



Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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1. Her Dream Bicycle

Malar lived at Keeranur village in Pudukottai district with her family. Malar was studying in Class VI. She was eleven years old and had two elder sisters and a younger brother, Arul. Her father, Kathirvel, was a hard working farmer. Of late, the rains were irregular and he could not always cultivate the two acres they owned. Her eldest sister, Ponni, was married to a mason and lived in Mathur with her little son Vikram. Her second sister, Mallika, had decided to learn tailoring after Class X and was attending a tailoring course in Mathur. Attending the course also gave Mallika a chance to visit her sister. But walking all the way made her tired and she often missed classes.

Her mother used to scold Mallika. "Oh! Why are you so lazy? You must attend your class regularly". Mallika would reply, "I walk 9 kilometres every day — 4kilometres to the tailoring class, 2 kilometres to fetch water and 3 kilometres to take lunch for father when you are busy. You can't call me lazy."

In fact, nobody in their home was lazy. Malar would walk 1 kilometre with her friends to school and back. She and her friends would chat and play all the way back.

One day, when Arul and Malar had just come back from school, her father came in looking upset. He said to his wife, "Shanthi, it seems that the Collector is not satisfied with teaching only Maths and Tamil. She even wants women to learn cycling."

Malar was very excited. She asked, "Father, is it only for mother? Can I learn?" Mallika was interested too. She said, "If there is anyone who needs a bicycle, it is me." Arul said, "This is really good. I can teach both of you to cycle, if you buy me a bicycle!"

Their father was angry.

"Keep quiet!" he said. "No woman in my house will learn to cycle". A week passed. What their father had heard was true. Women were being taught to cycle at no cost at all. In many homes across the villages in Pudukottai district, there was a lot of discussion on women learning to cycle.

In Keeranur too, women were beginning to use bicycles to do many things. One day, Shanthi told Mallika softly, "Borrow Radhamma's old bicycle and bring it here. We are going to learn to ride it." When Malar's father returned, he saw Mallika smiling widely and guessed why. He said gruffly, "Allright. But be careful." He looked at Shanthi and smiled. "Have you started learning too?" he asked. "Yes," she said. "It makes things much easier."

Malar was busy, dreaming of the future. She saw herself riding a brand new bicycle along a smooth, long road, to school, to college, and then, who knows? Maybe even cycle on a rainbow to the clouds.

2. Going downhill on a Bicycle

With lifted feet, hands still,
I am poised, and down the hill
Dart, with heedful mind;
The air goes by in a wind.
Swifter and yet more swift,
Till the heart with a mighty lift
Makes the lungs laugh, the throat cry: -'
O bird, see; see, bird, I fly.
'Is this, is this your joy?
O bird, then I, though a boy
for a golden moment share
your feathery life in air!'

3. The Meaning of Education

Anitha knew she didn't have many friends in her class. Her classmates thought that she was a show off and Anitha didn't mind their saying so. After all, it was the truth. The only thing Anitha cared about was coming first in the class, which she usually did.

But Nandini was quite different from Anitha. Everyone liked her except Anitha. Nandini always had a smile on her face and was ready to help anyone with their homework. The children in the class were very happy when Nandini was with them. All this made Anitha very envious of Nandini. But she would console herself saying, "I come first in class and she comes second. That makes me better than her." Most students dreaded the examinations but Anitha did not. She took it as an opportunity to exhibit her talents. But she never helped anyone else.

When people approached Nandini, she took extra effort to help them out. Anitha couldn't understand Nandini's behaviour. "Why do you want to teach them?" She would ask. "You should spend the time studying by yourself. Who knows, you could even come first!"

"I can't change myself," Nandini would reply.

The examination schedule was announced and the first exam was English. "All the best, Anitha!" her father wished her on the morning of the exam. "I am going out for a walk."

Anitha reached the school early. Then she looked around for Nandini. She was nowhere to be seen. An hour passed; yet there was no sign of Nandini. Anitha was really glad. "Nandini will not be coming for today's exam," she thought. With only half an hour left, Nandini rushed into the hall, sweat running down her face.

When the examination ended, everyone gathered around Nandini. "What happened? Why were you late?"

"I was delayed a bit," Nandini explained. Anitha started laughing.

