

Why the Woodpecker's Head is Red

From *The Book of Nature Myths* by Florence Holbrooke

One day the woodpecker said to the Great Spirit, "Men do not like me. I wish they did."

The Great Spirit said, "If you wish men to love you, you must be good to them and help them. Then they will call you their friend."

"How can a little bird help a man?" asked the woodpecker.

"If one wishes to help, the day will come when he can help," said the Great Spirit. The day did come, and this story shows how a little bird helped a strong warrior.

There was once a cruel magician who lived in a gloomy wigwam beside the Black-Sea-Water. He did not like flowers, and they did not blossom in his pathway. He did not like birds, and they did not sing in the trees above him. The breath of his nostrils was fatal to all life. North, south, east, and west he blew the deadly fever that killed the women and the little children.

"Can I help them?" thought a brave warrior, and he said, "I will find the magician, and see if death will not come to him as he has made it come to others. I will go straightway to his home."

For many days the brave warrior was in his canoe traveling across the Black-Sea-Water. At last he saw the gloomy wigwam of the cruel magician.

He shot an arrow at the door and called, "Come out, O coward! You have killed women and children with your fatal breath, but you cannot kill a warrior. Come out and fight, if you are not afraid."

The cruel magician laughed loud and long. "One breath of fever," he said, "and you will fall to the earth." The warrior shot again, and then the magician was angry. He did not laugh, but he came straight out of his gloomy lodge, and as he came, he blew the fever all about him.

Then was seen the greatest fight that the sun had ever looked upon. The brave warrior shot his flint-tipped arrows, but the magician had on his magic cloak, and the arrows could not wound him. He blew from his nostrils the deadly breath of fever, but the heart of the warrior was so strong that the fever could not kill him.

At last the brave warrior had but three arrows in his quiver. "What shall I do?" he said sadly. "My arrows are good and my aim is good, but no arrow can go through the magic cloak."

"Come on, come on," called the magician. "You are the man who wished to fight. Come on." Then a woodpecker in a tree above the brave warrior said softly, "Aim your arrow at his head, O warrior! Do not shoot at his heart, but at the crest of feathers on his head. He can be wounded there, but not in his heart."

The warrior was not so proud that he could not listen to a little bird. The magician bent to lift a stone, and an arrow flew from the warrior's bow. It buzzed and stung like a wasp. It came so close to the crest of feathers that the magician trembled with terror. Before he could run, another arrow came, and this one struck him right on his crest. His heart grew cold with fear. "Death has struck me," he cried.

"Your cruel life is over," said the warrior. "People shall no longer fear your fatal breath." Then he said to the woodpecker, "Little bird, you have been a good friend to me, and I will do all that I can for you." He put some of the red blood of the magician upon the little creature's head. It made the crest of feathers there as red as flame.

"Whenever a man looks upon you," said the warrior, "he will say, 'That bird is our friend. He helped to kill the cruel magician.'"

The little woodpecker was very proud of his red crest because it showed that he was the friend of man, and all his children to this day are as proud as he was.

Name _____

“Why the Woodpecker’s Head is Red”

1. **Author’s Purpose:** entertain inform persuade

WHY DID THE AUTHOR WRITE THIS?

2. **Genre:** _____ **Subgenre:** _____

NONFICTION/FICTION/FOLKLORE

AUTOBIOGRAPHY, SCIENCE FICTION, FABLE, INFORMATIONAL, ETC.

3. **Narrator’s Point of View:** _____

1ST PERSON, 2ND PERSON, 3RD PERSON LIMITED, 3RD PERSON OBJECTIVE, 3RD PERSON OMNISCIENT

4. **Summarize the text. List five key events from beginning to end.**

5. **Exposition**

A. *Setting:* _____

B. *Conflict:* _____

6. **Rising Action: List some events that occur before the climax.**

A. _____

B. _____

Climax: _____

Falling Action: List some events that occur after the climax.

C. _____

D. _____

Resolution: _____

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ANSWERS

1. inform

2. folklore, fable

3. 3rd person omniscient

4. The woodpecker wishes that men liked him. The Great Spirit tells the woodpecker to be a friend to men. The brave warrior tries to kill the cruel magician. The woodpecker tells the warrior to aim his arrow at the magician's head. The warrior kills the magician and puts some of the magician's blood on the woodpecker's head.

5A. Wilderness, beside the black sea water

5B. The brave warrior is trying to kill the magician who is breathing illness out into the world.

6. Answers may vary.

Conflict: The brave warrior defeats the magician.

Resolution: The Woodpecker is a friend of man and now has a red head.