

Name:

Period:

Directions: Read the following short story and answer the questions that follow.

The Blue Stones

By: Isak Dinesen

There was once a skipper who named his ship after his wife. He had the figurehead of it beautifully carved, just like her, and the hair of it gilt. But his wife was jealous of the ship. "You think more of the figurehead than of me," she said to him. "No," he answered, "I think so highly of her because she is like you, yes, because she is you yourself. Is she not gallant, full-bosomed; does she not dance in the waves, like you at our wedding? In a way she is really even kinder to me than you are. She gallops along where I tell her to go, and she lets her long hair hang down freely, while you put up yours under a cap. But she turns her back to me, so that when I want a kiss I come home to Elsinore."

Now once, when this skipper was trading at Trankebar, he chanced to help an old native king to flee traitors in his own country. As they parted, the king gave him two big blue, precious stones, and these he had set into the face of his figurehead, like a pair of eyes to it. When he came home he told his wife of his adventure and said: "Now she has your blue eyes too." "You had better give me the stones for a pair of earrings," said she. "No," he said again, "I cannot do that, and you would not ask me to if you understood." Still the wife could not stop fretting about the blue stones, and one day, when her husband was with the skippers' corporation, she had a glazier of the town take them out, and put two bits of blue glass into the figurehead instead, and the skipper did not find out, but sailed off to Portugal. But after some time the skipper's wife found that her eyesight was growing bad, and that she could not see to thread a needle. She went to a wise-woman, who gave her ointments and waters, but they did not help her and in the end the old woman shook her head, and told her that this was a rare and incurable disease, and that she was going blind. "Oh, God," the wife then cried, "that the ship was back in the harbor of Elsinore. Then I should have the glass taken out, and the jewels put back. For did he not say that they were my eyes?" But the ship did not come back. Instead, the skipper's wife had a letter from the Consul of Portugal, who informed her that she had been wrecked and go to the bottom with all hands. And it was a very strange thing, the Consul wrote, that in broad daylight she had run straight into a tall rock, rising out of the sea.

1. To the skipper the ship's figurehead represents:
 - a. Freedom
 - b. His wife
 - c. His success as a captain
 - d. Ideal feminine beauty
2. On a deeper level, what does the ship's figurehead symbolize in the story?
 - a. The skipper's love for his wife
 - b. The uncertainty of human relationships
 - c. The wife's coldness toward her husband
 - d. Innocence

Name:

Period:

3. The **conflict** between the skipper and his wife is caused by the wife's:
 - a. Sadness and fear
 - b. Compassion and understanding
 - c. Worry and loneliness
 - d. Jealousy and greed
4. In the story the big blue stones are a **symbol** of:
 - a. Beauty
 - b. Wealth and power
 - c. The wife's eyes
 - d. The sea
5. A clue that the stones are a **symbol** is their:
 - a. Appearance throughout the story
 - b. Unusual color and shape
 - c. Strange history
 - d. Great value
6. The story suggests that the wife goes blind and the ship sinks because:
 - a. The wife steals the figurehead's eyes
 - b. The skipper stops loving his wife
 - c. The skipper is cursed by the foreign king
 - d. The wife is an unlucky woman
7. Part of the appeal of reading "The Blue Stones" is that we realize that beneath the literal story lies:
 - a. A comic intent
 - b. An unhappy ending
 - c. A moral lesson
 - d. An allusion to the Bible
8. "The Blue Stones" can be interpreted as an **allegory** warning us about the dangers of :
 - a. Jealousy and greed
 - b. Loneliness
 - c. Unhappy marriage
 - d. Life at sea
9. What does the skipper mean when he says: "No, I can do that, and you would not ask me if you understood?" Use **details** (quotes) from the story to explain your answer.