Tears rolled down from Nandini's eyes and she ran away from the spot. Later, when Anitha walked into her home she knew something was wrong. Her relatives were present in the house. Her mother was looking tense and the doctor was pacifying everyone.

"What happened?" Anitha rushed to her mother. "Where is Daddy?" Her mother led her to the bedroom. Her father was lying on the bed, looking a bit pale. Anitha knelt by her father's side.

"One of your classmates helped me," her father whispered.

Back in the hall, her mother explained. "Daddy had left for his early morning walk when he suffered a mild stroke and collapsed on the pavement. Thank God one of your classmates passed by and took your father to the hospital. He said it was someone called Nandini." Anitha closed her eyes for a moment. She couldn't understand what was happening. The person whom she had always ridiculed, had actually saved her father's life.

The next morning, a change had come over her. She rushed to the school and found Nandini standing by the library.

"Nandini," she spoke hesitantly. "I want to apologize. You saved my father's life and I ridiculed you for coming late. Why didn't you tell me?"

"You didn't give me a chance," Nandini said and smiled. Soon, Anitha and Nandini became best friends. Someone asked Anitha the reason for her change.

"I have understood that it is not for knowledge alone that my parents are sending me to school. I have to learn to become a good human being. Nandini made me realize that," Anitha replied with a smile.

4. Boat Song

Any time now, the sun would pierce the blue grey of the dawn sky and the pale moon would fade away. It was Adityan's favourite time of the day. He took a deep breath, cupped a handful of cold river water and let it wash down his throat. Fish nibbled at his feet. He untied his small boat and pulled it towards the water. He heard the call of a calf from his village and the reassuring answer of its mother. He sat on a wooden plank in his boat waiting for his first customer.

Every day, Adityan took people back and forth across the river. He loved the small wooden boat that he had made with his own hands. He loved his quiet village and the flat, fertile fields that surrounded it. Yet, when he rowed, he sang a song not of his village but of the sea. He wanted to roll like the waves, touching, looking, listening, and learning about places that were far, far away. He dreamt that one day, he would leave his village and learn to build a big ship. It would carry him to the different places that he dreamt about. It would be strong enough to carry horses and elephants. He dreamt that he would not only carry goods for trade but also the stories and songs of the Cholas, his people. He would learn about those places and come and share them with the children of his village. Sometimes, Adityan felt sad. Would he ever earn enough to fulfil his dream?

“Boatman! Boatman!”

Adityan saw a person standing on the opposite bank of the river.

“I am coming,” he shouted.

Adityan saw his first customer for that day. There was something about this man that seemed to command respect. “You row the boat so well!” said the man. “The river is wide but you reached here so fast.”

Adityan smiled widely. “I made the boat myself. I am an orphan and I have only the boat and my hut to call my own.”

“What else do you do?” asked the man.

“I sing,” said Adityan. “I make my own songs.”

“Then your songs are your own, too!” said the man.

Your songs, your dreams, your ideas — they’re yours as well, aren't they?”

Adityan felt understood. "I will sing a song for you," he said.

He began to sing. His voice rose from the boat and carried across the water like a ripple. He sang about his dream of owning a ship some day and of the journeys that he would make to distant lands. His oar dipped into the water keeping time with his music. The man sat and listened carefully to Adityan's music. They reached the shore. When he was about to get off, the man asked, "Do you feel your dream will be realized one day?"

Adityan spoke softly. "I hope so!"

The man nodded. He said quietly, "It is good to hope." He gave Adityan a few coins, Adityan was astounded. They were very valuable.

Adityan ran after the man and said, "You have paid me much more than the cost of the ride. Maybe there has been a mistake."

The man smiled. "No," he said. "But I am happy that you are so honest. This is something to help your dream come true. Maybe one day you will travel to the corners of my Empire and come back with the songs of other lands."

"Who are you?" asked Adityan.

"My name is Karikalan", said the stranger as he walked away. "Do visit me sometime."

5. Hopes and Dreams

We all have our hopes and dreams,
It makes life seem worthwhile!
If we can adhere to that thought most of the time,
We'd go that extra mile!

Everyone needs an incentive, in order to
reach their goal,
It's worth fighting for.
To have someone who, will stand by you,
could you ask for anything more?

When you have encouragement,
you begin to believe in yourself,
There's nothing you cannot undertake or do.
So...keep up your hopes,
believe in your dreams,
one day, it will, all come true!