



Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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HONEYSUCKLE

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH FOR CLASS VI



1. Fair Play

By Premchand

JUMMAN Shaikh and Algu Chowdhry were good friends. So strong was their bond of friendship that when either of them went away from the village, the other looked after his family. Both were greatly respected in the village.

Jumman had an old aunt who had some property. This she transferred to him on the understanding that she would stay with him and he would look after her. The arrangement worked well for a couple of years. Then the situation changed. Jumman and his family were tired of the old relative. Jumman became as indifferent to her as his wife, who grudged even the little food that the old lady wanted every day. She swallowed these insults along with her food for a few months. But patience has its limits.

One day she spoke to Jumman, "My son, it is now obvious that I am not wanted in your house. Kindly give me a monthly allowance so that I can set up a separate kitchen." "My wife knows best how to run the house. Be patient," said Jumman shamelessly. This made his aunt very angry and she decided to take her case to the village panchayat.

For many days, the old lady was seen talking to the villagers explaining her case and seeking their support. Some sympathised with her, others laughed at her and a few others advised her to make it up with her nephew and his wife. At last she came to Algu Chowdhry and spoke to him. "You know, Chachi, Jumman is my best friend. How can I go against him?" Algu said. "But is it right, my son, to keep mum and not say what you consider just and fair?" pleaded the old lady. "Come to the panchayat and speak the truth," she said. Algu didn't reply, but her words kept ringing in his ears.

The panchayat was held the same evening under an old banyan tree. Jumman stood up and said, "The voice of the Panch is the voice of God. Let my aunt nominate the head Panch. I will abide by her decision."

“The Panch knows neither friend nor enemy. What do you say to Algu Chowdhry?” the old lady announced. “Fine,” replied Jumman hiding his joy over this unexpected piece of luck. “Chachi, you are aware of my friendship with Jumman,” said Algu. “I know that,” replied the aunt, “but I also know that you will not kill your conscience for the sake of friendship. God lives in the heart of the Panch, and his voice is the voice of God.” And the old lady explained her case. “Jumman,” said Algu, “you and I are old friends. Your aunt is as dear to me as you. Now I am a Panch. You and your aunt are equal before me. What have you to say in your defence?” “Three years ago,” began Jumman, “my aunt transferred her property to me. I promised to support her as long as she lived. I have done all I could. There have been a couple of quarrels between my wife and her but I can’t stop it. Now my aunt is claiming a monthly allowance from me. This is not possible. That’s all I have to say.”

Jumman was cross-examined by Algu and others. Then Algu announced, “We have gone into the matter carefully. In our opinion, Jumman must pay his aunt a monthly allowance, or else the property goes back to her.”

Now, the two friends were seldom seen together. The bond of friendship between them was broken. In fact, Jumman was Algu's enemy and wanted his revenge.

Days passed and, as ill luck would have it, Algu Chowdhry found himself in a tight spot. One of his fine pair of bullocks died, and he sold the other to Samjhu Sahu, a cart driver of the village. The understanding was that Sahu would pay the price of the bullock in a month’s time. It so happened that the bullock died within a month.

Several months after the bullock’s death, Algu reminded Sahu of the money he hadn’t yet paid. Sahu got very annoyed. “I can’t pay you a penny for the wretched beast you sold me. He brought us nothing but ruin. I have a bullock. Use it for a month and then return it to me. No money for the dead bullock,” he said angrily.

Algu decided to refer the case to the panchayat. For a second time in a few months, preparations for holding the panchayat were made, and both the parties started meeting people seeking their support.

The panchayat was held under the old banyan tree. Algu stood up and said, "The voice of the Panch is the voice of God. Let Sahu nominate the head Panch. I will abide by his decision."

Sahu saw his chance and proposed the name of Jumman. Algu's heart sank and he turned pale. But what could he do?

The moment Jumman became head Panch, he realised his responsibility as judge and the dignity of his office. Could he, seated in that high place, have his revenge now? He thought and thought. No, he must not allow his personal feelings to come in the way of speaking the truth and doing justice.

Both Algu and Sahu stated their cases. They were cross-examined and the case was considered deeply. Then Jumman stood up and announced, "It is our opinion that Sahu should pay Algu the price of the bullock. When Sahu bought the bullock, it suffered from no disability or disease. The death of the bullock was unfortunate, but Algu cannot be blamed for it." Algu could not contain his feelings. He stood up and said loudly over and over again, "Victory to the panchayat. This is justice. God lives in the voice of the Panch."

Soon after, Jumman came to Algu, embraced him and said, "Since the last panchayat, I had become your enemy. Today I realised what it meant to be a Panch. A Panch has no friend nor enemy. He knows only justice. Let no one deviate from the path of justice and truth for friendship or enmity." Algu embraced his friend and wept. And his tears washed away all the dirt of misunderstanding between them.

