

A Treacherous Journey

Reading Guide

What is the point of view of this story? Look at the pronouns used in the story.

What is the conflict? Think about why Gretchen must make this journey.

What warnings do the doctor and Gretchen's father give her?

Long ago, a twelve-year-old girl named Gretchen lived with her family on a farm in Switzerland in a remote area far from town and any neighbors. As the oldest child, Gretchen was the most adept at handling the goats on their farm and helping her father plow their land with their hard-working mule, Hans. Gretchen was always busy working with her parents on the daily chores of farm life. She often accompanied her father on trips to the town market where they sold goat butter and cheese they had made and then purchased supplies with their earnings.

When her mother became very ill, a traveling doctor prescribed a special medicine that could be obtained from only a certain apothecary. The doctor gave Gretchen's father instructions for finding the apothecary, who lived a day's ride away. Gretchen's father decided that she would make this journey on their mule because she was the faster rider. Her father stayed to watch over the mother, children, and farm animals. As the doctor left, he warned Gretchen that she must buy the medicine from only this trusted apothecary, Herr Kalt, because only his medicine could save her mother.

"If you can't get the medicine and return in two days' time, your mother may not survive," cautioned the doctor.

Gretchen's father warned her that there might be obstacles along the way.

"The journey is treacherous, my child," he said. "You must cross a raging river on a footbridge, which shakes in the wind. Hold tight to the posts as you cross, and don't look down. As you travel through the woods, keep watch for bears, and if you see one, bang on this iron pot to scare it away."

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What motivates Gretchen to face the danger of the bridge?

How does Gretchen take her father's warnings? Look back at the previous page to see what her father told her. Then, compare his words with her actions on this page.

What clues show that Hans is scared? Pay attention to the author's choice of words that reveal Hans's behaviors.

All these warnings made Gretchen very nervous, but she tried to hide these feelings from her family because she knew that she was their only hope. Her father helped her pack the mule's saddlebags with food and water for the journey. Then, she set off down the dirt road. By noon Gretchen and Hans arrived at the river, which roared louder than a waterfall. The water churned its way around huge boulders, and the wind tossed the tiny wooden bridge from side to side.

Gretchen knew that if she didn't cross this terrifying bridge she had no chance of getting the medicine for her mother. Doing her best to think of nothing but her mother and family, she guided her nervous mule across the bridge—step by step. Finally, they reached the other side and sat down to rest, eat, and drink. Gretchen was tired and wanted to take a nap in the warm sunshine, but she knew she couldn't rest. She was determined to continue their journey.

Just as they reached the forest, Hans began sniffing the air. Soon, his skinny legs were shaking. Gretchen quickly saw the cause of his distress—a mother bear and her cub emerging from the woods. Gretchen remembered her father's advice and took her iron pot out of the saddlebag. As hard as she could, she beat it with the metal spoon until the bears turned around and disappeared into the forest.

As the sun began to lower in the sky, Gretchen saw a young man coming toward them on the road.

"Good afternoon, young lady," he greeted her politely. "What brings you to this terribly dangerous road?"

Gretchen told him about the medicine she had to buy and asked if he knew where the apothecary lived. The young man, whose name was Leon, reached into his pocket and pulled out a bottle of dark blue liquid. Leon smiled at Gretchen and offered her the bottle.

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Notice how the author reveals Gretchen's thoughts and feelings. What have you learned about Gretchen from her thoughts and actions?

What does Leon want in exchange for the medicine? What motivates Gretchen to refuse his offer?

How is the conflict resolved?

"You don't have to bother walking all the way to Herr Kalt's house," Leon said. "It's quite far from here, and you won't arrive until midnight. I have some medicine here that is the same as what you would get from Herr Kalt. You can take it and be home early to give your mother this life-saving drink. All I want in return is your mule."

