



Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

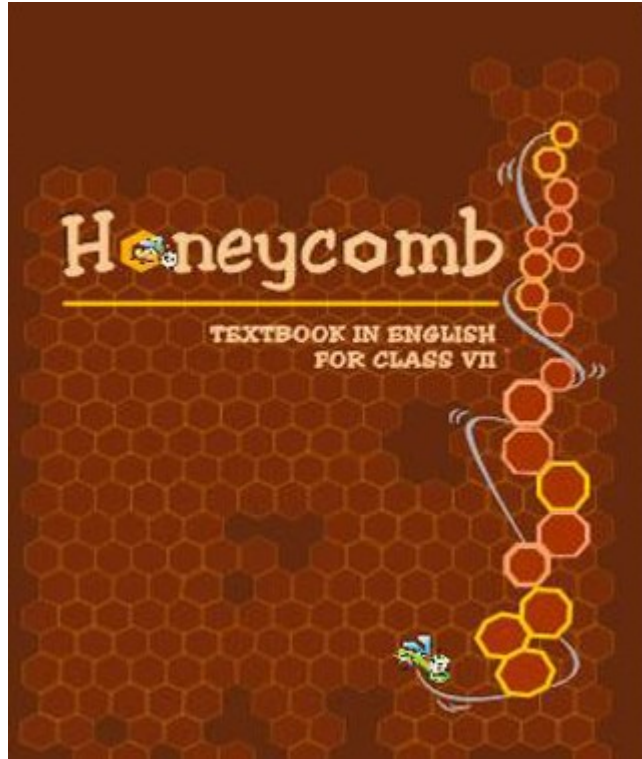
Elementary Plus Level

**Adapted and modified by
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Honeycomb

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH
FOR CLASS VII



1. The Ashes That Made Trees Bloom

By William Elliot Griffis

In the good old days of the daimios, there lived an old couple whose only pet was a little dog. Having no children, they loved it as though it were a baby. The old dame made it a cushion of blue crape, and at mealtime Muko—for that was its name—would sit on it as snug as any cat. The kind people fed the pet with tidbits of fish from their own chopsticks, and all the boiled rice it wanted. Thus treated, the dumb creature loved its protectors like a being with a soul.

The old man, being a rice farmer, went daily with hoe or spade into the fields, working hard from morning until O Tenta Sama (as the sun is called) had gone down behind the hills. Every day the dog followed him to work, never once harming the white heron that walked in the footsteps of the old man to pick up the worms. For the old fellow was patient and kind to everything that had life, and often turned up a sod on purpose to give food to the birds.

One day the dog came running to him, putting his paws against his legs and motioning with his head to some spot behind. The old man at first thought his pet was only playing and did not mind it. But the dog kept on whining and running to and fro for some minutes. Then the old man followed the dog a few yards to a place where the animal began a lively scratching. Thinking it was possibly a buried bone or bit of fish, the old man struck his hoe in the earth, when, lo! A pile of gold gleamed before him.

Thus in an hour the old couple were made rich. The good souls bought a piece of land, made a feast for their friends, and gave plentifully to their poor neighbours. As for the dog, they petted him till they nearly smothered him with kindness.

Now in the same village there lived a wicked old man and his wife, not a bit sensitive and kind, who had always kicked and scolded all dogs whenever any passed their house. Hearing of their neighbours' good luck, they coaxed the dog into their garden and set before him bits of fish and other dainties, hoping he would find treasure for them. But the dog, being afraid of the cruel pair, would neither eat nor move.

Then they dragged him out of doors, taking a spade and hoe with them. No sooner had the dog got near a pine tree growing in the garden than he began to paw and scratch the ground, as if a mighty treasure lay beneath.

“Quick, wife, hand me the spade and hoe!” cried the greedy old fool, as he danced with joy.

Then the covetous old fellow, with a spade, and the old crone, with a hoe, began to dig; but there was nothing but a dead kitten, the smell of which made them drop their tools and shut their noses. Furious at the dog, the old man kicked and beat him to death, and the old woman finished the work by nearly chopping off his head with the sharp hoe. They then flung him into the hole and heaped the earth over his carcass.

The owner of the dog heard of the death of his pet and, mourning for him as if he had been his own child, went at night under the pine tree. He set up some bamboo tubes in the ground, such as are used before tombs, in which he put fresh flowers. Then he laid a cup of water and a tray of food on the grave and burned several costly sticks of incense. He mourned a great while over his pet, calling him many dear names, as if he were alive.

That night the spirit of the dog appeared to him in a dream and said, “Cut down the pine tree over my grave, and make from it a mortar for your rice pastry and a mill for your bean sauce.”

