



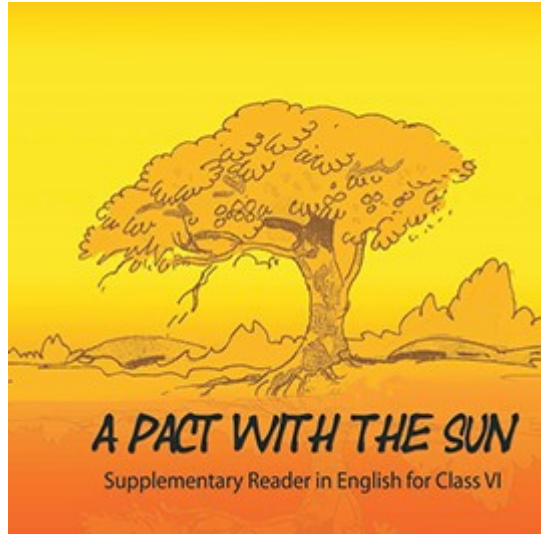
Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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A PACT WITH THE SUN

Supplementary Reader in English for Class VI

1. The Wonder Called Sleep

WE know enough about what sleep is, though we don't know what exactly causes sleep. Sleep is a state of rest — an unconscious rest. When we sleep, our body recovers from fatigue caused by the day's activities. After a good sleep and the rest that it gives, we become alert and active again, ready for the normal activities of the day.

When we wake up in the morning, it is not always possible for us to remember what happened when we were asleep. We may remember a dream but the rest of our sleep was a kind of darkness in which nothing seems to have taken place.

Several things happen to our body while we are sleeping. As we sink deeper into sleep, our muscles relax more and more. Our heartbeat becomes slower. Our temperature and blood pressure go down. The ever-active brain also slows down so that we can't think or act consciously. But we dream.

When we wake up, our temperature and blood pressure rise to normal. Our heartbeat and breathing also become normal and we are fully awake, and have forgotten most, if not all, the dreams that we had while sleeping.

What is a dream? It is an activity of the mind that takes place when we are asleep. Some dreams are probable while others are not. That only means that many of the things that happen in dreams could happen when we are awake. Others could not. Dreams seem to be important for several reasons. One is that a dream can help us to sleep through noise or other disturbances. For example, the alarm clock rings, but our mind causes us to dream that the telephone or doorbell is ringing, and that we are awake and answering it.

Certain doctors have found that one's dreams often reveal a great deal about one's problems and that, if understood correctly, they can provide a key to the solution of those problems. But we must remember one thing. Dreams cannot be used as a way to tell the future. They simply can never tell the future. Sleep is the most common experience, but how many of us really think about the wonder and power of sleep? Many poets have written beautiful poems about sleep. Here is one in which the poet is describing the experience of falling asleep.

Lights Out

I have come to the borders of sleep,
The unfathomable deep
Forest where all must lose
Their way, however straight,
Or winding, soon or late;
They cannot choose.

There is not any book
Or face of dearest look
That I would not turn from now
To go into the unknown
I must enter and leave alone
I know not how.

2. A Pact with the Sun

SAEEDA'S mother had been ailing for a long time — fever, cough, body-ache, painful joints and what not. Treated by a variety of physicians for weeks, she often showed signs of improvement but soon relapsed into her old, sick self, one complaint substituted by another. Though weak and colourless, she was forbidden normal food and was under strict orders to remain perpetually confined to her small, dingy room with doors and windows fastened, deprived of sunshine and fresh air.

When she became critical, her relatives and neighbours persuaded her to consult a specialist even though his fee was likely to be high. Life is more precious than money, they said. Saeeda's mother was poor but she heeded their advice and sold a few trinkets to pay the doctor's fee and the cost of medicine.

The doctor came in a few days and examined her and prescribed effective but costly medicine. To the question as to what she should eat he said, "Anything you wish to eat — chapati, vegetables, milk, fruits, etc. In addition to all this," he added emphatically, "leave this dark hovel and occupy a bigger room with doors and windows open. Sit in the sun every morning from eight to nine. Sunshine and fresh air," he concluded, "are more important than medicine."

The doctor and his advice became a subject of noisy commentary among all present. Some favoured while others opposed it. Exposure to sun and air for someone afflicted with chronic cough was dangerous, an experienced lady declared. A younger neighbour nearly quarrelled with her over this. Too exhausted to participate in the debate, Saeeda's mother remained quiet but determined to follow the doctor's advice. "Forget the consequences," she said at last. "I'll carry out his instructions to the letter. Move my bed into the next room and let me sit in the sun on my charpoy for an hour daily."

It so happened that the sky remained overcast next morning. The same was the case the following day. Saeeda's mother was dejected. She muttered, "O Lord of mine, why have you ordered the sun to remain hidden? How will I ever be cured?"

Saeeda was playing with her doll nearby and she heard her mother's lament but kept calm. Later in the afternoon, when she stumbled on a spot of pale sunshine in the courtyard, she ran to her mother to say the sun was there. "No, no", said everybody present. "It's too late and chilly. Your mother can't sit out there." Disheartened, Saeeda returned to her doll. There was no sun really except for its last remnant entangled in the top branches of the family mango tree.

Now, children have at their command a secret language, foreign to grown-ups altogether, in which they fluently communicate with trees, flowers, animals, the sun and the moon, perhaps even with the Almighty. Using that special language, Saeeda addressed her remark to the last departing ray of the sun. "Dearest sister, do come tomorrow with lots of warmth and brightness. You see, my mother is ill and needs your help."

"Surely," answered the light, "don't look unhappy. We'll be here at the fixed hour."

Next day, early in the morning, when the sprightly sunrays embellished themselves for their journey down to earth, the sun said, "It's our day off again. We're staying up here. The road to earth is blocked by an army of thick, mucky clouds." The little rays so much wanted to go down for a lark but they remained quiet. One of them, though, who had made a pact with little Saeeda said, "Sir, I can't stay back. I've given my word to Saeeda whose mother is ill and needs our help. I'll pierce through the clouds to reach Saeeda's courtyard. How else will her mother be cured?" Hearing this, all the rays nearly staged a revolt against their father, the sun. "Fancy staying back again," they said in a single voice. "What will the people of the earth say about us? That we of the heavens have turned liars?"

The sun relented. "Please yourselves," he said. "Mind your clothes, though. The clouds are mucky."

"Never mind our clothes. We can always change. But go we must." And the rays rushed towards the earth. The clouds stood guard between them and Saeeda's courtyard. The little rays focussed their heat — and they had enough of it — on a battalion of clouds, which had to flee from its post. The rays got through, shooting past the bewildered clouds. They were already late.

Saeeda saw the whole host of them approaching and her heart leapt with joy. She shouted, "Amma, Amma! The sun is here. Come out." The old lady's eyes welled up with tears of gratitude. Her charpoy was placed in the courtyard and she sat on it for an hour reclining against bolsters. It had been months since she had felt the sun on her hands and face and breathed in fresh air. She thought she was in a new world. Though pale, her face glowed and her eyes shone bright. She saw her child too bathed in sunlight and kissed her. The morning air brought in a new fragrance from nearby flowers. The birds chanted a new tune. Saeeda's mother felt better already.

She is fully recovered now, but she still follows the doctor's advice — an hour of sunlight and lungfuls of fresh air every day.