



# Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E7

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## **Contents**

- 1. The Horse Trap**
- 2. The Aged Mother**
- 3. Grammar Page – Pronouns**

## 1. The Horse Trap

One day, there was a surprise summer shower. The land smelled beautiful. The thirsty earth had soaked in every drop of rainwater. The children had been very busy shifting the puppies and kittens, who were roaming in the back and front yards, into the house so that they did not get drenched in the rain. Their respective mothers were very busy shifting the poppadums left to dry on the terrace. Summer is the season when, under Grandma's leadership, pickles and poppadums were made.

Meenu started a calculation. "Everyone needs at least five poppadums per day. For the next month, 600 poppadums will be needed. Tomorrow our neighbour Vishnu Kaka's three grandchildren are coming. They will also eat with us these tasty poppadums. We may have to keep five per head . . . That means Grandma has to prepare  $600 + 50$  poppadums." When Grandma listened to Meenu's mathematics, she laughed and said, "Don't calculate that way. It may be true today that we will all eat five poppadums a day, but this may not be true for every day. After eating poppadums for three days, one may get bored. There is a wedding in my brother's house and we all might go there. So we may not eat any poppadum those days. The way you are calculating, reminds me of the man who calculated the number of horses, once in England . . ."

All the children immediately gathered around her. "Oh Grandma, you must tell us this story of how the horses were counted."

So Grandma had to stop what she was doing right there and tell them the story.

Many, many years ago, in England, there lived a great thinker and scholar called George Smith. He thought a lot about how it would be in the future and advised the prime minister about many things. He researched how many people would live in the country in twenty years" time, he calculated how many schools, hospitals and roads needed to be built, or how much food needed to be grown or bought from other places to feed all these people. His calculations helped the government immensely in planning for the future.

George often needed to visit the prime minister's office to talk to him about some new project and advise him. One day, the prime minister invited him for a meeting, so he hopped into his horse carriage and set off for the office.

Now George was always deep in thought and rarely noticed what was happening around him. Today, too, he sat in his carriage thinking about farms and ships and houses. But suddenly his carriage stopped with a jolt and he was shaken out of his thoughts. There was some commotion on the road and all carriages had stopped around him. Normally George would have just sunk back into his thoughts again, but today something stopped him. A horrible, strong smell. A smell that hung in the air and made you cover your nose with a hanky if you were not a scholar wrapped up in your own world.

Today, somehow, George was not able to disconnect himself from what was going on around him. The smell kept wafting into his nose and taking his mind away from the problem he was tackling. He called out to his coachman, "Hi John, what is this extraordinary smell?"

John the coachman was used to his master's absent-minded ways, and he replied briefly, "Horse dung."

Horse dung! Now that was something George had never given a thought to. Somehow, he could now think of nothing else. Soon his carriage pulled up in front of the prime minister's office. But George kept sitting inside, lost in thought. Finally, John tapped on the window to tell his master that they had reached their destination.

George walked to the visitor's room still thinking. He was there, reflecting on horses and their dung, when the prime minister's secretary came to meet him. Now Adam, the secretary, was not as learned as George, but he was very sharp and intelligent. He greeted George and said to him apologetically, "The PM had to make time for another important meeting, and will be late in seeing you. I hope you don't mind waiting."

George kept staring out of the window, watching yet more horse-drawn carriages rushing up and down the road. Thinking he had perhaps not heard him, Adam cleared his throat and repeated loudly, "Mr Smith, the PM . . ."

"Yes, I heard you, Adam," George mumbled.

Worried that this great thinker of the country was in some trouble, Adam asked gingerly, "Is something bothering you? Perhaps I could help . . .?"

George looked at him excitedly, “You know, I just looked into the future and realized we will all die in about a hundred years. Our country will be destroyed, and our way of life gone forever. And do you know why? All because of horses . . . and their dung!”

Adam stared at George, puzzled. Surely he could not be serious?

George continued, “See, now we use horses as the principal mode of transport in the country. They are used to draw carriages, in the king’s stables, even in the farms.”

Adam nodded. This was true.

“So how many horses are there now? Let’s assume that there are 500 rich families who can afford to own a horse carriage. If each family has at least two children and all of them are rich enough to own carriages, that will mean a minimum of two more carriages in a few years. Each carriage would require two horses. So, each rich family would be using four horses at the least. So then there will be 2,000 horses. If you add our king’s cavalry, and the number of horses in the farms, the numbers increase substantially.”

