Of all the pupils at the knight school, Gawaine le Coeur-Hardy was among the least promising. He was tall and sturdy, but his instructors soon discovered that he lacked spirit. He would hide in the woods when the jousting class was called, although his companions and members of the faculty sought to appeal to his better nature by shouting to him to come out and break his neck like a man. Even when they told him that the lances were padded, the horses no more than ponies, and the field unusually soft for late autumn, Gawaine refused to grow enthusiastic. The Headmaster and the Assistant Professor of Pleasaunce were discussing the case one spring afternoon, and the Assistant Professor could see no remedy but expulsion.

“No,” said the Headmaster, as he looked out at the purple hills that ringed the school, “I think I’ll train him to slay dragons.”

“He might be killed,” objected the Assistant Professor.

“So he might,” replied the Headmaster brightly, but he added more soberly, “We must consider the greater good. We are responsible for the formation of this lad’s character.”

“Are the dragons particularly bad this year?” interrupted the Assistant Professor. This was characteristic. He always seemed restive when the head of the school began to talk ethics and the ideals of the institution.

“I’ve never known them to be worse,” replied the Headmaster. “Up in the hills to the south last week they killed a number of peasants, two cows, and a prize pig. And if this dry spell holds, there’s no telling when they may start a forest fire simply by breathing around indiscriminately.”

“Would any refund on the tuition fee be necessary in case of an accident to young Coeur-Hardy?”

“No,” the principal answered, judicially, “that’s all covered in the contract. But as a matter of fact he won’t be killed. Before I send him up in the hills I’m going to give him a magic word.”

“That’s a good idea,” said the Professor. “Sometimes they work wonders. . . . ”

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“I’d like an enchanted cap,” said Gawaine.

“What’s that?” answered the Headmaster, testily.

“A cap to make me disappear,” explained Gawaine. The Headmaster laughed indulgently. “You mustn’t believe all those old wives’ stories,” he said. “There isn’t any such thing. A cap to make you disappear, indeed! What would you do with it? You haven’t even appeared yet. Why, my boy, you could walk from here to London, and nobody would so much as look at you. You’re nobody. You couldn’t be more invisible than that.”

Gawaine seemed dangerously close to a relapse into his old habit of whimpering. The Headmaster assured him. “Don’t worry; I’ll give you something much better than an enchanted cap. I’m going to give you a magic word. All you have to do is to repeat this magic charm once and no dragon can possibly harm a hair of your head. You can cut off his head at your leisure.”

He took a heavy book from the shelf behind his desk and began to run through it. “Sometimes,” he said, “the char is a whole phrase or even a sentence. I might, for instance, give you ‘To make the’—No, that might not do. I think a single word would be best for dragons.”

“A short word,” suggested Gawaine.

“It can’t be too short or it wouldn’t be potent. There isn’t so much to hurry as all that. Here’s a splendid magic word, ‘Rumplesnitz.’ Do you think you can learn that?”

Gawaine tried, and in an hour or so he seemed to have the word well in hand. Again and again he interrupted the lesson to inquire, “And if I say ‘Rumplesnitz’ the dragon can’t possibly hurt me?” And always the Headmaster replied, “If you only say ‘Rumplesnitz,’ you are perfectly safe.”

Toward morning Gawaine seemed resigned to his career. At daybreak the Headmaster saw him to the edge of the forest and pointed him to the direction in which he should proceed. About a mile away to the southwest a cloud of steam hovered over an open meadow in the woods, and the Headmaster assured Gawaine that under the steam he would find a dragon. Gawaine went forward slowly. He wondered whether it would be best to approach the dragon on the run as he did in his practice in the South Meadow or to walk slowly toward him, shouting “Rumplesnitz” all the way.

The problem was decided for him. No sooner had he come to the fringe of the meadow than the dragon spied him and began to charge. It was a large dragon, and yet it seemed decidedly aggressive in spite of the Headmaster’s statement to the contrary. As the dragon charged, it released huge clouds of hissing steam through its nostrils. It was almost as if a gigantic teapot had gone mad. The dragon came forward so fast, and Gawaine was so frightened that he had time to say “Rumplesnitz” only once. As he said it, he swung his battle-ax and off popped the head of the dragon. Gawaine had to admit that it was even easier to kill a real dragon than a wooden one if you only said “Rumplesnitz.”

1. In the second sentence of the story, Gawain is said to “lack spirit.” Using details from the rest of the story, you can INFER that this means:

1. Brave b. Arrogant c. Fearless d. Cowardly
2. Which detail below BEST provides evidence for your answer to the prior question?

a. “Toward morning Gawaine seemed resigned to his career.”

b. “Gawaine seemed dangerously close to a relapse into his old habit of whimpering.”

c. “ . . .”he swung the battle-axe and off popped the head of the dragon.”

d. “Gawaine had to admit that it was even easier to kill a real dragon. . .if you only said, “Rumplesnitz.’”

1. Which word best describes the TONE of the passage?
2. Serious b. Humorous c. Suspenseful d. Compassionate
3. Which of the following pieces of text evidence BEST shows the tone indicated in the prior question?

a. “As the dragon charged, it released huge clouds of hissing steam through its nostrils.”

b. “So he might,” replied the Headmaster brightly, but he added more soberly, “We must consider the greater

good. We are responsible for the formation of this lad’s character.”

c. “And always the Headmaster replied, “If you only say ‘Rumplesnitz,’ you are perfectly safe.”

d. “He would hide in the woods. . . and members of the faculty sought to appeal to his better nature by

shouting to him to come out and break his neck like a man”

1. Based on your knowledge of myths, epics, and legends, this story seems to be a(n):
2. myth b. epic c. legend
3. Which feature below BEST supports the answer to the prior question?
4. The main purpose is to explain the unexplainable.
5. The story is based upon knights during medieval times.
6. It is a story about an admirable hero going on a quest.