Gretchen was very tempted to take the bottle. She stared sadly at her beloved mule, and Hans stared sadly back. She didn't want to give Hans to a stranger, but she could save time and get the medicine to her mother more quickly if she did. But then Gretchen realized that she would have to walk all the way back and it would take her more time without Hans. And how could she forget how much her father needed the mule for plowing? Then another thought occurred to her. Suppose this wasn't the medicine her mother needed? She remembered that the doctor told her that only Herr Kalt could be trusted. If she took this medicine and it didn't work, her whole trip would be pointless.

Gretchen refused the offer and mounted her mule. She had to get to the apothecary as soon as possible! Hans trotted down the road, and before long, the travelers reached Herr Kalt's cottage.

"Well, it certainly didn't take me until midnight to get here," Gretchen thought suspiciously.

Herr Kalt presented the medicine in a tin of yellow powder. He told her to mix the yellow powder with water when she got home. Gretchen realized that what she suspected was true. Leon's blue liquid wasn't the right medicine at all, and she had been wise to refuse it.

Fortunately, the trip home was uneventful. After taking the medicine, her mother recovered and the whole family congratulated Gretchen for making her perilous journey. Gretchen was proud of herself, too. As her father said, she had shown determination, bravery, and a steady mind and heart on this quest to save her mother's life.

Answer the following questions.

- 1** How might the passage have been different if it had been narrated in the third-person omniscient point of view?
- A. It would have had more sentences beginning with the pronoun *I*.
 - B. It would have told more of Gretchen's thoughts and feelings but no one else's.
 - C. It might have included other characters' thoughts in addition to Gretchen's.
 - D. It would have taken place in the future, not the distant past.

- 2 The sentences in the chart have underlined words. Write the correct meaning for each underlined word in the right column of the chart.

Meanings:

a long search

dangerous

a person who makes medicines

able to do something well

Sentence from the Story	Meaning of Underlined Word
As the oldest child, Gretchen was the most <u>adept</u> at handling the goats on their farm . . .	
When her mother became very ill, a traveling doctor prescribed a special medicine that could be obtained from only a certain <u>apothecary</u> .	
"The journey is <u>treacherous</u> , my child," he said. "You must cross a raging river on a footbridge, which shakes in the wind."	
As her father said, she had shown determination, bravery, and a steady mind and heart on this <u>quest</u> to save her mother's life.	

3 Read the following paragraph from the passage.

Gretchen knew that if she didn't cross this terrifying bridge she had no chance of getting the medicine for her mother. Doing her best to think of nothing but her mother and family, she guided her nervous mule across the bridge—step by step. Finally, they reached the other side and sat down to rest, eat, and drink. Gretchen was tired and wanted to take a nap in the warm sunshine, but she knew she couldn't rest. She was determined to continue their journey.

What does the passage tell you about Gretchen's character traits and her motivations? Write your response on the lines below. Include **two** sentences in the paragraph that support your response.

4 This question has two parts. First, answer Part A. Then, answer Part B.

Part A

What message might the author be trying to share with readers in "A Treacherous Journey"? Circle **all** possible themes that can be supported by the passage.

- A. Living in a remote place is good for a family.
- B. The easiest way out of a problem is the best.
- C. Determination to reach a goal can help you overcome many obstacles.
- D. Think carefully about the possible results of your decisions.
- E. Never tell your secrets to anyone, or you might be sorry.

Part B

Which evidence from the passage supports the answer to Part A?

- A. She often accompanied her father on trips to the town market where they sold goat butter and cheese they had made and then purchased supplies with their earnings.
- B. All these warnings made Gretchen very nervous, but she tried to hide these feelings from her family because she knew that she was their only hope.
- C. As the sun began to lower in the sky, Gretchen saw a young man coming toward them on the road.
- D. Gretchen told him about the medicine she had to buy and asked if he knew where the apothecary lived.

- 5 Describe the main conflict in the passage. How do other story events or characters' actions complicate the conflict?

Write your response on the lines below.