Teacher's notes and answer key

Vetala – the Ghost Who Set a King Riddles

Subjects: English · Ethics · Religious Education | recommended from age 12 (B1) | Video: 8:36 min

Answers B

1. A spirit that haunts cremation grounds and slips into dead bodies; uncanny, but clever, mocking and full of knowledge. Not a vampire in the European sense (it does not drink blood).

2. A single fruit every day, tossed carelessly into the treasury. A pet monkey bites into one and a precious gemstone drops out; every fruit contains a jewel.

3. It will tell stories on the way. If the king speaks a single word, it flies back to its tree. If the king knows the answer to a question and keeps silent, his head will shatter.

4. “The one with the husband's head, because the head is what matters most in a person – it's where the mind lives.” The corpse laughs and flies back to the tree; the king has to fetch it again.

5. The ascetic wants to sacrifice the king to gain supernatural power. The king pretends not to know how to bow and asks the ascetic to show him; when the ascetic bends down, the king strikes.

Answer C

Correct numbers from top to bottom: 4 – 7 – 1 – 6 – 2 – 8 – 3 – 5

Notes on C, D and E

C follows the video. Note: the video tells several of the riddles; the whole collection has 25 tales (24 riddles plus the frame).

D1: Whoever knows the truth has a duty to speak it – a good king must not stay silent, even when it costs him. Personal opinions are open. D2: His honest silence makes the vetala warn him. Wisdom = the courage to speak the truth and the humility to see the limits of one's knowledge.

E: Heads – the one with the husband's head | Girl – the one who stayed by her ashes (the reviver acted like a father, the bone-carrier like a son) | Queens – left open in the video; tradition usually names the third (hurt by a mere sound). The king's answers are not the only possible ones – that's the point: weighing things up instead of following rules.

Content note and age recommendation

Recommended from age 12. The frame story takes place at night on a cremation ground with a corpse; self-sacrifice in the temple and the killing of the ascetic are only told, not shown. The last riddle (a father marries the daughter, a son the mother) works as a puzzle but should be briefly put into context.

Background: “Vetalapanchavimshati” (Twenty-Five Tales of the Vetala), e.g. in Somadeva's “Ocean of the Streams of Story” (Kashmir, 11th century); popularly known as “Vikram and Betaal”. Inspired Thomas Mann's novella “The Transposed Heads”.

The narrator's voice and the illustrations in the video are AI-generated; the script follows the established tradition. You are welcome to copy and share this worksheet for classroom use.

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