

# The Story of the Widow's Son

## Journals

- *Have you ever been saved by someone else? Can people really save each other or does everyone have to save themselves? Explain.*
- *What is more painful: the death of love or the death of a loved one?*
- *Have you ever known anyone who was considered a Mama's boy or a Daddy's girl? Was it a fair description of them? Should we label people this way?*
- *Should a child always do what their mothers or fathers want? Do parents always know best? Explain.*

## Comprehension Questions

1. What does the author, Mary Lavin, do in the first paragraph to emphasize that what you are reading did not really happen?
  2. What are some of the sacrifices the widow makes for her son, Packy?
  3. What kind of a boy is Packy?
  4. What purpose in the story do you think the neighbor's comments serve as he and the widow wait for Packy's return?
  5. What accident happens to Packy?
  6. The widow asks many questions to try to piece together an understanding of what has happened. One question, which she continues to repeat for years, hints that she was never able to see things clearly. What is that question?
  7. What do the neighbors think of Packy?
  8. Find a sentence that shows Packy is accustomed to angry outbursts from his mother.
  9. Give a reason for the widow's extreme wrath.
  10. What happens during her tirade that takes the widow's rebukes down a path even she had not quite expected?
  11. How do you know that Packy has noble motives when he leaves home?
  12. In the final paragraph, the author reveals her attitude toward making personal choices in life. What does she believe?
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1. How did the widow pay for Packy's clothes and most of his school book?

2. According to the narrator, what two great branches of creative art are the result of invention rather than recalling facts?
3. In the second version of the story, what excuse does Packy offer his mother for running over the hen?
4. What news is Packy rushing home to tell his mother?
5. The setting of the accident is the same in both versions. Describe the setting, explaining in what way it is a cause of what happens.
6. In which version of the story is the widow more responsible for the outcome? Explain.

**The Story of the Widow's Son**  
Book Questions

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Date \_\_\_\_\_ Period \_\_\_\_\_

- |    |           |    |           |    |         |
|----|-----------|----|-----------|----|---------|
| a. | squawked  | e. | gridiron  | i. | gawking |
| b. | poultices | f. | earnestly | j. | wayside |
| c. | gruff     | g. | credulity |    |         |
| d. | steepest  | h. | cowered   |    |         |

1. The Widow's \_\_\_\_\_ words were only a cover for her pride in her son.
2. She grazed her cow on a long acre of \_\_\_\_\_ grass.
3. That must be one of the \_\_\_\_\_ hills in Ireland.
4. The neighbor talked \_\_\_\_\_ about the dangers of biking down a steep hill.
5. The chickens clucked and \_\_\_\_\_ excitedly when Packy rode by.
6. The \_\_\_\_\_ of the reader is their ability to believe a story is true.
7. Packy \_\_\_\_\_ down under the carcass of the chicken shielding himself.
8. Packy's face was often scraped and bloody like a \_\_\_\_\_.
9. The widow used to put \_\_\_\_\_ on Packy to heal his bruises.
10. He no longer appealed to the \_\_\_\_\_ neighbors.

1. sloping downward sharply

2. staring, ogling

3. bandages, dressings

4. The frame of a grill

5. sincerely, gravely

6. bad-tempered, hoarse

7. cringed, trembled, recoiled

8. loud and shrill complaint

9. innocence, gullibility

10. curb, roadside

## The Story of the Widow's Son Newspaper Activity

"The Story of the Widow's Son" is about a boy who is traumatized by his mother and places the value of objects above the value of his own life. It is also a story about a woman who truly loves her son, but has a difficult time showing her affection and instead is very hard on her son and even verbally and physically abuses him.

These topics are relevant today.

child abuse verbal/physical  
mother/child relationships  
low self-esteem  
accidental death  
poor parenting skills  
concern over gossip or neighbors talking

1. In your groups, **find** an article in the newspaper that deals with one of the topics listed above and can be compared to the story we have just read.
2. **Read** the article aloud.
3. **Summarize** the article in three or four sentences
4. **Compare** the newspaper story to “The Story of the Widow’s Son.” Are there positive things about the newspaper story that did or did not take place in the fictional story? Are there negative things in the newspaper story that did or did not take place in the fictional story?
5. **Decide** which story is more tragic and provide evidence for this decision.

## The Story of the Widow's Son

Write a paragraph

Answer the following question in a paragraph. Who is most responsible for Packy's death: Packy, the widow, the old man, or the chickens?

Remember to include:

1. topic sentence with title and author of the story  
*In "The Story of the Widow's Son" written by Mary Lavin, \_\_\_\_\_ is most responsible for Packy's death.*
2. transitional words *first, second, finally, in conclusion*
3. three reasons or evidence
4. conclusion sentence

Paragraphs are due at the end of the period.

Would you say that the widow has done a good job of molding Packy's character? Why or why not?

## Story of the Widow's Son Test

1. the story describes the effect of the deaths of
  - a. the son and a hen
  - b. the son and a widow
  - c. the widow and a hen
  - d. the son and an old man
2. In the first version, Packy is the victim of
  - a. his own deliberate carelessness
  - b. his mother's anger
  - c. the old man's jokes
  - d. circumstances
3. The narrator suggests that a tragic destiny is preferable to
  - a. a meaningful life
  - b. the tragedies people bring upon themselves
  - c. a lack of opportunities
  - d. constant worrying about the future
4. In both versions the widow fears
  - a. educating her son
  - b. dying before her son is grown
  - c. making her son out to be a weakling
  - d. arguing with her son
5. In the second version, a more active role is played by
  - a. the chicken
  - b. the old man
  - c. the neighbors
  - d. Packy's friends
6. The widow's motivation in working hard is to
  - a. guarantee security in her old age
  - b. make sure Packy succeeds
  - c. have the most productive farm in the village
  - d. avenge her husband's death
7. In the second version, the old man compares Packy to a ewe lamb to imply that Packy is
  - a. pampered

- b. sickly
- c. shy
- d. affected

8. When the widow begins making fun of Packy's scholarship, she resents Packy because
- a. he embarrassed her in front of the neighbors
  - b. he spoiled the good news by killing the hen
  - c. he bragged about it without thanking her for her help
  - d. he intentionally killed her last hen to show his independence
9. The master of the school thinks Packy left because
- a. he was angry at his mother
  - b. he was ashamed in front of the neighbors
  - c. he was excited about his scholarship
  - d. he had a strange notion
10. In the second version, the widow expresses her love for Packy
- a. in a kind way
  - b. in a humorous way
  - c. in a manipulative way
  - d. in a harsh way

#### True or False

- 1. "The Story of the Widow's Son" opens with a theme statement.
- 2. The widow and the old man have different conversations in the two versions.
- 3. In both versions the neighbors are uncritical of the widow.
- 4. In the first version the widow blames her son and herself for the senseless tragedy.
- 5. In both versions the widow feels contentment by the end of the story.
- 6. The author reveals more of Packy's character in the second version.
- 7. The neighbors suspect Packy is spoiled by his mother.
- 8. The widow's actions contradict her wishes in the second version.
- 9. In both versions the widow takes responsibility for her own grief.
- 10. In one version Packy leaves his mother to attend college.