



# Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E15

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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## **Contents**

- 1. Three Bright Young Men.**
- 2. Papa.**
- 3. Grammar Page: Determiners.**

# 1. Three Bright Young Men

By Sudha Murty

Many years ago, I was the chief guest at a function. This was held in a hostel for poor students that had been built by a philanthropist. Food and shelter were free, but students had to bear other expenses like tuition and clothing.

In my younger days, I have come across many families who would look after students who were economically backward but otherwise bright. They used to help them with their fees or clothing and often with their food as well. In those days, most colleges were located in larger towns. Many poor students who came to study in these towns used to stay with these families and would be treated as part of the family. The woman of the house considered this a good deed and helped the poor students wholeheartedly. Today, the situation is different. Even smaller towns have schools and colleges, so this custom has disappeared.

While I was sitting on the dais, I remembered the past and congratulated the person who had built the hostel. It was a good deed and of great help to many students. The hostel secretary told me about some of the students in the hostel who had secured ranks but had a problem paying their tuition fees.

He said, 'Madam, this year we have three students from different disciplines who have secured ranks. All of them are from extremely poor families. They have one more year to complete their degrees.'

'What are they studying?'

'One is in medicine, the second in engineering and the third in commerce.'

'Can I meet them after the function?'

The function went on as usual. Often, at such functions, too much praise is lavished on the chief guest. Sometimes, they even make exaggerated and false claims about the chief guest. I feel this unnecessary praising is the highest form of corruption where people are easily fooled, and it encourages those who are praised to develop an inflated opinion of themselves. That's why in the twelfth century, in Karnataka, the great revolutionary leader Basaveshwara warned in his teaching that praise is like golden gallows.

After the function, I met the three poor bright boys whom the secretary had told me about. They were a little puzzled, shy and nervous. All of them had the

same story: father in a small job unable to make ends meet, a large family back in the village, no land or any other asset. Only sheer determination to excel in studies had brought them here against all odds.

I felt sorry for them. There are many parents who struggle to give their children the best of education with tuitions, coaching and plenty of books. But here were these eager, hard-working students who were struggling to pay their fees. Perhaps Saraswati, the goddess of learning, liked them.

‘Please call on me in June. I will help you with your fees,’ I promised.

They did not expect this and I could see the happiness on their faces.

As promised, I paid their fees and forgot about the whole incident. Some years later I was going abroad and wanted to buy a sari for a friend who lived there. I remembered it on the way to the airport and stopped at a sari shop on the way. It was lunchtime, so hardly anybody was in the shop. It was very quiet. I was in a hurry, so I quickly selected a sari that was on display and asked one of the salesmen to pack a similar one and get me the bill.

Suddenly, a young gentleman appeared from the back of the shop. He was well dressed, charming and sophisticated. He smiled at me and invited me to sit in his office. I didn’t know who he was. I thought he might be one of my ex-students. Many a time I cannot remember their names, particularly if they were in undergraduate classes.

I stepped into his office. It was well furnished—fresh-cut flowers, marble flooring, latest modern artwork on the walls, electronic gadgets and the whole works. In a nutshell, it was an affluent office.

‘I’m in a hurry to go to the airport. I want the packet immediately,’ I told him. I opened my purse and gave the money for the sari. I didn’t sit down and insisted that I must leave immediately.

The young man smiled and said, ‘Please sit down, ma’am. Your packet will be ready any moment.’

I wondered when this young man had passed out of our college. ‘Which year did I teach you?’ I asked, trying to place him in a batch I had taught.

‘No, ma’am, I was not your student.’

‘But you know me?’

‘Yes, I met you a few years ago in the student hostel.’

I was unable to remember him.

‘You had come there as a chief guest,’ he reminded me. ‘I met you with two of my friends. You paid my final year B.Com fees.’

Now I did remember him. He had been one of those bright-eyed and nervous young boys, so different from what I saw today.

I felt happy. ‘What are you doing now?’

‘Ma’am, I am manager and partner in this sari shop. God is very kind. We are doing good business.’

‘Where is your family?’

‘I am married and settled here. My two brothers are students and live with me. My two sisters are married. My parents are very happy.’

