

Passage II
The Pebble People

Ben Adam sat outside his grandparents' weathered old loghouse. He liked to sit outside and listen to the sounds of the forest. Especially after one of his grandma's famous chicken-and-dumpling dinners. And he liked to play one of his favorite games—making rocks war dance. So he started looking for different colored pebbles. Some were easily scraped off the surface of the well-worn path to the grandparents' loghouse, others he had to dig and scratch out of the earth.

Finally, he found the ones he wanted—black ones, white ones, red ones, yellow ones, and blue ones. Holding the pebbles on an open palm, Ben Adam talked to them. He spoke to the pebbles for a long time about the respect and discipline they should have while wearing the traditional clothing the Creator had given them. He talked of the symbols the old people said were in their dress. He spoke of how they should all try to conduct themselves with dignity. Ben Adam repeated the words of an uncle who had helped him dress for a war dance many times before.

After several moments of serious meditation, he placed the pebbles on the bottom of an overturned tin bucket, each according to its own size and color. He carefully placed the red, yellow, blue, white, and black pebbles into the circular grooves of the bucket in the formation of a bustle, the middlemost circle being the drum. Under his breath, he sang the ancient words of his favorite war dance song, but he did not drum yet because he did not want the dancers moved.

Ben Adam finished his silent song and again spoke to the pebbles. His message contained a prayer of thanksgiving that his people were alive to see another day and that they had chosen this day to come together in celebration of tribal customs. He thanked all the dancers, drummers, and spectators. He asked the Creator to bestow special blessings upon them throughout the evening and as they traveled back to their homes.

Ben Adam asked for blessings on behalf of people who were sick and could not attend the dance. He prayed for those imprisoned by steel bars and by personal weaknesses. And he asked the people to remember those people who had died since the last time they had gathered. Ben Adam's words were very well selected and delivered for an eight-year-old.

Following a moment of silence, he started singing a warm-up song. He drummed slowly on the bottom ridge of the battered old bucket and watched proudly as the pebbles began to dance. At first they moved slowly about the grooves of the bucket according to the rhythm of the song. "For this slow beat, the traditional dancers should be thankful," Ben Adam said.

The pace quickened. Ben Adam sang louder and drummed faster. The dancers hopped about fervently, like fancy dancers, their thunderous hoofbeats in tune with the drumming and their blurred colors lighting the air. Some of the pebbles began falling off the edge of the bucket to the ground. Ben Adam drummed and sang as long as there were some pebble dancers left.

After only a few were left, Ben Adam announced to them, "This will be a contest song!" He drummed faster and faster, harder and harder, until all the pebbles fell off the bucket. Then, carefully, he picked up those that were the last to fall. "Gee, that was a good contest," he said.

50 He thanked the dancers and said, "One day there will be a big, big contest. Only those who are really good can come and participate in it." Ben Adam put the winning pebbles into marked jars to save. "The winners of the contest and my favorite dancers, I will take into the house and put away in my fishtank for the winter," he said to the pebble people.

— Roger Jack

Passage II

1. Lines 19 through 26 suggest that one purpose of Ben's play is to

- (1) challenge traditional roles
- (2) solve personal problems
- (3) practice social traditions
- (4) develop survival skills

2. In lines 27 through 31, Ben's prayers reveal a sense of

- (1) duty
- (2) compassion
- (3) courage
- (4) humility

3. Ben selected as winners of the contest those pebble people who had

- (1) drummed the loudest
- (2) danced the fastest
- (3) lasted the longest
- (4) jumped the highest

4. Ben's attitude toward play can best be described as

- (1) mischievous
- (2) courageous
- (3) innocent
- (4) thoughtful