



Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

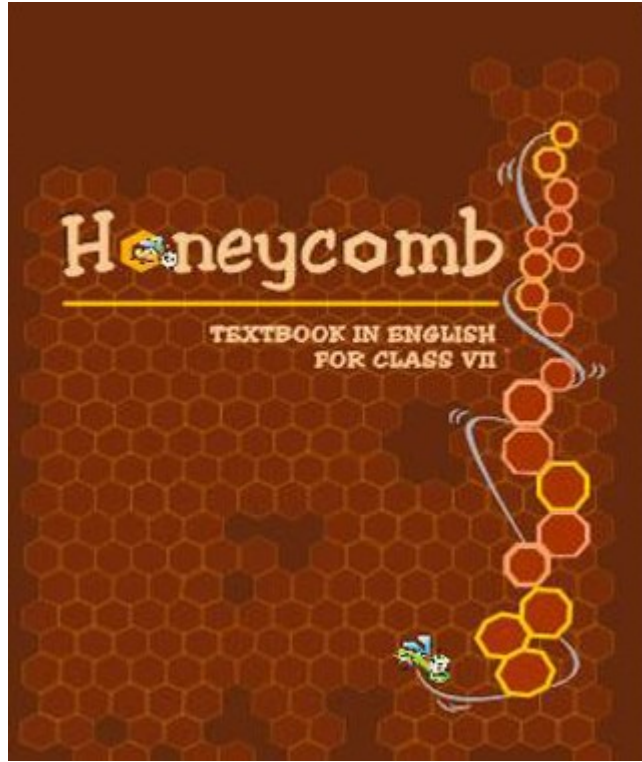
Elementary Plus Level

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# Honeycomb

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH  
FOR CLASS VII



# 1. Quality

By John Galsworthy

I knew him from the days of my extreme youth, because he made my father's boots. He lived with his elder brother in his shop, which was in a small by-street in a fashionable part of London.

The shop had a certain quiet distinction. There was no sign upon it other than the name of Gessler Brothers; and in the window a few pairs of boots. He made only what was ordered, and what he made never failed to fit. To make boots—such boots as he made—seemed to me then, and still seems to me, mysterious and wonderful.

I remember well my shy remarks, one day, while stretching out to him my youthful foot. "Isn't it awfully hard to do, Mr Gessler?" And his answer, given with a sudden smile from out of the redness of his beard: "*It is an art!*"

It was not possible to go to him very often— his boots lasted terribly, having something beyond the temporary, some essence of boot stitched into them.

One went in, not as into most shops, but restfully, as one enters a church, and sitting on the single wooden chair, waited. A guttural sound, and the tip-tap of his slippers beating the narrow wooden stairs and he would stand before one without coat, a little bent, in leather apron, with sleeves turned back, blinking — as if awakened from some dream of boots.

And I would say, "How do you do, Mr Gessler? Could you make me a pair of Russian-leather boots?"

Without a word he would leave me retiring whence he came, or into the other portion of the shop, and I would continue to rest in the wooden chair inhaling the incense of his trade. Soon he would come back, holding in his hand a piece of gold-brown leather. With eyes fixed on it he would remark, "What a beautiful piece!" When I too had admired it, he would speak again. "When do you want them?" And I would answer, "Oh! As soon as you conveniently can." And he would say, "Tomorrow fortnight?" Or if he were his elder brother: "I will ask my brother."

Then I would murmur, "Thank you! Good morning, Mr Gessler." "Good morning" he would reply, still looking at the leather in his hand. And as I moved to the door, I would hear the tip-tap of his slippers going up the stairs: to his dream of boots.

I cannot forget that day on which I had occasion to say to him, "Mr Gessler, that last pair of boots creaked, you know."

He looked at me for a time without replying, as if expecting me to withdraw or qualify the statement, then said, "It shouldn't have creaked."

"It did, I'm afraid."

"You got them wet before they found themselves."

"I don't think so."

"At that he lowered his eyes, as if hunting for memory of those boots and I felt sorry I had mentioned this grave thing. "Send them back," he said, "I will look at them."

"Some boots," he continued slowly, "are bad from birth. If I can do nothing with them I take them off your bill."

Once (once only) I went absent-mindedly into his shop in a pair of boots bought in an emergency at some large firm. He took my order without showing me any leather and I could feel his eyes penetrating the inferior covering of my foot. At last he said, "Those are not my boots."

The tone was not one of anger, nor of sorrow, not even of contempt, but there was in it something quiet that froze the blood. He put his hand down and pressed a finger on the place where the left boot was not quite comfortable.

"It hurts you there," he said, "Those big firms have no self-respect." And then, as if something had given way within him, he spoke long and bitterly. It was the only time I ever heard him discuss the conditions and hardships of his trade.