So the old man chopped down the tree and cut out of the middle of the trunk a section about two feet long. With great labour, partly by fire, partly by the chisel, he scraped out a hollow place as big as a small bowl. He then made a long-handled hammer of wood, such as is used for pounding rice. When New Year’s time drew near, he wished to make some rice pastry. When the rice was all boiled, granny put it into the mortar, the old man lifted his hammer to pound the mass into dough, and the blows fell heavy and fast till the pastry was all ready for baking. Suddenly the whole mass turned into a heap of gold coins. When the old woman took the hand-mill, and filling it with beans began to grind, the gold dropped like rain.

Meanwhile the envious neighbour peeped in at the window when the boiled beans were being ground.

“Goody me!” cried the old hag, as she saw each dripping of sauce turning into yellow gold, until in a few minutes the tub under the mill was full of a shining mass of gold.

So the old couple were rich again. The next day the stingy and wicked neighbour came and borrowed the mortar and magic mill. They filled one with boiled rice and the other with beans. Then the old man began to pound and the woman to grind. But at the first blow and turn, the pastry and sauce turned into a foul mass of worms. Still more angry at this, they chopped the mill into pieces, to use as firewood.

Not long after that, the good old man dreamed again, and the spirit of the dog spoke to him, telling him how the wicked people had burned the mill made from the pine tree. "Take the ashes of the mill, sprinkle them on the withered trees, and they will bloom again," said the dog-spirit.

The old man awoke and went at once to his wicked neighbour's house, where he found the miserable old pair sitting at the edge of their square fireplace, in the middle of the floor, smoking and spinning. From time to time they warmed their hands and feet with the blaze from some bits of the mill, while behind them lay a pile of the broken pieces.

The good old man humbly asked for the ashes. Though the covetous couple turned up their noses at him and scolded him as if he were a thief, they let him fill his basket with the ashes.

On coming home, the old man took his wife into the garden. It being winter, their favourite cherry tree was bare. He sprinkled a pinch of ashes on it, and, lo! It sprouted blossoms until it became a cloud of pink blooms which perfumed the air. The news of this filled the village, and everyone ran out to see the wonder.

The covetous couple also heard the story, and, gathering up the remaining ashes of the mill, kept them to make withered trees blossom.

The kind old man, hearing that his lord, the daimio, was to pass along the high road near the village, set out to see him, taking his basket of ashes. As the train approached, he climbed up into an old withered cherry tree that stood by the wayside.

Now, in the days of the daimios, it was the custom, when their lord passed by, for all the loyal people to shut up their high windows. They even pasted them fast with a slip of paper, so as not to commit the impertinence of looking down on his lordship. All the people along the road would fall upon their hands and knees and remain prostrate until the procession passed by.

The train drew near. One tall, competent man marched ahead, crying out to the people by the way, "Get down on your knees! Get down on your knees!" And every one kneeled down while the procession was passing.

Suddenly the leader of the van caught sight of the aged man up in the tree. He was about to call out to him in an angry tone, but, seeing he was such an old fellow, he pretended not to notice him and passed him by. So, when the daimio's palanquin drew near, the old man, taking a pinch of ashes from his basket, scattered it over the tree. In a moment it burst into blossom.

The delighted daimio ordered the train to be stopped and got out to see the wonder. Calling the old man to him, he thanked him and ordered presents of silk robes, sponge-cake, fans and other rewards to be given him. He even invited him to his castle.

So the old man went gleefully home to share his joy with his dear old wife. But when the greedy neighbour heard of it, he took some of the magic ashes and went out on the highway. There he waited until a daimio's train came along and, instead of kneeling down like the crowd, he climbed a withered cherry tree.

When the daimio himself was almost directly under him, he threw a handful of ashes over the tree, which did not change a particle. The wind blew the fine dust in the noses and eyes of the daimio and his wife. Such sneezing and choking! It spoiled all the pomp and dignity of the procession. The man whose business it was to cry, "Get down on your knees," seized the old fool by the collar, dragged him from the tree, and tumbled him and his ash-basket into the ditch by the road. Then, beating him soundly, he left him for dead.

Thus the wicked old man died in the mud, but the kind friend of the dog dwelt in peace and plenty, and both he and his wife lived to a green old age.

2. The Ashes That Made Trees Bloom: Summary

Once there lived a **good old couple** in **Japan** during the nineteenth century. They were **childless** and had a pet dog named **Muko**. Since Muko was their beloved pet, they treated it like a kid and showed more love and care than anything else. One day, while **accompanying** the good old man, Muko spotted a place and **compelled** its master to dig there. When the good old man started digging in the location specified by Muko, he was surprised to find a pile of gold coins buried underneath the ground. Thus, the good old couple become **rich** overnight and the kind-hearted couple **distributed a large portion of their riches** to their **poor neighbours**.

