Have you ever heard the phrase “Don’t judge a book by its cover”? Read what happens to a rich man who had not learned that lesson. Answer the questions that follow.

The Guest

Retold by Uma Krishnaswami

Nasreddin is a legendary character who appears in many Asian folktales. He solves life’s problems with a mixture of foolishness and wisdom.

1 Mullah Nasreddin was a wise man. When he spoke, people listened. And so he chose his words and actions as carefully as kings choose their generals.

2 One day a rich man invited the Mullah to a feast at his house. “I would be honored, Mullah sahib,”* said he, “if you would grace us with your presence. Tomorrow night?”

3 “I will come,” agreed Mullah Nasreddin, “tomorrow night.”

4 The following night, the Mullah threw on his shabbiest and most comfortable clothes. “It is a bit chilly,” he said, and added an old black coat. The edges of its sleeves were frayed. The holes in its elbows were patched with swatches torn from old flour sacks.

5 On his feet, Mullah Nasreddin slipped a pair of ragged sandals.

6 When darkness fell he arrived at the rich man’s doorstep. A servant opened the door. “What do you want, old man?” the servant demanded.

7 “Your master has invited me to his feast,” said the Mullah.

8 The servant peered suspiciously at him. “Wait here,” he said. “I’ll be back in a moment.”

9 The servant went in. His whispers carried to the door. “An old beggarman, O my master . . . says he is your guest. . . .”

10 The rich man came to the courtyard to take a look. Seeing the old man in his ragged clothes, he waved a hand to the servant, then went back to join his elegant guests.

11 The servant returned to the door. “My master does not know you,” he said.

12 “He invited me to his feast,” insisted the Mullah.

*sahib — a respectful title or term of respect
The servant laughed. "Nonsense! Invited you? A ragged old beggar? My master's friends are noblemen and kings. Be off before I take a stick to you!"

So Mullah Nasreddin went home. He changed into his finest silk garments. He wore a black woolen vest with silver trim. He put his best cap on his head and added a handsome high-collared coat. He sprinkled rose water on his face and hands. He combed his beard.

Smiling to himself, he made his way back to the rich man's house and knocked at the door.

Once again, the servant opened it. Once again, the Mullah said, "Your master has invited me to his feast."

This time the servant bowed respectfully and ushered him in.

"Welcome, welcome, Mullah sahib." And the rich man himself showed the Mullah to his special seat at the feast.

"At last, Mullah sahib," said the guests. "We have all been waiting for you."

The food arrived. "Serve Mullah Nasreddin first," said the rich man. The Mullah smiled at everyone. Then he began to get busy with his food.

But he did not eat.

"Hai hail!" cried the guests.

"Mullah sahib! What are you doing?" cried the rich man.

For Mullah Nasreddin had begun to spoon the soup over his best cap. He crumbled the bread and sprinkled the crumbs over the shoulders of his handsome high-collared coat. He took apart the shish kebab and fed it lovingly to his sleeves.
The rich man’s voice trembled. “Mullah sahib, do you not like the food?”

In reply, Mullah Nasreddin dribbled the delicate yogurt and cream sauces over his fine silk garments and best black woolen vest with silver trim. Then he sat back and beamed at everyone.

There was a shocked silence. Then the rich man said, “O most respected Mullah Nasreddin, you never do anything without a reason. Has someone offended you?”

The Mullah replied, “When I arrived in rags, you turned me away. Now that I am dressed in finery, you treat me with honor. Clearly it is my clothes you are welcoming and not me. So it is only fitting that they should eat this delightful food you have prepared for them.”

The rich man hung his head in shame. He said, “Mullah sahib, forgive me. I was blind. I saw only your clothes and could not recognize the wearer. I will never again judge people by how they look or by the clothes they wear.” And, in truth, he never did.
10. What is the MAIN purpose of paragraph 1?
   a. to describe the setting of the story
   b. to explain why the Mullah is like a king
   c. to explain why kings choose their generals
   d. to describe an important character trait of the Mullah

11. Why does the rich man in the story MOST LIKELY invite the Mullah to the feast?
   a. The rich man needs advice.
   b. The rich man admires the Mullah.
   c. The rich man wants everyone in the village to come.
   d. The rich man needs help preparing delightful food.

12. In paragraph 28, what does the Mullah mean when he says, “Clearly it is my clothes you are welcoming and not me.”?
   a. He means that the rich man likes to wear fine clothes.
   b. He means that the rich man does not accept him in old clothes.
   c. He means that the guests like to dress nicely.
   d. He means that the guests are very rude to him.

13. What is the MOST important lesson the rich man learns in the story?
   a. Clumsiness should be avoided.
   b. Servants should be told to be kind.
   c. Do not be rude to wise men.
   d. Appearances are not the most important thing.

14. Read the sentence from paragraph 4 in the box below.

   The following night, the Mullah threw on his shabbiest and most comfortable clothes.

   What does the word *shabbiest* mean?
   a. fanciest
   b. most colorful
   c. most worn out
   d. cleanest