2. Vocation

By Rabindranath Tagore

*When the gong sounds ten in the morning and
I walk to school by our lane,*

*Every day I meet the hawker crying, "Bangles,
crystal bangles!"*

*There is nothing to hurry him on, there is no
road he must take, no place he must go to, no
time when he must come home.*

*I wish I were a hawker, spending my day in
the road, crying, "Bangles, crystal bangles!"*

*When at four in the afternoon I come back from
the school,*

*I can see through the gate of that house the
gardener digging the ground.*

*He does what he likes with his spade, he soils
his clothes with dust, nobody takes him to
task, if he gets baked in the sun or gets wet.*

*I wish I were a gardener digging away at the
garden with nobody to stop me from digging.*

*Just as it gets dark in the evening and my
mother sends me to bed,*

*I can see through my open window the
watchman walking up and down.*

*The lane is dark and lonely, and the streetlamp
stands like a giant with one red eye in
its head.*

*The watchman swings his lantern and walks
with his shadow at his side, and never once
goes to bed in his life.*

*I wish I were a watchman walking the street
all night, chasing the shadows with my
lantern.*

3. The Banyan Tree

By Ruskin Bond

THOUGH the house and grounds belonged to my grandparents, the magnificent old banyan tree was mine — chiefly because Grandfather, at sixty-five, could no longer climb it.

Its spreading branches, which hung to the ground and took root again, forming a number of twisting passages, gave me endless pleasure. Among them were squirrels and snails and butterflies. The tree was older than the house, older than Grandfather, as old as Dehra Dun itself. I could hide myself in its branches, behind thick green leaves, and spy on the world below.

My first friend was a small grey squirrel. Arching his back and sniffing into the air, he seemed at first to resent my invasion of his privacy. But when he found that I did not arm myself with catapult or air gun, he became friendly, and when I started bringing him pieces of cake and biscuit he grew quite bold and was soon taking morsels from hand. Before long, he was delving into my pockets and helping himself to whatever he could find. He was a very young squirrel, and his friends and relatives probably thought him foolish and headstrong for trusting a human.

In the spring, when the banyan tree was full of small red figs, birds of all kinds would flock into its branches: the red-bottomed bulbul, cheerful and greedy; parrots, myna and crows squabbling with one another. During the fig season, the banyan tree was the noisiest place in the garden.

Halfway up the tree I had built a crude platform where I would spend the afternoons when it was not too hot. I could read there propping myself up against the tree with a cushion from the living room. *Treasure Island*, *Huckleberry Finn* and *The Story of Dr Dolittle* were some of the books that made up my banyan tree library.

When I did not feel like reading, I could look down through the leaves at the world below. And on one particular afternoon I had a grandstand view of that classic of the Indian wilds, a fight between a mongoose and a cobra.

The warm breezes of approaching summer had sent everyone, including the gardener, into the house. I was feeling drowsy myself, wondering if I should go to the pond and have a swim with Ramu and the buffaloes, when I saw a huge black cobra gliding out of a clump of cactus. At the same time a mongoose emerged from the bushes and went straight for the cobra.

In a clearing beneath the banyan tree, in bright sunshine, they came face to face. The cobra knew only too well that the grey mongoose, three feet long, was a superb fighter, clever and aggressive. But the cobra, too, was a skilful and experienced fighter. He could move swiftly and strike with the speed of light; and the sacs behind his long sharp fangs were full of deadly poison. It was to be a battle of champions.

Hissing defiance, his forked tongue darting in and out, the cobra raised three of his six feet off the ground, and spread his broad, spectacled hood. The mongoose bushed his tail. The long hair on his spine stood up.

Though the combatants were unaware of my presence in the tree, they were soon made aware of the arrival of two other spectators. One was a myna, the other a jungle crow. They had seen these preparations for battle, and had settled on the cactus to watch the outcome. Had they been content only to watch, all would have been well with both of them.

The cobra stood on the defensive, swaying slowly from side to side, trying to mesmerise the mongoose into making a false move. But the mongoose knew the power of his opponent's glassy, unwinking eyes, and refused to meet them. Instead he fixed his gaze at a point just below the cobra's hood, and opened the attack.

Moving forward quickly until he was just within the cobra's reach, the mongoose made a pretended move to one side. Immediately the cobra struck. His great hood came down so swiftly that I thought nothing could save the mongoose. But the little fellow jumped neatly to one side, and darted in as swiftly as the cobra, biting the snake on the back and darting away again out of reach.

At the same moment that the cobra struck, the crow and the myna hurled themselves at him, only to collide heavily in mid-air. Shrieking insults at each other they returned to the cactus plant. A few drops of blood glistened on the cobra's back.

The cobra struck and missed. Again the mongoose sprang aside, jumped in and bit. Again the birds dived at the snake, bumped into each other instead, and returned shrieking to the safety of the cactus.

The third round followed the same course as the first but with one dramatic difference. The crow and the myna, still determined to take part in the proceedings, dived at the cobra; but this time they missed each other as well as their mark. The myna flew on and reached its perch, but the crow tried to pull up in mid-air and turn back. In the second that it took the bird to do this the cobra whipped his head back and struck with great force, his snout thudding against the crow's body.

I saw the bird flung nearly twenty feet across the garden. It fluttered about for a while, then lay still. The myna remained on the cactus plant, and when the snake and the mongoose returned to the fight, very wisely decided not to interfere again! The cobra was weakening, and the mongoose, walking fearlessly up to it, raised himself on his short legs and with a lightning snap had the big snake by the snout. The cobra writhed and lashed about in a frightening manner, and even coiled itself about the mongoose, but to no avail. The little fellow hung grimly on, until the snake had ceased to struggle. He then smelt along its quivering length, gripped it round the hood, and dragged it into the bushes.

The myna dropped cautiously to the ground, hopped about, peered into the bushes from a safe distance, and then, with a shrill cry of congratulation, flew away.