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Mahabharata

Mahabharata (pronounced "*ma-haa-BHAAR-a-ta*") is the world's longest poem. Altogether, it has 18 sections and 220,000 lines! This great piece of work is from India. It tells the story of a royal family's struggle over power. The story goes like this:

A long, long time ago, there was a kingdom in India called Bharata ("*BHAR-a-ta*"). The king of Bharata had two sons, Dhritarashtra ("*dhri-ta-RAASH-tra*") and Pandu ("*PAAN-doo*"). Dhritarashtra was the eldest of the two. He was supposed to be the next king. But because he was blind, he could not take the throne. His brother became the next king.

Dhritarashtra was married to Gandhari ("*gaan-DHAAR-ee*"). The couple had one hundred sons in all! Collectively, their offspring were called the Kauravas.

Pandu had two wives, Kunti and Madri. Kunti bore him three sons, and Madri two. Together, the five sons were called the Pandavas.

One day while hunting, Pandu killed a sage's wife by accident. The sage was very angry. He placed a curse on Pandu and killed him. Pandu's death shattered his second wife, Madri. She killed herself and left her two sons to the care of Kunti. Kunti took the five boys back to Bharata. Now with everybody together, the new king (Dhritarashtra) asked his uncle, Bhishma ("*BHEESH-ma*"), to supervise the upbringing of the princes. Bhishma then hired Drona ("*DROE-na*") as the boys' tutor. Drona was a good teacher. He taught the kids the art of archery. He taught them how to fight.

Under Drona's guidance, it soon became clear that the Pandavas were smarter and stronger than the Kauravas. The Kauravas were jealous. They wanted to get rid of their five cousins and aunt. One day, they came up with an evil plan. They wanted to lure the Pandavas and Kunti to a palace and set the place on fire! Luckily, the Pandavas got wind of the evil plan before they departed. They dug a secret tunnel and escaped the fire just in time. Afraid that the Kauravas would try to kill them again, the Pandavas and Kunti fled. They put on disguises and traveled from one kingdom to another. Everybody thought Kunti and the five boys died in the fire.

During their time abroad, the Pandavas heard about a contest held in the kingdom of Panchal. The rule was simple: whoever could shoot an arrow into a moving target could marry the beautiful princess, Draupadi ("*DRAO-pa-dee*"). Many people tried. But none succeeded. At last, it was Arjuna's turn. He calmly walked up to the platform, took aim, and released the arrow. He hit the bull's eye! Everybody there congratulated the winner and discovered that he was actually one of the Pandavas. Now with their secrets out, Kunti, the five princes, and Draupadi all returned to Bharata.

Dhritarashtra was very happy to see them. Though he welcomed them with open arms, he knew that his sons

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did not get along with the Pandavas. At the urging of Bhishma, the king decided to split his kingdom into two parts. He gave one half to the Kauravas and the other half to the Pandavas. The eldest of both clans became the rulers of the new nations.

Despite his father's best effort, Duryodhana ("*dur-YODH-ana*"), the eldest of the Kauravas, was not happy. He did not want the kingdom to be split in two. He wanted it all to himself! So he devised a devious plan. He set up a game of dice and asked his cunning uncle, Sakuni, to play on his behalf. He then openly challenged Yudhishtira ("*yu-DHISH-thir-a*"), the eldest of the Pandavas, to join the game. Of course, Yudhishtira did not know the game was a set-up. He lost every hand! He first lost his necklace, then all the jewelries, brothers, the nation, and finally, Draupadi! Pleased with his victories, Duryodhana asked his younger brother to go and get Draupadi. He wanted to embarrass her. He wanted to make her a servant!

Just as the Kauravas were dragging Draupadi to the court, she cried out for help. Krishna, the divine god, was a good friend of the Pandavas. He intervened. Dhritarashtra was horrified! He begged the god for forgiveness. He promised that he would look into the matter. He also promised that he would have Duryodhana return to the Pandavas everything they had lost.

Duryodhana obeyed his father reluctantly. He freed his cousins and Draupadi, and gave them back the necklace, all the jewelries, and the nation. After the Pandavas left, Duryodhana had a second thought. With much persuasion, he talked his father into inviting Yudhishtira for another game of dice. Yudhishtira accepted the invitation. He came back and played with Sakuni again. And he lost again! This time, the wager was different. Instead of asking for the land, Duryodhana demanded the Pandavas go into exile for thirteen years. He demanded that they remain undiscovered during their last year of exile. If they were discovered, the Pandavas must go into exile again for another round of thirteen years. Depending on their hiding skills, this punishment could go on forever!

Yudhishtira accepted the terms. He, his four brothers, and Draupadi moved to live in a forest. During their first twelve years in the forest, they visited many holy places. They befriended several gods. In the thirteenth year, the Pandavas and Draupadi left the forest and went into hiding. They went to the kingdom of Viratas and worked as servants in the king's palace. Duryodhana looked for them everywhere. But he could not find them. Just as he was about to give up, he got a big break.

Duryodhana heard about a tragedy in the kingdom of Viratas: the king's brother-in-law was recently murdered! Right away, he suspected that this must be the work of his cousins. He was right! As it turned out, the king's brother-in-law was very interested in Draupadi though he knew that she was already married. He kept harassing her. He kept pressing her to marry him. When Draupadi could not take his advances any more, she told Bheem, one of the Pandavas. Bheem was very angry. He killed the king's brother-in-law that very night! The event gave away their whereabouts.

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Duryodhana led his troops and attacked the kingdom of Viratas. The Pandavas took part in the battle. But when they were found out, the time limit of thirteen years had already expired. Now with the wager no longer valid, Yudhishtira wanted his nation back. He and the rest of his family members all wanted to live in peace. But things did not go as planned. Duryodhana rejected the claim flat-out and, thus, forced the Pandavas to declare war. The two sides fought at Kurukshetra. In the end, justice prevailed. The Pandvas won and killed all the Kauravas. Yudhishtira finally became the king. He united the two nations into one. He ruled it for 36 years. When he died, he went to heaven.

Mahabharata

Questions

- _____ 1. Where did the story of Mahabharata take place?
- A. Greece
 - B. India
 - C. Japan
 - D. China
- _____ 2. Who saved Draupadi from Duryodhana's humiliation?
- A. Bhishma
 - B. Krishna
 - C. Arjuna
 - D. Bheem
- _____ 3. How many years did Yudhishtir go into exile?
- A. 13
 - B. 12
 - C. 14
 - D. 15
- _____ 4. How many princes did the kingdom of Bharata have altogether?
- A. 100
 - B. 110
 - C. 115
 - D. 105
- _____ 5. What did Dhritarashtra do when he realized that Kunti and the five boys were not dead?
- A. He sent them into exile.
 - B. He welcomed them back.
 - C. He killed them.
 - D. He hid them.
- _____ 6. Who won the archery contest in the kingdom of Panchal?
- A. Arjuna
 - B. Drona
 - C. Bhishma
 - D. Bheem

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- _____ 7. Which of the following about Mahabharata is correct?
- A. It is the longest poem in the world!
 - B. It has 16 sections.
 - C. It is the love story of Romeo and Juliet.
 - D. It has 20,000 lines.
- _____ 8. What did Duryodhana do when Yudhishtira came to claim his nation?
- A. He accepted the claim.
 - B. He rejected the claim.

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If you were Yudhishtira, would you accept Dhritarashtra's invitation for another game of dice? Suppose your answer was no. Rewrite the story's ending.
