



Learn English Through Stories

A1 Stories

Elementary Level

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HONEYSUCKLE

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH FOR CLASS VI



1. Game of Chance

EVERY year on the occasion of Eid, there was a fair in our village. Eid was celebrated only one day but the fair lasted many days. Tradesmen from far and wide came there with all kinds of goods to sell. You could buy anything from a small pin to a big buffalo.

Uncle took me to the fair. Bhaiya, who worked for us at home, came with us. There was a big crowd at the fair. Uncle was leading us through the crowd when he met a few of his friends. They wanted him to spend some time with them.

Uncle asked me whether I would like to look around the fair with Bhaiya till he came back. I was happy to do that. Uncle warned me neither to buy anything nor to go too far out while he was away. I promised that I would wait for him.

Bhaiya and I went from shop to shop. There were many things I would have liked to buy, but I waited for Uncle to return. Then we came to what was called the Lucky Shop. The shopkeeper was neither young nor old. He was a middle-aged man. He seemed neither too smart nor too lazy. He wanted everybody to try their luck. There were discs on the table with numbers from one to ten facing down. All you had to do was to pay 50 paise, pick up any six discs, add up the numbers on the discs and find the total. The article marked with that number was yours.

An old man paid 50 paise and selected six discs. He added up the numbers on them and found the total was 15. He was given the article marked 15, which was a beautiful clock. But the old man did not want a clock. The shopkeeper obliged him by buying it back for 15 rupees. The old man went away very pleased.

Then a boy, a little older than I, tried his luck. He got a comb worth 25 paise. The shopkeeper looked neither happy nor sad. He bought the comb from the boy for 25 paise. The boy tried his luck again. He now got a fountain-pen worth three rupees. Then he tried a third time and got a wrist watch worth 25 rupees. When he tried again he got a table lamp worth more than 10 rupees. The boy was happy and went away with a smile and a good deal of cash.

I wanted to try my luck too. I looked at Bhaiya. He encouraged me. I paid 50 paise and took six discs. My luck was not too good. I got two pencils. The shopkeeper bought them from me for 25 paise. I tried again. This time I got a bottle of ink, also of little value. The shopkeeper bought that too for 25 paise. I took a chance for the third time. Still luck was not with me.

I had hopes of winning a big prize and continued to try my luck again and again, paying 50 paise each time. But every time I got a trifle. At last I was left with only 25 paise. Again the shopkeeper showed his kindness. He said I could either play once more with 25 paise or settle the account then and there. I played again and the last 25 paise also disappeared.

People were looking at me. Some were laughing at my bad luck, but none showed any sympathy. Bhaiya and I went to the place where Uncle had left us and waited for him to return. Presently he came. He looked at me and said, "Rasheed, you look upset. What is the matter?"

I did not say anything. Bhaiya told him what had happened. Uncle was neither angry nor sad. He smiled and patted me. He took me to a shop and bought me a beautiful umbrella, biscuits and sweets and some other little gifts. Then we returned home.

Back home, Uncle told me that the Lucky Shop man had made a fool of me. "No, Uncle," I said, "it was just my bad luck." "No, my boy," said Uncle, "it was neither good luck nor bad luck." "But, Uncle," I said, "I saw an old man getting a clock and a boy getting two or three costly things." "You don't know, child," Uncle said, "they were all friends of the shopkeeper. They were playing tricks to tempt you to try your luck. They wanted your money and they got it. Now forget about it, and don't tell anybody of your bad luck or your foolishness."

-The End-

2. Desert Animals

DESERTS are the driest places on earth and sometimes go for months, or even years, without rain. But even the desert animals cannot survive without water, or for long periods in the scorching sun, so they have had to find different ways of coping with the harsh conditions. For example, gerbils spend the hottest part of the day in cool underground burrows. And strange insects called darkling beetles are experts at catching drops of moisture on their legs, then lifting them into the air until the drops trickle down into their mouths. Not all deserts are endless seas of rolling sand dunes. Some are rocky or pebbly and dotted with small bushes while others are sprinkled with colourful flowers during the spring.

There are more than 2300 different kinds of snakes around the world, ranging from just fifteen centimetres long to more than eleven metres. Most snakes are quite harmless — but there are a few that are so poisonous they can kill a human being with just one bite. Most snakes lay eggs, but there are many which give birth to their young. In the dry, rocky deserts of America lives a rather evil-looking snake with a very bad reputation. Its frightening rattle can be heard as far as thirty metres away, and it can strike with lightning speed.

But the rattlesnake, or 'rattler' as it is sometimes called, prefers to avoid people if it possibly can. It holds its tail upright and rattles the end whenever it is disturbed, in the hope that the intruder will go away. However, if its warnings are ignored—and it feels threatened—it will coil ready to bite. But the rattler itself cannot hear the noise its own tail makes. Like most snakes, it 'hears' things through vibrations in the ground. If a person walks nearby the snake can feel the movement. But if the same person were to shout, it would not hear a thing. Rattlesnakes are very common and widespread animals, living right across the American continent from Canada to Argentina. They feed on a variety of prey, including mice, voles, rats, chipmunks and many other small animals. Rattlesnakes kill their prey with venom. Like all snakes, they swallow the unfortunate animals whole. Few snakes have to eat more than once a week and some, such as the larger pythons, can survive for a year or more without eating.

Mongoose like to hunt together, but they always keep a lookout for dangerous predators nearby. Poking their noses into holes, overturning rocks with their paws and scratching the ground with their sharp claws, banded mongooses are very amusing animals to watch. A common sight in many parts of Africa, they travel in groups of about twenty to forage for beetles, millipedes and other small creatures.

They like to hunt together, keeping in touch whenever they go out of sight behind rocks or bushes by twittering and calling. Always on the lookout for danger — hawks, eagles and large snakes — they warn one another with a special alarm call if they spot anything suspicious.

Mongoose are famous for being able to kill snakes without getting hurt themselves. Their reactions are so fast that they can dodge each time the snake strikes. They continually make a nuisance of themselves until, after a while, when the snake gets tired, they quickly dive in for the kill.

All the female mongooses have their kitten at about the same time. They are raised by the whole group in a den made inside an old termite mound or hollow log. When most of the adults are out looking for food, one or two males stay behind to stand guard until the others return for the night.

Another animal which lives in the desert is the camel. Camels were first domesticated by people many thousands of years ago. In the wild, camels usually live in small groups of up to thirty animals. Camels have long, shaggy winter coats to keep warm and shorter, tidier coats in the summer to keep cool. A thirsty camel can drink as much as thirty gallons of water — that's about five hundred full glasses — in just ten minutes. Normally, however, it gets all the moisture it needs from desert plants and can survive for up to ten months without drinking any water at all.

There are two different kinds of camel. One, known as the Dromedary, has only a single hump; the other is called a Bactrian camel and has two humps. The humps help the animal to survive in the desert, by acting as storage containers. But they don't store water — as many people wrongly believe — they are full of fat. This fat nourishes the camels when food is scarce. If they have nothing to eat for several days, their humps shrink as the fat is used up. There are many other ways in which camels are adapted to desert life. Their mouths are so tough that even the sharp thorn cannot pierce through.