

Raisel's Riddle Reader's Theater

Story Teller 1:

Once Upon a time in a village in Poland there lived an orphan girl named Raisel. She was raised by her grandfather, a poor scholar who studied day and night. Because of his vast learning, the villagers turned to him for wisdom and guidance.

Story Teller 2:

They paid him when they could with cheese or bread or wood for the fire. In this way, Raisel and her grandfather got by. One day, Raisel sat by her grandfather's side, watching as he pored over a thick book.

Raisel: Zaydeh, why do you study all the time?

Grandfather: Why, indeed?

Story Teller 1:

He looked at her with twinkling eyes.

Grandfather: It is written that learning is more precious than rubies, more lasting than gold. Rubies may be lost and gold stolen, but that which you learn is yours forever.

Raisel: Zaydeh, I want to study too!

Story Teller 2:

Raisel's grandfather began to teach her. Every day, they read and recited from the ancient texts, often late into the night.

Story Teller 1:

Then came a harsh winter. Raisel's grandfather fell ill.

Story Teller 2:

On a bitter cold night, as she sat reading to him, he breathed his last breath.

Story Teller 1:

The villagers visited Raisel with words of comfort. They brought what little food they could spare.

Story Teller 2:

But Raisel did not want to become a burden to them. As the snow began to melt, she set out to seek work.

Story Teller 1:

Wearing a tattered shawl, she followed a dirt path through forest and field, until at last she reached the gates of the city.

Story Teller 2:

She made her way through crooked, narrow streets. She stopped at every house to ask for work. Again and again, she was turned away.

Story Teller 1:

Beyond the synagogue, Raisel entered a courtyard and knocked on a door. A woman in an apron opened it.

Cook: The poorhouse is down the street!

Story Teller 2:

The woman said gruffly.

Raisel:

I am seeking work. I can cook and clean.

Story Teller 1:

The woman turned up her nose.

Cook: This is the fine home of a most distinguished rabbi. I am his cook, the best in all of Poland, and I manage the household too.

Story Teller 2:

At that moment the rabbi came to the door.

Raisel: Please! I am strong and capable. For a place to sleep and some bread, I will work very hard.

Story Teller 1:

The rabbi turned to the cook.

Rabbi: Surely you could use some help.

Story Teller 2:

Scowling, the cook led Raisel to the kitchen.

Cook: You might be capable, rag girl, but that doesn't mean you can push your way into my home and steal my job!

Story Teller 1:

She pointed to the large washtub.

Cook: Fill it to the top and be quick!

Story Teller 2:

Raisel hurried back and forth, hauling bucket after bucket from the well to the washtub until finally it was full.

Cook: Not fast enough! (Kick over the bucket) Do it AGAIN!

Story Teller 1:

Later that night, the cook showed Raisel to a bed of straw behind the oven. Early the next morning, she shook Raisel from her sleep.

Cook: Scrub the hearth until it sparkles!

Story Teller 2:

And so the days passed. From sunup to sundown, Raisel held her tongue, hid her tears and did as she was told.

Story Teller 1:

As the holiday of Purim drew near, Raisel worked harder than ever. There were costumes to make ready and a feast to prepare.

Story Teller 2:

On Purim morning, Raisel walked across the courtyard, struggling with a heavy bundle of wood. She bumped into someone. Logs fell, and quickly she Finleyt down to pick them up.

Rabbi's Son: I'm so sorry.

Story Teller 2:

Said a kind voice.

RABBI'S SON:

Silly of me to read and walk at the same time.

Story Teller 1:

Raisel looked up.

Story Teller 2:

It was the Rabbi's son. He helped her gather the wood and carry it to the kitchen. Then walked on, his nose back in his book.

Story Teller 1:

The cook's eyes blazed.

Cook: I saw you talking sweetly to the rabbi's son, trying to win favor in the household! From now on, keep to yourself or things will go badly for you.

Story Teller 2:

That afternoon guests dressed in their Purim costumes sat down to a fine feast of beet soup, roast duck, potato pancakes, and noodle pudding.

Story Teller 1:

Raisel cleared the table, listening to the young women entertain the rabbi's son with riddles.

Girl 1: What has a face but no mouth?

Rabbi's Son: A clock.

Story Teller 2:

Said the Rabbi's son.

Girl 2: I have a good riddle.

Story Teller 1:

Said another.

Story Teller 2:

Raisel lingered, wanting to hear more.

Story Teller 1:

The rabbi's son saw her.

Rabbi's Son: Do you have a riddle, too?

Story Teller 2:

He smiled.

Story Teller 1:

The cook pushed Raisel into the kitchen.

Cook: If you cannot stay out of sight, I will lock you in the pantry!

Story Teller 2:

After dinner, the rabbi and his guests climbed into horse-drawn wagons and rode off to see the Purim play.

Raisel: I wish I could go too.

Cook: In your costume of rags?

Story Teller 1:

The cook sneered.

Cook: Take your dinner from what is left over. Then get to work!

Story Teller 2:

She pointed at the piles of plates and pots and pans waiting to be washed.

Story Teller 1:

Raisel carried her meager meal outside and sat by the well.

Story Teller 2:

An old beggar woman hobbled toward her.

Raisel: I can see that you are hungry.

Story Teller 1:

She offered the woman her own plate of food.

Story Teller 2:

The old woman ate. Then she reached for Raisel's hands.

Mia: Because of your kind heart, I grant you three wishes. But know this--magic does not last past midnight.

Story Teller 1:

Magic?

Story Teller 2:

Was it Possible?

Story Teller 1:
Could she go to the Purim play?