"They get it all," he said, "they get it by advertisement, not by work. They take it away from us, who love our boots. It comes to this — presently I have no work. Every year it gets less. You will see." And looking at his lined face I saw things I had never noticed before, bitter things and bitter struggle and what a lot of grey hairs there seemed suddenly in his red beard!

As best I could, I explained the circumstances of those ill-omened boots. But his face and voice made so deep an impression that during the next few minutes I ordered many pairs. They lasted longer than ever. And I was not able to go to him for nearly two years.

It was many months before my next visit to his shop. This time it appeared to be his elder brother, handling a piece of leather.

“Well, Mr Gessler,” I said, “how are you?” He came close, and peered at me. “I am pretty well,” he said slowly “but my elder brother is dead.”

And I saw that it was indeed himself but how aged and wan! And never before had I heard him mention his brother. Much shocked, I murmured, “Oh! I am sorry!”

“Yes,” he answered, “he was a good man, he made a good boot. But he is dead.” And he touched the top of his head, where the hair had suddenly gone as thin as it had been on that of his poor brother, to indicate, I suppose, the cause of his death. “Do you want any boots?” And he held up the leather in his hand. “It’s a beautiful piece.”

I ordered several pairs. It was very long before they came—but they were better than ever. One simply could not wear them out. And soon after that I went abroad.

It was over a year before I was again in London. And the first shop I went to was my old friend’s. I had left a man of sixty; I came back to one of seventy-five, pinched and worn, who genuinely, this time, did not at first know me.

“Do you want any boots?” he said. “I can make them quickly; it is a slack time.”

I answered, “Please, please! I want boots all around—every kind.”

I had given those boots up when one evening they came. One by one I tried them on. In shape and fit, in finish and quality of leather they were the best he had ever made. I flew downstairs, wrote a cheque and posted it at once with my own hand.

A week later, passing the little street, I thought I would go in and tell him how splendidly the new boots fitted. But when I came to where his shop had been, his name was gone.

I went in very much disturbed. In the shop, there was a young man with an English face.

“Mr Gessler in?” I said.

“No, sir,” he said. “No, but we can attend to anything with pleasure. We’ve taken the shop over.”

“Yes. yes,” I said, “but Mr Gessler?”

“Oh!” he answered, “dead.”

“Dead! But I only received these boots from him last Wednesday week.”

“Ah!” he said, “poor old man starved himself. Slow starvation, the doctor called it! You see he went to work in such a way! Would keep the shop on; wouldn’t have a soul touch his boots except himself. When he got an order, it took him such a time. People won’t wait. He lost everybody. And there he’d sit, going on and on. I will say that for him—not a man in London made a better boot. But look at the competition! He never advertised! Would have the best leather too, and do it all himself. Well, there it is. What could you expect with his ideas?”

“But starvation!”

“That may be a bit flowery, as the saying is— but I know myself he was sitting over his boots day and night, to the very last you see, I used to watch him. Never gave himself time to eat; never had a penny in the house. All went in rent and leather. How he lived so long I don’t know. He regularly let his fire go out. He was a character. But he made good boots.”

“Yes,” I said, “he made good boots.”

## 2. Trees

Trees are for birds.

Trees are for children.

Trees are to make tree houses in.

Trees are to swing swings on.

Trees are for the wind to blow through.

Trees are to hide behind in 'Hide and Seek.'

Trees are to have tea parties under.

Trees are for kites to get caught in.

Trees are to make cool shade in summer.

Trees are to make no shade in winter.

Trees are for apples to grow on, and pears;

Trees are to chop down and call, "TIMBER-R-R!"

Trees make mothers say,

"What a lovely picture to paint!"

Trees make fathers say,

"What a lot of leaves to rake this fall!"

### 3. My Uncle Jhalla

Last month, my aunt received a letter from her parents. She opened the letter and read it. Her mother was ill. So she decided to visit her straightway. As she left the house in a hurry, there was no food for my uncle.

My uncle can cook but he is quite absent-minded. He washed the carrots and sliced them into pieces. Then he fried spices and put the carrot pieces into the pan. Then he went to the shed to clean his bicycle. He cleaned the bicycle with a machine oil. Uncle was happy. The bike looked really shiny.

The neighbours smelled something burning and told my uncle so. My uncle rushed to the kitchen. He turned off the stove and put the pan in the sink. By doing all this, he put the oil marks everywhere in the kitchen.

With an empty stomach, he cleaned the kitchen, but instead of a kitchen cloth, he used one of the aunt's shawls.

My aunt came back in the evening. She was happy because her mum was okay. But when she saw her shawl, she was.....