



Saint Vincent School
Sister of Charity of Ste J.A.
Besançon – Baskinta

Class : grade 8
Teacher : Mrs Christiane Abou Nader
Duration :
Date :

Permitted Documents :

Reading comprehension exercise

The empty pot.

My royal proclamation, the Emperor of China announced a contest to decide the next heir* to the throne. The Emperor was old and had no son, and because he had been a plant-lover for years, he declared that any boy who wanted to be king should come to the palace to receive one royal seed*. Whichever boy could show the best results within six months would win the contest and become the next to wear the crown.

You can imagine the excitement! Every boy in China fancied himself likely to win. Parents of boys who were talented at growing plants imagined living in splendor at the palace. On the day the seeds were to be handed out, thick crowds of hopeful boys thronged the palace. Each boy returned home with one precious possibility in his palm*. And so it was with the boy Jun. He was already considered the best gardener in the village. His neighbors fought over the melons and peas that flourished from his garden. Anyone looking for Jun would probably find him taking care of his garden. Jun carefully carried the Emperor's seed home, sealing it securely in his hands so it wouldn't fall, but not so tightly that it might crush.

At home, he spread the bottom of a flowerpot with large stones, covered the stones with pebbles, then filled the pot with rich black moist soil*. He pressed the seed about an inch below the surface and covered it with light soil. Over the next few days Jun, along with every boy he knew and hundreds he did not know, watered his pot every day and watched for the first leaf as it burst through the surface.

Cheun was the first boy in Jun's village to announce that his seed was developing through the soil, and his announcement was met with whoops of excitement and congratulations. He bragged that he would surely be the next emperor and practiced his royal skills by bossing around the younger, adoring children. Manchu was the next boy whose tiny plant had emerged from his pot, then it was Wong. Jun was puzzled – none of these boys could grow plants as well as he! But Jun's seed did not grow.

Soon sprouts* emerged from pots all over the village. Boys moved their plants outside so the baby leaves could bask in the warmth of the sun. Soon, dozens of sprouts in pots throughout Jun's village were stretching out their first leaves. But Jun's seed did not grow.

He was confused – what was wrong? Jun carefully repotted his seed into a new pot with the very best and richest black soil from his garden. He crumbled every ball of soil into tiny particles. He gently pressed in the seed, and kept the top moist and watched the pot every day. Still Jun's seed did not grow. Jun was thrown into despair. The other boys laughed at him and started to

mockingly say “as empty as Jun’s pot”. Jun repotted his plant yet again, this time sprinkling dried fish throughout the soil as fertilizer. Even so, his seed did not grow.

Six month’s passed. The day approached when the boys were supposed to bring their plants to the palace for judging. Cheun, Manchu, Wong and hundreds of other boys cleaned their pots till they shone and prepared themselves by dressing in their finest clothes. Some mothers or fathers walked alongside their son to hold the plant upright as he carried the pot to the palace, to keep the plant from tipping over.

“What will I do?” wailed Jun to his parents as he gazed out the window at the other boys joyfully preparing their triumphant return to the palace. “My seed wouldn’t grow! My pot is empty!”

“You did the best you could,” said his father, shaking his head. Added his mother, “Jun, just bring the emperor your pot,” said his mother, “it was the best you could do.”

Shame-faced, Jun carried his empty pot on the road to the palace, while other boys were very happy carrying their plants.

At the palace, all the boys lined up in rows with their blossoming plants and awaited judgment. The Emperor, wrapped in his richly embroidered silk robe, strode down the line of hopeful entrants, viewing each plant with a frown*. When he came to Jun, he frowned even more and said, “What is this? You brought me an empty pot?”

It was all Jun could do to keep from crying. “If you please, Your Majesty,” said Jun, “I tried my best. I planted your seed with the best soil I could find, I kept it moist and watched it every day. When the seed didn’t grow I repotted it in new soil, and I even repotted it again. But it just didn’t grow. I’m sorry.” Jun hung his head.

“Hmm,” said the Emperor. Turning so everyone could hear he thundered, “I don’t know where all these other boys got their seeds. There is no way anything could grow from the seeds we passed out for the contest, because those seeds had all been cooked!”

And he smiled at Jun.

heir : a successor in a role

seed: a fertilized grain

palm: the inner part of the hand

soil: a mixture of sand and organic material

sprout: a new growth on a plant

frown: a facial expression showing displeasure

A- comprehension

1- Answer the questions below.

- a- What does the author tell us about Jun?
- b- A proclamation is an important announcement. What three things does the Emperor say in his proclamation?
- c- The Emperor states, "Whoever can show me their best in a year's time will succeed me to the throne." What does the Emperor mean?
- d- How do the children feel about the Emperor's proclamation?
- e- How does Jun feel when he receives his seed from the Emperor? Why?
- f- What does Jun do with the seed?
- g- What does Jun do when the seed does not grow?
- h- How is Jun feeling while the other children are rushing to the palace?
- i- What have the other children brought to the Emperor?
- j- What has Jun brought to the Emperor?
- k- What does the Emperor say about the seeds he gave to all of the children at the beginning of the competition?
- l- Who do you think the Emperor choose to be his successor and why?