Story Teller 2:
Raisel shut her eyes.

Raisel: I wish.....I wish for a Purim costume.

Story Teller 1:
Suddenly she felt different. Opening her eyes she gasped.

Raisel: I am dressed as Queen Esther!

Story Teller 2:
She twirled around and around.

Story Teller 1:
Again she shut her eyes.

Raisel: I wish for a horse-drawn wagon.

Story Teller 2:
A wagon stood waiting!

Story Teller 1:
Trembling with excitement, she climbed in.

Story Teller 2:
Raisel entered the hall. Everyone's eyes turned toward her.

Girl 1: What a beautiful costume.

Story Teller 1:
Whispered on person.

Girl 2: I wonder who she is.

Story Teller 2:
Whispered another.

Story Teller 1:
After the Purim play, a klezmer band made music. The rabbi's son came up to Raisel and introduced himself.

Rabbi's Son: Forgive my boldness, but in that costume you are the loveliest Queen Esther here. It is a pity there are no prizes tonight.

Story Teller 2: Raisel blushed.

Raisel: It is only a costume. As it is written, Look not at the flask but at what it contains.

Story Teller 1:
The rabbi's son gazed in surprise.

Rabbi's Son: How is it that you know words from the Talmud?

Story Teller 2:
Raisel's eyes grew moist.

Raisel: My zaydeh, blessed be his memory, was a devout scholar.

Rabbi's Son: Have I heard of him?

Raisel: It is not likely. He lived in a small village far from here.

Rabbi's Son: And where do you live?

Story Teller 1:
Raisel was silent. He did not realize that she was the rag girl in his kitchen. Quickly, she changed the subject.

Raisel: May I tell you a riddle?

Story Teller 2:
Before he could reply, she made one up.

Raisel: What's more precious than rubies, more lasting than gold? What can never be traded, stolen or sold? What comes with great effort and takes time, but then----Once you, will serve you again and again?

Story Teller 1:
All at once, a clock began to chime midnight. Bong! Bong!

Raisel: I must go!

Story Teller 1:
Raisel raced across the hall.

Rabbi's Son: Wait!

Story Teller 2:
Called the rabbi's son.

Story Teller 1:
Bong! Bong!

Story Teller 2:
She ran through the doors.

Story Teller 1:
Bong!

Story Teller 2:
She climbed into the wagon.

Story Teller 1:
Bong!

Story Teller 2:
She grabbed the reins. The horse took off.

Story Teller 1:
Bong! Bong!

Story Teller 2:
The wagon clattered down the cobblestone streets.

Story Teller 1:
Bong! Bong!

Story Teller 2:
At last, it stopped at the rabbi's house. Raisel hurried to the kitchen.

Story Teller 1:
Bong!

Raisel: Oh no! The dishes!

Story Teller 2:
She closed her eyes.

Raisel: I wish the kitchen spotless!

Story Teller 1:
Bong!

Story Teller 2:
The kitchen was clean. And Raisel was back in her old rags.

Story Teller 1:
Sadly, she curled up on her bed of straw.

Story Teller 2:
She hardly slept, thinking of her conversation with the rabbi's son.

Story Teller 1:
The next morning, as Raisel was working in the kitchen, she heard voices outside.

Raisel: Are you having company?

Story Teller 2:
She asked the cook.

Cook: We, indeed! I warned you to keep to yourself!

Story Teller 1:
The cook pushed Raisel into the pantry and barred the door.

Story Teller 2:
It was dark but for one ray of light.

Story Teller 1:
Raisel climbed on a stool and followed the light to a hole in the door.

Story Teller 2:
Peering through it, she could see all the way to the dining room, where guests had gathered.

Rabbi: Welcome, friends and thank you for coming.

Story Teller 1:
The rabbi said.

Rabbi: Last night a girl told my son a riddle that showed rare intelligence. This is the girl my son wants to marry. She must be found!

Girl 1: I told him a wonderful riddle.

Girl 2: Come hear my rhyme. Now what is that Over my head but under my hat?

Story Teller 2:
The rabbi's son shook his head.

Rabbi's Son: The answer is hair. But that's not the right riddle.

Story Teller 1:
More young women came forward.

Story Teller 2:
The rabbi's son listened to one riddle after another. Finally, he sighed.

Rabbi Son: These riddles are common. The one I seek spoke of something precious and lasting.

Story Teller 1:
Raisel's heart fluttered. Could it be hers?

Story Teller 2:
She banged on the door with all her might.

Story Teller 1:
The rabbi's son hurried into the kitchen.

Rabbi's Son: What was that noise?

Cook: Just the rag girl. She's cleaning the pantry.

Raisel: My name is Raisel. I, too, told you a riddle.

Cook: She was here all night, washing dishes.

Rabbi's Son: I would hear her riddle.

Story Teller 2:
Said the rabbi's son. He unbarred the door.

Story Teller 1:
Raisel stepped forward.

Raisel: What's more precious than rubies, more lasting than gold? What can never be traded, stolen, or sold?

Rabbi's Son: That's it!

Story Teller 2:
Cried the rabbi's son. He completed the riddle.

Rabbi's Son: What comes with great effort and takes time, but then---Once yours will serve you again and again?

Story Teller 1:
He took her hand.

Rabbi's Son: Will you marry me?

Raisel: Only if you can answer my riddle.

Story Teller 2:
Replied Raisel.

Story Teller 1:
He smiled.

Rabbi's Son: The answer islearning.

Raisel: Yes!!!

Story Teller 2:
And so Raisel and the rabbi's son were married. They lived and learned happily ever after.