Adam nodded. Yes, this sounded true enough, but what was George’s point?

“How do we get rid of the dung they generate now?”

Adam answered patiently, “We dig pits and empty the dung into them.”

George nodded, “Now that’s my point. Imagine the scene a hundred years from now. 2,000 horses would have increased to 400,000, given the way the population is increasing. This will mean more dung! And what will we do with all this dung? Humans will need more space and houses and farming to sustain themselves. Where will we find open land to dig up and bury the dung? It will lie unattended everywhere and cause horrible diseases. If they make their way into the water sources it will be even worse. We will end up poisoning ourselves and our environment. We will become sick, and our country will become poor just by tending to so many sick people, and finally, our way of life will just die out—as we all will. All because of horses!”

Adam sat and thought about this for some time. George’s thoughts and the grim picture he had painted of the future were scary indeed. But . . . here Adam’s practical thinking kicked in; what if things did not work exactly the way

George was seeing them? He turned to his friend and said, “Mr Smith, you are not taking into account one very important bit into your calculations—the ability humans have to innovate and adapt. Many years ago there were no carts or carriages, we went everywhere on foot. Then once we started domesticating animals we realized we could use them for transport too. But do you think humans will rest with this achievement? Who knows, in a hundred years what other modes of transport we would have invented so that we may not require horses for transport at all. Perhaps we will even be able to fly like birds!”

George never solved this problem in his lifetime. Neither did Adam live to see how true his thoughts about the future had been. The man went on to invent so many new ways of moving from place to place that horses are no longer used in the numbers they once were. James Watt invented the steam engine, which led to the invention of railways. Then cars were invented by Karl F. Benz and became widely used in cities for transport. Finally, the Wright brothers showed that humans could fly—in aeroplanes! With all these great inventions, the horse and other animal-drawn carts and carriages are now a thing of the past.

Truly, if a man did not innovate and experiment, our species would have died out—just like George had predicted!

Everyone was very happy with this story. They all teased Meenu. “You are the George Smith of our house. Who knows one day nobody will eat poppadums and Grandma may not prepare that many poppadums. We may even buy directly from the shops if it is a small number.”

Meenu felt very embarrassed. She hid her face behind a pillow. Grandma said, “Don’t make fun of her. Foresight is very important. If you don’t have foresight, then you will land up in trouble.”

## 2. The Aged Mother

Long, long ago there lived at the foot of the mountain a poor farmer and his aged, widowed mother. They owned a bit of land, which supplied them with food, and they were humble, peaceful, and happy.

The province where they lived was called 'Shining'. A terrible leader governed shining. He was a warrior and hated anything that seemed weak or frail. One day, he made an announcement. The entire province was given strict orders: all of the old people are to be put to death. Those were the days when the custom of abandoning old people to die was not uncommon. The poor farmer loved his aged mother dearly, and the order filled his heart with sadness. But no one ever thought twice about disobeying the order of the governor. And so with many deep sighs, the youth prepared for what at that time was considered the kindest mode of death.

At sundown when his day's work was ended, the son took a quantity of unripened rice, which was the main food of the poor. He cooked and dried it, and tied it in a square cloth. He swung the bundle around his neck along with a container filled with cool, sweet water. Then he lifted his helpless old mother to his back and started on his long, painful journey up the mountain.

The road was long and steep. It was crossed and re-crossed by many paths made by the hunters and woodcutters. One path or another, it mattered not to the young man, as long as he went up. On he went, ever upward towards the high bare top of what is known as Obatsuyama, the mountain of 'abandoning the aged'.

The eyes of the old mother were not so dim but they noted the reckless hastening from one path to another. Her loving heart grew anxious. Her son did not know the mountain's many paths and his return might be dangerous for him, so she stretched forth her hand and snapped the twigs from brushes as they passed. Then quietly dropped a handful every few steps of the way so that as they climbed, the narrow path behind them was dotted at frequent intervals with tiny piles of twigs.

At last, the summit was reached.

Weary and heartsick, the youth gently set down his mother and quietly prepared a place of comfort as his last duty to the loved one. Gathering fallen pine needles, he made a soft cushion and tenderly lifted his old mother onto it. He wrapped her padded coat more closely about the stooping shoulders and with tearful eyes and an aching heart he said farewell.

