Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

Adapted and modified by

Kulwant Singh Sandhu.

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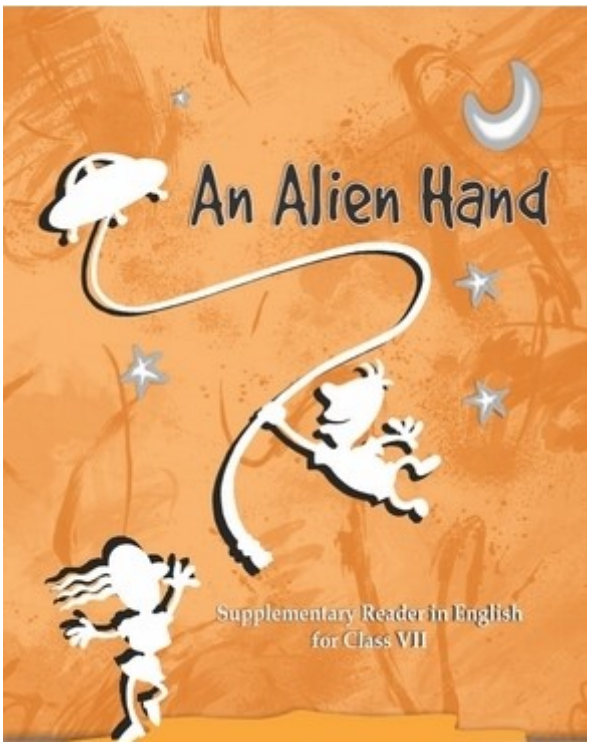
An Alien Hand
Supplementary Reader in English
for Class VII

1. The Tiny Teacher

Name the smallest insect you have seen, and the wisest. Is it the fly? No, it isn't. Is it the mosquito? No, not the mosquito. Then it must be the worm. No, none of these. It is the ant—the commonest, the smallest but the wisest insect. The story of an ant's life sounds almost untrue. But people have kept ants as pets, and have watched their daily behaviour closely. So we know a number of facts about this tiny, hard-working and intelligent creature.

An ant uses its feelers or antennae to 'talk' to other ants by passing messages through them. Watch a row of ants moving up or down the wall. Each ant greets all the others coming from the opposite direction by touching their feelers.

There are many kinds of ants. The commonest among them are the black or red ones. We have seen them since we were children, but haven't paid enough attention to them. Where do they live? In their comfortable homes called 'nests' or 'anthills'. Each has hundreds of little rooms and passages. In some of these rooms the queen ant lays eggs. Others are nurseries for the young ones (called 'grubs'). Workers have their reserved quarters. They spend most of their time searching for food. Some rooms serve as storehouses for this food. Soldiers have separate barracks. No worker has ever tried to live in a soldier's house; no soldier has ever gone out searching for food. No worker or soldier or cleaner has ever harmed a grub. So you see, an ant's life is very peaceful. Each does its share of work intelligently and bravely, and never fights with other members of the group.

The queen is the mother of the entire population of the colony. It lives for about fifteen years. It has a pair of wings, but bites them off after its 'wedding' flight. This flight takes place on a hot summer day. The queen leaves the nest and goes out to meet a male ant, or drone, high up in the air. On its return to earth, it gets rid of its wings and then does nothing but lay eggs.

Eggs hatch and grubs come out. Soldiers guard them. Workers feed and clean them, and also carry them about daily for airing, exercise and sunshine. Two or three weeks later, grubs become cocoons and lie without food or activity for three weeks more. Then the cocoons break and perfect ants appear. Now it's time for teaching and training. New ants learn their duties from old ants as workers, soldiers, builders, cleaners, etc. After a few weeks' training, the small ants are ready to go out into the big world of work.

An anthill is a home not only for ants but also for some other creatures— beetles, lesser breeds of ants and the greenfly. Why do ants want these alien creatures to live in their nests? For several reasons: some give off smell pleasant to the ants' senses; others give sweet juices; and some are just pets or playthings like cats and dogs to human beings. The greenfly is the ants' cow.

The ants train it to give honeydew (like milk) with a touch of their antennae. They milk it just as we milk the cow. Have humans learned as much as ants have? Perhaps they have, but they haven't put their learning to good use. They may still learn a few things from this tiny teacher— hard work, sense of duty and discipline, cleanliness, care for the young ones, and, above all, a firm loyalty to the land where they live.

2. Bringing up Kari

Kari, the elephant, was five months old when he was given to me to take care of. I was nine years old and I could reach his back if I stood on tiptoe. He seemed to remain that high for nearly two years. We grew together; that is probably why I never found out just how tall he was. He lived in a pavilion, under a thatched roof which rested on thick tree stumps so that it could not fall in when Kari bumped against the poles as he moved about.

One of the first things Kari did was to save the life of a boy. Kari did not eat much but he nevertheless needed forty pounds of twigs a day to chew and play with. Every day I used to take him to the river in the morning for his bath. He would lie down on the sand bank while I rubbed him with the clean sand of the river for an hour. After that he would lie in the water for a long time. On coming out his skin would be shining like ebony, and he would squeal with pleasure as I rubbed water down his back. Then I would take him by the ear, because that is the easiest way to lead an elephant, and leave him on the edge of the jungle while I went into the forest to get some luscious twigs for his dinner. One has to have a very sharp hatchet to cut down these twigs; it takes half an hour to sharpen the hatchet because if a twig is mutilated an elephant will not touch it.

