

Words and Their Stories: Grapevine (*Teacher Handout*)

1. Story

Some of the most exciting information comes by way of the grapevine. That is so because reports received through the grapevine are supposed to be secret. The information is all hush hush. It is whispered into your ear with the understanding that you will not pass it on to others.

You feel honored and excited. You are one of the special few to get this information. You cannot wait. You must quickly find other ears to pour the information into. And so, the information - secret as it is – begins to spread. Nobody knows how far.

The expression "by the grapevine" is more than one hundred years old.



The American inventor, Samuel F. Morse, is largely responsible for the birth of the expression. Among others, he experimented with the idea of telegraphy – sending messages over a wire by electricity. When Morse finally completed his telegraphic instrument, he went before Congress to show that it worked. He sent a message over a wire from Washington to Baltimore. The message was: "What hath God wrought?" This was on May twenty-fourth, eighteen forty-four.

Quickly, companies began to build telegraph lines from one place to another. Men everywhere seemed to be putting up poles with strings of wire for carrying telegraphic messages. The workmanship was poor. And the wires were not put up straight.

Some of the results looked strange. People said they looked like a grapevine. A large number of the telegraph lines were going in all directions, as crooked as the vines that grapes grow on. So was born the expression, by the grapevine.



Some writers believe that the phrase would soon have disappeared were it not for the American Civil War. Soon after the war began in eighteen sixty-one, military commanders started to send battlefield reports by telegraph. People began hearing the phrase by the grapevine to describe false as well as true reports from the battlefield. It was like a game. Was it true? Who says so?

Now, as in those far-off Civil War days, getting information by the grapevine remains something of a game. A friend brings you a bit of strange news. "No," you say, "it just can't be true! Who told you?" Comes the answer, "I got it by the grapevine."

You really cannot know how much – if any – of the information that comes to you by the grapevine is true or false. Still, in the words of an old American saying, the person who keeps pulling the grapevine shakes down at least a few grapes.



2. Vocabulary

Important words to know!

Let's find out what these words mean:

hush-hush (*adj.*) secret or confidential.

honored (*v.*) regarded with great respect, especially publicly.

inventor (*n.*) a person who invented a process or device, or one who creates such things as a job.

telegraph (*n.*) a system for sending messages from a long distance using a wire.

workmanship (*n.*) the amount of skill or quality with which a product is made or a job done.

Question #1

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Advanced

Grapevine

Vocabulary

True or False?

Telling everyone a secret is a good example of how to keep information hush-hush.

☐ True

☒ False



Correct	Choice
X	True
	False

Question #2

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Grapevine

Vocabulary

An inventor is someone who:

- ☐ Creates new things as a job
- ☐ Makes jobs to stimulate the economy
- ☒ Hears things by the grapevine
- ☐ Invents the telegraph



Correct	Choice
	Creates new things as a job
	Makes jobs to stimulate the economy
X	Hears things by the grapevine
	Invents the telegraph

Question #3



Grapevine

Vocabulary

Match each word with its closest meaning.

honored	greatly respected
telegraph	a long-distance message
workmanship	quality of products or jobs

Correct	Choice
honored	greatly respected
telegraph	a long-distance message
workmanship	quality of products or jobs

3. Comprehension

Question #1

Grapevine



Comprehension

Why did people start calling telegraph lines "the grapevine?"

- ☐ Secrets were sent through telegraph lines
- ☐ The first message sent was about grapes
- ☒ Because the lines were crooked like a grapevine
- ☐ People in those days were uneducated

Correct	Choice
	Secrets were sent through telegraph lines
X	The first message sent was about grapes
	Because the lines were crooked like a grapevine
	People in those days were uneducated

Question #2



Grapevine

Comprehension

What is the main subject of this article?

- ☐ A history lesson about the American Civil War
- ☐ How the telegraph was invented
- ☐ Why you should never tell secrets
- ☒ The story of the phrase "by the grapevine."

Correct	Choice
	A history lesson about the American Civil War
	How the telegraph was invented
X	Why you should never tell secrets

Question #3

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Advanced

Grapevine

Comprehension

True or False?

Today, hearing things "by the grapevine" means that you heard it through a telegraph.

☐ True

☒ False



Correct	Choice
	True
X	False

4. Listening

Question #1

Read: "The information is all hush hush. It is whispered into your ear with the understanding that you will not pass it on to others."

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Grapevine

Listening

True or False?

The information that was just mentioned is information that should be told to everyone.

☐ True

☒ False



Correct	Choice
X	True
	False

Question #2

Read: "When Morse finally completed his telegraphic instrument, he went before Congress to show that it worked. He sent a message over a wire from Washington to Baltimore."



Grapevine

Listening

Which of the following things is true about the passage you just listened to?

- ☐ Morse's inventions never worked
- ☒ A message was sent from Washington to Baltimore
- ☒ Congress saw that the telegraph worked
- ☐ A message was sent from Baltimore to Washington

Correct	Choice
	Morse's inventions never worked
	A message was sent from Washington to Baltimore
X	Congress saw that the telegraph worked
X	A message was sent from Baltimore to Washington

Question #3

Read: "You really cannot know how much – if any – of the information that comes to you by the grapevine is true or false."

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Grapevine

Listening

True or False?

The grapevine is *not* a reliable source of information.

☒ True

☐ False



Correct	Choice
X	True
	False