. Everyone rushed forward to buy their very own dragon egg. For some, it took everything they had to buy an egg, but they didn’t care. They believed the peddler when he promised that an egg would bring them good fortune.

¹⁴ The next day, young Joe Miller arrived back in the village after visiting his cousins down South. As he walked up to his house, his neighbor Annie called out to him, “Joe! Joe! Come and see!”

¹⁵ Annie led Joe into her house and showed him her two dragon eggs that were tucked snugly in her bed. “I have to keep them warm until they hatch,” she said. “I sleep on the floor so they can be safe and warm in the bed.”

¹⁶ Joe inspected the dragon eggs closely. “Is the peddler still here?” he asked.

¹⁷ “Oh, yes,” said Annie. “But you’d better hurry. He may be sold out of dragon eggs soon, and then he’ll be leaving.”

¹⁸ Joe went and bought his own dragon egg. “And this is real?” he asked the peddler.

¹⁹ “Guaranteed!” said the peddler with a strange, too-big smile.

²⁰ “Then we must celebrate!” said Joe. “I will throw a party at my house, and you will be the guest of honor!”

²¹ Soon everyone was gathered at Joe’s house, talking of nothing but their dragon eggs and their future fame and wealth.

²² “Attention, everyone!” Joe said, with the peddler standing proudly by his side. “For this very special occasion, I have decided to serve what can only be the world’s greatest delicacy. Scrambled dragon egg!”

²³ And with that, he raised his dragon egg over his head and dropped it to the floor. CRACK! SPLAT!

²⁴ The crowd gasped, a woman screamed, and children cried. The peddler’s smile turned to a frown.

²⁵ Joe reached down and picked up a bit of the juicy red dragon egg. He then took a big bite.

²⁶ “That doesn’t look like an egg!” everyone shouted.

²⁷ “That’s because it’s not an egg,” said Joe. They grow these on almost every farm down South where my cousin lives. This is a fruit called a watermelon!”

²⁸ “A fruit?” asked a woman. “It won’t hatch into a flying dragon?”

²⁹ “I’m afraid not,” said Joe. He pointed at the peddler, who had turned as red as the watermelon fruit. “You’ve been tricked by this greedy peddler. And you were all greedy enough *to be* tricked. You know there are no such things as dragons, and you know there are no dragon eggs. Because you wanted to be rich, you let greed open the door that allowed you to be fooled.

³⁰ The villagers were silent for a moment, then turned and shouted angrily at the peddler. They wanted to put him in jail and throw away the key!

³¹ But again, Joe spoke out. “If this trickster returns all of your money, leaves town, and promises never to come back, then we can all be happy.”

³² And so the peddler left town, but only after he had given back all the villagers’ money. As promised, he never returned.

³³ For many weeks, the people of the village ate lots and lots of watermelon. Soon all the villagers grew watermelons in their gardens to remind them not to be greedy and fooled again. They also really liked to eat watermelon.