It was not an easy job to get twigs and saplings for Kari. I had to climb all kinds of trees to get the most delicate and tender twigs. As he was very fond of the young branches of the banyan tree which grows like a cathedral of leaves and branches, I was gathering some, one spring day in March, when I suddenly heard Kari calling to me in the distance. As he was still very young, the call was more like that of a baby than an elephant. I thought somebody was hurting him, so I came down from my tree and ran very fast to the edge of the forest where I had left him, but he was not there.

I looked all over, but I could not find him.

I went near the edge of the water, and I saw a black something struggling above its surface. Then it rose higher and it was the trunk of my elephant. I thought he was drowning. I was helpless because I could not jump into the water and save the four hundred pounds of him since he was much higher than I. But I saw his back rise above the water and the moment he caught my eye, he began to trumpet and struggle up to the shore. Then, still trumpeting, he pushed me into the water and, as I fell into the stream, I saw a boy lying flat on the bottom of the river. He had not altogether touched bottom but was somewhat afloat. I came to the surface of the water to take my breath and

there Kari was standing, his feet planted in the sand bank and his trunk stretched out like a hand waiting for mine. I dived down again and pulled the body of the drowning boy to the surface but, not being a good swimmer, I could not swim ashore and the slow current was already dragging me down. Seeing us drift by in the current, Kari, who was usually slow and ponderous, suddenly darted down like a hawk and came halfway into the water where I saw him stretch out his trunk again. I raised up my hand to catch it and it slipped. I found myself going under the water again, but this time I found that the water was not very deep so I sank to the bottom of the river and doubled my feet under me and then suddenly kicked the river bed and so shot upwards like an arrow, in spite of the fact that I was holding the drowning boy with my hand. As my body rose above the water, I felt a lasso around my neck. This frightened me; I thought some water animal was going to swallow me. I heard Kari squealing, and I knew it was his trunk about my neck. He pulled us both ashore.

Kari was like a baby. He had to be trained to be good and if you did not tell him when he was naughty, he was up to more mischief than ever.

For instance, one day, somebody gave him some bananas to eat. Very soon he developed a great love for ripe bananas. We used to keep large plates of fruit on a table near a window in the dining-room. One day all the bananas on that table disappeared and my family blamed the servants for eating all the fruit in the house. A few days later the fruit disappeared again; this time the blame was put on me, and I knew I had not done it. It made me very angry with my parents and the servants, for I was sure they had taken all the fruit. The next time the fruit disappeared, I found a banana all smashed up in Kari's pavilion. This surprised me very much, for I had never seen fruit there and, as you know, he had always lived on twigs. Next day, while I was sitting in the dining-room wondering whether I should take some fruit from the table without my parents' permission, a long, black thing, very much like a snake, suddenly came through the window and disappeared with all the bananas. I was very much frightened because I had never seen snakes eat bananas and I thought it must be a terrible snake that would sneak in and take fruit. I crept out of the room and with great fear in my heart ran out of the house, feeling sure that the snake would come back into the house, eat all the fruit and kill all of us.

As I went out, I saw Kari's back disappearing in the direction of the pavilion and I was so frightened that I wanted his company to cheer me up. I ran after him into the pavilion and I found him there eating bananas. I stood still in astonishment; the bananas were lying strewn all around him. He stretched out his trunk and reached for one far away from where he was standing. That

instant the trunk looked like a black snake, and I realised that Kari was the thief. I went to him, pulled him out by the ear and joyously showed my parents that it was Kari and not I that had eaten all the fruit these many weeks. Then I scolded him, for elephants understand words as well as children, and I said to him, “Next time I see you stealing fruit, you will be whipped.” He knew that we were all angry with him, even the servants. His pride was so injured that he never stole another thing from the dining-room. And from then on, if anybody gave him any fruit, he always squealed as if to thank them.

An elephant is willing to be punished for having done wrong, but if you punish him without any reason, he will remember it and pay you back in your own coin.

An elephant must be taught when to sit down, when to walk, when to go fast, and when to go slow. You teach him these things as you teach a child. If you say ‘Dhat’ and pull him by the ear, he will gradually learn to sit down. Similarly, if you say ‘Mali’ and pull his trunk forward, he will gradually learn that it is the signal to walk.

Kari learned ‘Mali’ after three lessons, but it took him three weeks to learn ‘Dhat’. He was no good at sitting down. And do you know why an elephant should be taught to sit down? Because he grows taller and taller than you who take care of him, so that when he is two or three years old, you can only reach his back with a ladder. It is, therefore, better to teach him to sit down by saying ‘Dhat’ so that you can climb upon his back, for who would want to carry a ladder around all the time?

The most difficult thing to teach an elephant is the master call. He generally takes five years to learn it properly. The master call is a strange hissing, howling sound, as if a snake and a tiger were fighting each other, and you have to make that kind of noise in his ear. And do you know what you expect an elephant to do when you give him the master call? If you are lost in the jungle and there is no way out, and everything is black except the stars above, you dare not stay very long anywhere. The only thing to do then is to give the master call and at once the elephant pulls down the tree in front of him with his trunk. This frightens all the animals away. As the tree comes crashing down, monkeys wake from their sleep and run from branch to branch— you can see them in the moonlight—and you can almost see the stags running in all directions below. You can hear the growl of the tiger in the distance. Even he is frightened. Then the elephant pulls down the next tree and the next, and the next. Soon you will find that he has made a road right through the jungle straight to your house.