

Name: _____ Class: _____

Feathers

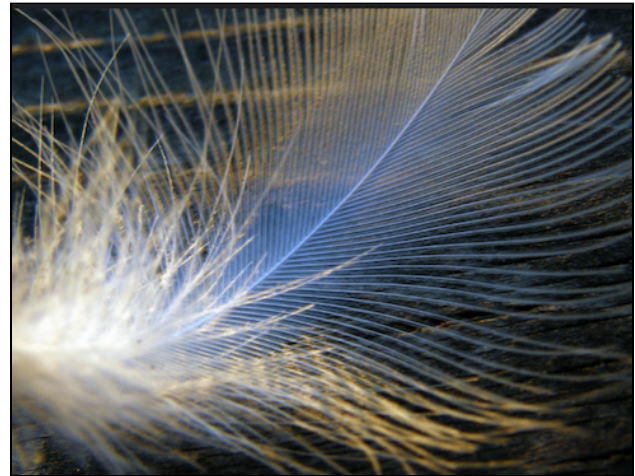
By Anonymous

In this short story by an anonymous writer, a woman spreads a rumor, unaware of the consequences of her actions. As you read, take notes on how the woman's understanding of rumors changes throughout the story.

- [1] A sharp-tongued woman was accused of starting a rumor. When she was brought before the village rabbi,¹ she said, "I was only joking. My words were spread by others, and so I am not to blame."

But the victim demanded justice, saying, "Your words soiled² my good name!"

"I'll take back what I said," replied the sharp-tongued woman, "and that will take away my guilt." When the rabbi heard this, he knew that this woman truly did not understand her crime.



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And so he said to the women, "Your words will not be excused until you have done the following. Bring my feather pillow to the market square. Cut it and let the feathers fly through the air. Then collect every one of the feathers from the pillow and bring them all back to me. When you have done this, you will be absolved³ of your crime."

- [5] The woman agreed, but thought to herself, The old rabbi has finally gone mad!

She did as he asked, and cut the pillow. Feathers blew far and wide over the square and beyond. The wind carried them here and there, up into trees and under merchants' carts. She tried to catch them, but after much effort it was clear to her that she would never find them all.

She returned to the rabbi with only a few feathers in her hand. Facing the rabbi, she said, "I could not take back the feathers any more than I could take back my words. From now on I will be careful not to say anything that would harm another, for there is no way to control the flight of words, any more than I could control the flight of these feathers." From that day, the woman spoke kindly of all she had met.

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1. a Jewish scholar or teacher
 2. **Soil (verb):** to make dirty
 3. **Absolve (verb):** to free from guilt or blame

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the meaning of “soiled” as it is used in paragraph 2? [RL.4]
 - A. involved
 - B. damaged
 - C. emphasized
 - D. identified

2. PART B: Which TWO phrases help the reader understand the meaning of “soiled”? [RL.1]
 - A. “starting a rumor.” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “I was only joking.” (Paragraph 1)
 - C. “my good name!” (Paragraph 2)
 - D. “I’ll take back” (Paragraph 3)
 - E. “take away my guilt.” (Paragraph 3)
 - F. “understand her crime.” (Paragraph 3)

3. PART A: Based on the story, which statement explains how starting a rumor and cutting a feather pillow are alike? [RL.3]
 - A. Both events helped the woman make up for things that she failed to do.
 - B. Both events caused the rabbi to forgive the woman for her crime.
 - C. Both events scattered things that could no longer be retrieved.
 - D. Both events allowed the woman to make changes in her life.

4. PART B: Which quotation provides evidence for the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
 - A. “My words were spread by others, and so I am not to blame.” (Paragraph 1)
 - B. “and that will take away my guilt.” (Paragraph 3)
 - C. “The wind carried them here and there” (Paragraph 6)
 - D. “She returned to the rabbi with only a few feathers in her hand.” (Paragraph 7)

5. PART A: Which statement contrasts the attitude of the woman with the attitude of the rabbi at the beginning of the story? [RL.3]
 - A. The woman accepted no blame, while the rabbi realized the significance of her crime.
 - B. The woman trusted the rabbi, but he thought she was playing a trick.
 - C. The woman wanted to correct her behavior, while the rabbi was pleased with his own behavior.
 - D. The woman thought the rabbi was wise, but the rabbi thought the woman was careless.

6. PART B: Select TWO sentences from the story that show how the woman changes to agree with the rabbi. [RL.1]
- A. "My words were spread by others" (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "The woman agreed, but thought to herself, The old rabbi has finally gone mad!" (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "there is no way to control the flight of words, any more than I could control the flight of these feathers" (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "From that day, the woman spoke kindly of all she had met." (Paragraph 7)
7. PART A: What is the purpose of the dialogue between the woman and the victim in the beginning of the story? [RL.5]
- A. to introduce the causes for the woman's negative actions
 - B. to introduce the conflict that will be resolved later in the story
 - C. to connect the woman's thoughts and actions to important events
 - D. to develop background information for events later in the story
8. PART B: Which sentence from the story makes a connection to the answer to Part A? [RL.1]
- A. "When she was brought before the village rabbi, she said, 'I was only joking.'" (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "The wind carried them here and there, up into trees and under merchants' carts." (Paragraph 6)
 - C. "She tried to catch them, but after much effort it was clear to her that she would never find them all." (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "From that day, the woman spoke kindly of all she had met." (Paragraph 7)
9. PART A: Which statement expresses a theme of the story? [RL.2]
- A. Stand up for those less fortunate.
 - B. Peer pressure can be a powerful inspiration.
 - C. Speak with courage.
 - D. Think before you speak.
10. PART B: Which quotation demonstrates the theme identified in Part A? [RL.1]
- A. "A sharp-tongued woman was accused of starting a rumor." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "The woman agreed, but thought to herself, The old rabbi has finally gone mad!" (Paragraph 5)
 - C. "She returned to the rabbi with only a few feathers in her hand." (Paragraph 7)
 - D. "Facing the rabbi, she said, 'I could not take back the feathers any more than I could take back my words.'" (Paragraph 7)

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Have you ever had a rumor spread about you? How did it make you feel?
2. In the context of the text, why do people do bad things? Why does the woman think it's ok to spread rumors? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. In the context of the text, how do we find redemption? How does the woman come to realize the consequences of her actions? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.