The trembling mother's voice was full of unselfish love as she gave her last advice. "The mountain road is full of dangers, my son," she said. "Look carefully and follow the path that tracks the piles of twigs. They will guide you down." The son's surprised eyes looked back over the path, then at the poor old, shrivelled hands all scratched and soiled by their work of love. His heart broke.

Bowing to the ground, the son cried out, "Oh, Honourable mother, your kindness breaks my heart! I will not leave you. Together we will follow the path of twigs, and together we will die!"

How light she seemed now. And hastened down the path, through the shadows and the moonlight, to the little hut in the valley. Beneath the kitchen floor was a walled closet for food, which was covered and hidden from view. There the son hid his mother, giving her with everything she needed, always watching and fearing she would be discovered. Time passed. He was beginning to feel safe when again the governor sent forth heralds bearing an unreasonable order, seemingly as a boast of his power. His demand was that his subjects should present him with a rope of ashes.

The entire province trembled with dread. The order must be obeyed yet who in all Shining could make a rope of ashes? One night, in great distress, the son whispered the news to his hidden mother. "Wait!" she said. "I will think. I will think." On the second day, she told him what to do.

"Make rope of twisted straw," she said. "Then stretch it upon a row of flat stones and burn it on a windless night." He called the people together and did as she said and when the blaze died down, there upon the stones, with every twist and fiber showing perfectly, lay a rope of ashes.

The governor was pleased with the wit of the youth and praised him greatly, but he demanded to know where he had obtained his wisdom. "Alas! Alas!" cried the farmer, "the truth must be told!" and with deep bows, he related his story.

The governor listened and then meditated in silence. Finally, he lifted his head. "The province of Shining needs more than the strength of youth," he said gravely. "Ah, that I should have forgotten the well-known saying, 'With the crown of snow, there cometh wisdom!'" That very hour, the cruel law was abolished. And the custom drifted so far into the past that only its legend remains.

'With the crown of snow, there cometh wisdom': as a person gets older they become wise.



## 3. Grammar Page

# 2 Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that takes the place of a noun. There are different kinds of pronouns.

## Personal Pronouns

Personal pronouns may be used as:

- the subject of a verb, or
- the object of a verb.

## Subject Pronouns

The **subject** of a verb does **the action of the verb**. The personal pronouns **I, you, he, she, it, we** and **they** can all be used as the subject of a verb. Study the following two sentences:

**Lisa** likes cats. **She** has four cats.

In the first sentence, the proper noun **Lisa** is the subject of the verb *likes*. In the second sentence, the pronoun **she** is the subject of the verb *has*.

Here are some more pairs of sentences that show **personal pronouns used as subjects of verbs**.

My name is Michael. I am fourteen.

My father works hard. He works in a factory.

My sister is older than me. She is twelve.

Our dog is very naughty. It likes to chase cats.

Bob, you are a bad dog!

David and I are playing football. We like sports.

Jim and Jeff are my brothers. They are older than I am.

## Object Pronouns

The **object** of a verb receives the **action of the verb**. The personal pronouns **me, you, him, her, it, us** and **them** can all be used as the object of a verb. Look at the following two sentences:

Lisa likes **cats**. She likes to stroke **them**.

In the first sentence, the noun **cats** is the object of the verb **likes**. In the second sentence, the pronoun **them** is the object of the verb **stroke**.

Here are some more pairs of sentences that show **personal pronouns used as objects of verbs**.

I'm doing my homework. Dad is helping **me**.

Goodbye, children! I'll call **you** later.

Where is John? I need to speak to **him**.

Miss Garcia is very nice. All the children like **her**.

The car is very dirty. Mom is cleaning **it**.

Uncle Harry called Mary to ask **her** a question.

My chocolates are all gone. Someone has eaten **them**.

## First Person, Second Person and Third Person

In grammar, the person who is speaking is called the **first person**. The one spoken to is called the **second person**, and the one spoken about is called the **third person**.

Here is a table to help you remember which pronouns to use.

	subject	object
first person singular	I	me
second person singular	you	you
third person singular	he she it	him her it
first person plural	we	us
second person plural	you	you
third person plural	they	them