By then my packet had been delivered to me and I got up to leave. He came right up to the car to say goodbye. It was getting late so I rushed and just made it to the aircraft. As the flight took off, I wanted to ensure the sari was good and opened the bag. I was surprised. There were two saris. I had wanted to buy only one and had paid for only one. And the packet contained not only two saris, but also the money that I had paid, along with a small note.

‘Ma’am,’ the note read, ‘it was very kind that you paid for my fees without knowing me. Many times, I have wondered why you did that. I was a total stranger and not related to you at all. You never expected anything from me. Now, I have made it a point to help people who are not related to me, without any expectation. This is my small gift to you. It may not be a big thing, but I would like to give it with affection and gratitude. You have changed my life.’

I was touched by his words and tears filled my eyes.

I reached Mumbai. My international flight was delayed due to a technical problem, so I thought I would go and buy some snacks at the Santa Cruz market. While walking on the footpath with a friend, I stumbled and fell down. My foot swelled up. I was worried that it might be fractured. My friend lived in Mumbai, so she took me to a doctor close by. She assured me that though he was a little expensive, he was very good.

We went to this doctor in Khar. The clinic was modern, the receptionist was smart and professional. She asked whether I had an appointment and when I said no, she asked me to wait. She talked to the doctor and then sent us in. The doctor was young and very confident. I felt at ease. He made me comfortable with his smile. While he was examining my leg, he started a conversation.

‘Ma’am, I have met you before. You look older now.’

‘Where have you met me before?’

‘I was in a student hostel. You had come there as a chief guest. After the function, I met you with my two other friends.’

I guessed who he was but wanted to reconfirm. ‘Where are your friends now?’

‘One is in Bangalore, a partner in a sari shop, and the other is in the US. How come you are here?’

I explained the reason. By that time, he knew what was wrong with my leg. ‘Don’t worry. It’s not a fracture, just a torn ligament. You’ll be all right with medicine.’

I was happy that this boy was doing well and was also relieved that there was no fracture.

While I was about to leave, I asked him, ‘Are you married?’

With the same confident smile he replied, ‘Yes. My wife is also a doctor and we have settled here.’ Then he called the next patient in.

When I came out, the telephone on the receptionist’s desk buzzed. Probably the doctor was talking to the receptionist. Maybe he was telling her not to collect any fees, but I wanted to pay. He had just started a clinic in such a posh area and was also married. I wanted to encourage him.

I opened my purse. The receptionist said, ‘It’s 300 rupees.’

‘Isn’t that a bit too much?’ I was surprised and my hand was still inside the purse.

‘No. The doctor himself told me the amount. Yours was not a confirmed appointment.’

I paid the bill and left.

I had helped three people at the same time without expecting anything in return, but their attitudes were so different. One person felt grateful for my help and wanted to help others in a similar manner. The other didn't even mention the help he had received from me and felt neither grateful for it nor obliged to me. He treated me exactly as he would have treated a perfect stranger. When people with different ideas face the same situation, they act differently.

I have yet to meet the third one who is in the USA.

## 2. Papa

Keera was a small coastal village near Nagpat. Even though the people in the village laboured in the seas every day, they lived happily. It was a pleasant Sunday morning in December. Just like any other day, the villagers had started their routine. A few of them had already left for the sea, and the others were preparing to go to the sea. Meena's family was also at the shore to see off her father going to the sea. After the men sailed into the sea, the women would return to other tasks that need their attention. The children would play under the many coconut trees in the village.

The village bell was about to strike eight times. The bell caretaker was ready to ring the bell. Just then, he saw that the seawater had receded a few hundred metres. Soon, many in the village noticed the same. All the children and the villagers started running towards the sea. Meena and her mother were also with them. The seawater continued to recede. All had gathered along the shore to see it. The bell hit eight times. People now saw a wave far away in the sea. Excitedly, they pointed to the wave that was raising high in the sea. It was common for people to be excited by big waves in Keera. Everyone was getting ready to brace themselves for the big wave that was coming towards them. Little did they know that the wave was increasing in height and would seem to touch the sky as it neared them. It was now getting closer to the shore with a roar.