However, there lived a **bad old couple** in the same village who were known for their **wickedness** and **greediness**. When the wicked couple came to know about the good old couple's fortune, they **forced Muko** to find a treasure for themselves as well. Muko was scared of the evil couple and showed a place under a pine tree with a dead kitten buried inside it. This enraged the wicked pair, who killed Muko as a result.

When the good old couple came to know about their pet **dog's death**, they went to its grave and mourned for its loss. On that night, **Muko's spirit** appeared in the good old man's **dream** and asked him to create a mortar and mill out of the pine tree from his grave. The good old couple designed a **mortar and mill** out of the pine tree as **instructed** by Muko and used it to prepare rice pastry and bean sauce during the newyear. Magic happened as the dough mass inside the mortar was transformed into a heap of **gold coins**, and each drop of bean sauce from mill was changed into **gold bits**. The bad old couple secretly noticed the magic from the window and borrowed the magical mortar and mill the next day. Unexpectedly, the magical mortar and mill gave out a foul **mass of worms** for the bad old couple. This arose their anger, and so they **destroyed** and burnt the **mill**.

Muko's spirit **once again** appeared in the good old man's **dream**. It explained the incident and asked him to collect the ashes of the magical mill burnt by the evil couple. Also, it asked him to throw the ashes on the withered cherry tree, assuring that it would bloom. The kind old man **trusted** his **dream** for the second time and performed the tasks as **instructed** by the **dog's spirit**. Magic happened again. The withered tree bloomed with the ashes sprayed.

The good old man came to know about his lord **daimio's arrival** and wanted to greet him. Despite the officer's instruction to kneel down before the procession, the good old man positioned himself on a cherry tree and threw **ashes** on it, which started to **bloom** while the daimio neared the tree. He was pleased to see the old man's magic and **rewarded** him with many **gifts**.

On having learned about the **incident** mentioned above, the wicked old man went near the procession to perform the same magic with the remaining ashes he had collected. Unfortunately, the ashes did not do any magic and, he was **beaten up to death** as he spoiled the **procession** with ash particles. The wicked man **died**. The good old couple **happily lived** long with the wealth gained.

3. Good Deeds and Bad Deeds

Once there lived an old man. He always kept himself busy. One day he was working in the garden when the king past. Seeing an old man planting a fig tree, the king asked why he was doing this. The man replied that he might live to eat the fruit, and, even if he did not, his grandchildren would enjoy the figs.



“Well,” said the king, “if you do live to eat the fruit of this tree, please let me know.” The man promised to do so, and sure enough, before too long, the tree grew and bore fruit.

Packing some fine figs in a basket, the old man set out for the palace to meet the king.

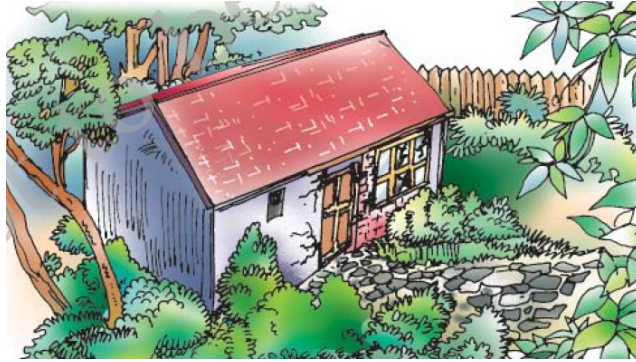
The king accepted the gift and gave orders that the old man’s basket be filled with gold.

Now, next door to the old man, there lived a greedy old man jealous of his neighbour’s good fortune. One night he stole some figs from his neighbour’s garden. He packed them in a basket and took them to the palace in the hope of getting gold.

The king, on learning the man’s motive, ordered him to stand in the compound and had him pelted with figs.

The old man returned home and told his wife the sad story. She consoled him by saying, “You should be thankful that our neighbour did not grow coconuts.”

4. The Shed



There's a dusty old window around at the side
With three cracked panes of glass.
I often think there's someone staring at me
Each time that I pass.
I'll peep through that window one day.

My brother says there's a ghost in the shed
Who hides under the rotten floorboards.
And if I ever dare to set foot inside
He'll jump out and chop off my head.
But I'll take a peek one day.

I know that there isn't really a ghost,
My brother tells lies to keep the shed for his den;
There isn't anyone staring or making strange noises
And the spider has been gone from his web
Since I don't know when,
I'll go into that shed one day soon,

But not just yet...