Gazing at the wave far away, Meena's mother felt a sudden fear gripping her. She felt that something was wrong. She caught Meena by her hand and started running towards their home. The wave that came closer to the shore had crushed the fishing boats. Before they reached their home, a powerful wave had hit the village. Meena and her mother could hear their friends and family screaming all around them. The seawater entered the village and washed out the huts and boats. The water hit their hut too.



Meena and her mother were separated and thrown off. Then, slowly, the water receded again into the sea. Meena's mother gathered herself and searched for Meena. It was then that the second **massive** wave hit the village. Meena's mother was washed away by the wave. Meena, **whirled** through the water, struggling to breathe. One moment she was inside the water, and all was dark around her. In the next, she could see the sky. The wave **banged** her to the trunk of a coconut tree. She wrestled the wave and firmly hugged the tree. Soon, she **fainted**.

When she woke up, she was in the hospital. After she recovered, they transferred her to a **rehabilitation** centre. The centre housed nearly 99 boys and girls. A kind-hearted official of the centre was always very kind to the children. He often used to visit them with his family. Meena was the youngest of all and soon was loved by all. The in charge and his wife often carried Meena while they played with other children. All children used to call them Muma and Papa. After three years the official was transferred. He and his family continued to visit the centre once a year for the next five years.

Meena now opened her eyes. Her cheeks were moist. All this seemed like it happened yesterday. The school bell rang and, Meena wiped her cheeks to get ready for her English class. Meena was good at studies and now was in the twelfth standard. The teacher was teaching, and Meena was writing her notes. She then heard a familiar voice calling her, "Meenu". She raised her head to see. She was surprised to see her father, the official standing at the entrance. He was smiling at her. She stared at him **blankly** for a few seconds, with tears rolling down her cheeks. She jumped out of her bench and dashed towards him, calling "Papa!"



## Vocabulary

**Recede** = go or move back; **massive** = large or heavy; **whirl** = move rapidly round and round;  
**Bang** = to strike forcefully and noisily; **faint** = to lose consciousness;  
**Rehabilitation** = the action of restoring someone after damage; **blankly** = without expression;  
**Coast** = land next to the sea.

## 3. Grammar Page

# 4 Determiners

Determiners, or noun signals, are special adjectives used before nouns.

There are different kinds of determiners.

## The Articles

The words **a**, **an** and **the** are called the **articles**.

The words **a** and **an** are **indefinite articles**. They are used with singular nouns. Use **a** before nouns that begin with a **consonant**. Use **an** before nouns that begin with a **vowel**.

John is reading **a** book.

Would you like **a** peach?

Is that **a** dog or **a** fox?

You'll need **a** ruler and **a** pencil.

Is there also **an** entrance at the back of the building?

Have you ever seen **an** elephant?

I always take **an** apple to school.

Do you have **an** umbrella that I can borrow?

Would you like to live on **an** island?



## Notes

- Some vowels have a consonant sound as well as vowel sound. Use the article **a** with nouns that begin with these vowels:

Is there **a** university in your town?

Does every child in the school wear **a** uniform?

We are taking **a** European vacation this summer.

- Some words begin with a silent h. Use **an** with nouns that begin with a silent h:

We've been waiting here for **an** hour.

Meeting the president was **an** honor for all of us.

The word **the** is called the **definite article**. Use **the** before a noun when you are talking to someone who already knows which person or thing you mean.

Dad is sitting in the garden.

Who made the mess on the carpet?

Turn the television off now.

I'll wait for you in the car.

The boys are upstairs and the girls are outside in the street.

## Using Nouns without Articles

When you are talking about something in general, not a particular thing, use a noun **without an article**. You can also use **plural nouns** without an article.

Frogs are my favorite animals.

Children like playing games.

Babies cry a lot.

Glasses are things that you wear to correct your eyesight.

Birds are animals that can fly.

People enjoy watching television.

**Nouns that don't show quantity** are normally used without **a** or **an**. The article **the**, however, may be used with nouns that don't show quantity.

I like sunshine.

I sometimes have fruit for breakfast.

You've got dirt on your face.

A clock measures time.

Put sugar in your tea to make it sweet.

I need time to think of a new plan.

Would you pass me the salt, please.

Can I borrow the paint when you've finished?

### Notes

You often use the singular nouns **school**, **home**, **work**, **church** without an article:

We go to school by bus.

Dad has already left home for work.

They go to church on Sundays.