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A2 Stories

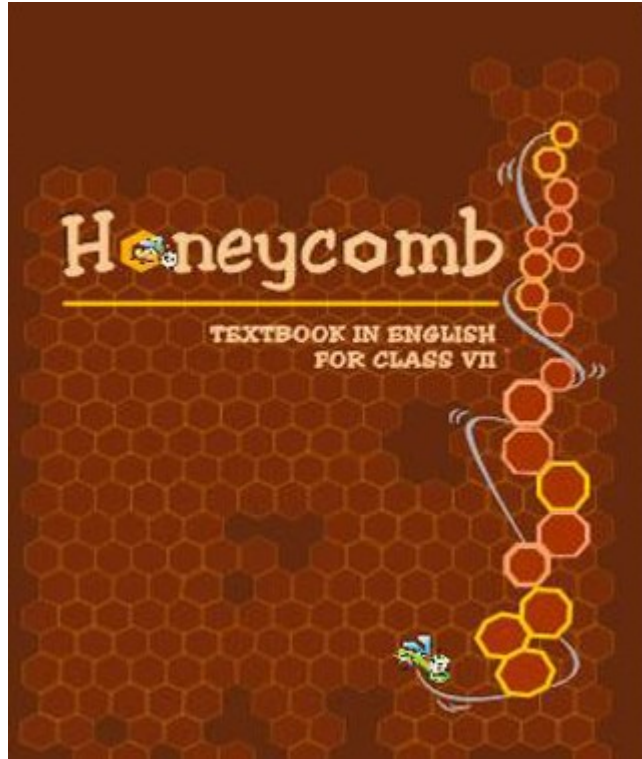
Elementary Plus Level

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# Honeycomb

TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH  
FOR CLASS VII



## Expert Detectives

As we walked back towards the clinic Seven said, “He doesn’t look anything like a monster, Maya. But did you see how thin he is? Maybe he’s very poor and can’t afford to eat.”

“He can’t be poor if he’s a crook on the run,” I told him. “He’s probably got millions of rupees stashed away somewhere in that room.”

“Do you really think he’s a criminal, Maya? He doesn’t look like one,” Nishad looked doubtful.

“Of course he’s one, Seven,” I said, “and he certainly isn’t starving. Mr Mehta told us that Ramesh brings his meals up from the restaurant downstairs.”

“But Maya, Mr Mehta told us he doesn’t work anywhere, so how can he possibly have money to pay for food?” Nishad said.

“Exactly!” I exclaimed. “He must have lots of money hidden somewhere, maybe in that trunk in his room. It’s probably full of silver and gold and jewels and...”

“What rubbish,” Nishad interrupted.

“I know I’m right, stupid,” I told him. “By the way, Seven, did you see his scars? I couldn’t, it was too dark, but I bet he got them during a shootout with the police or something.”

“Mummy told us quite clearly they were burn scars,” Nishad said firmly.

“Perhaps the police had to set his house on fire to force him out,” I suggested. Seven looked unsure.

On the Monday following Mamma’s birthday, Seven went alone with her to the clinic at Girgaum as I was spending the evening with a school-friend. When they returned, Nishad told me he’d been to see Mr Nath and I felt most annoyed that I hadn’t been there.

Seven had been quite upset about Mr Nath’s gaunt appearance and was sure that he was starving. He told me that he had knocked loudly on Mr Nath’s door that evening and said, “Open the door quickly, Mr Nath.”

The man had opened it and asked him, “Lost another marble?”

He had obviously recognised my brother.

“No,” said Nishad. He had taken the man’s hand in his own, and thrust a bar of chocolate into it.

“Did you get a chance to peek into the trunk, Seven?” I asked.

Nishad looked disappointed. “He didn’t even ask me in,” he said. Then he smiled. “But I did find out something, Maya. I went down to the restaurant where Ramesh works and talked to him.”

“Good for you, Mr Detective,” I said, patting him on the back, “I hope you questioned him properly.”

Seven looked pleased. “Ramesh told me that he takes two meals for Mr Nath every morning and evening, and two cups of tea, one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Ramesh says he’s not very particular about what he eats, it’s always the same food — two chapattis, some dal and a vegetable. Mr Nath pays cash and tips well.

“Ramesh told me something very strange, Maya,” Seven added. “Almost every Sunday, he carries two lunches to Mr Nath’s room and the same man is with him each time. He’s tall, fair, stout and wears spectacles. Ramesh says his visitor talks a lot, unlike Mr Nath who hardly speaks.”

“Well done, Nishad,” I told him. “Now that we’ve made some progress with our inquiries, we’ll have to sort out all the facts like expert detectives so that we can trap the crook.”

“How you do go on, Maya,” Seven sighed. “How can you possibly imagine he’s a crook? He looks so ordinary!”

“Criminals can look quite ordinary, smarty,” I retorted. “Did you see the picture of the Hyderabad housebreaker in the papers yesterday? He looked like any man on the street.” Nishad looked doubtful.

The monsoons broke the next day. Dark clouds accompanied by blinding flashes of lightning and roaring rolls of thunder burst with all their fury, flooding the streets with a heavy downpour. School was to have reopened after the summer holidays, but no traffic could move through the flooded roads and there was an unexpected holiday.

I thought I’d spend the time usefully. I sat at my desk in our bedroom with a sheet of paper before me.

I wrote in large block letters:

## **CATCHING A CROOK**

**Expert Detectives: Nishad and Maya Pandit**

**By Appointment to the Whole World**

Then I began writing. About half an hour later, I turned towards Seven who was lying on his tummy, chin cupped in his palms, reading comics. "Want to hear what I've written?" I asked.

He looked up questioningly. "I've listed all the facts we know about Mr Nath which might help us to trap him," I said. "Want to hear?"

Seven nodded.

"Fact Number 1," I read, "his name is Mr Nath. We must discover his first name."

"Do you think that's his real name, Maya?" Nishad asked.

"Probably not," I said. "Most crooks have an alias." I added a big question mark after Nath.

"Fact Number 2," I read on, "the tenants at Shankar House say he's mad, strange and unfriendly.

"Number 3, he doesn't talk to anyone and is mannerless."

"But he did talk to us, Maya, and Mamma says he's very polite," Nishad interrupted.

"He only talked to us because he had to," I said, "and since he was under Mamma's medical treatment, he had to be polite.

"Fact number 4, he doesn't receive any letters." Seven nodded.

"Number 5, he's been living in Room 10 of Shankar House for more than a year," I continued.

"Number 6, he doesn't work and sits in his room all day.

“Number 7, the kids in Shankar House and even some of the grown-ups are scared of him.

“Number 8, he has no visitors except for a spectacled, fair, fat man who visits him on Sundays for lunch.

“Number 9, food and tea are taken to his room by Ramesh from the restaurant downstairs. He doesn’t care what he eats, pays his bill immediately and tips well. That ends my list. Have I forgotten anything, Seven?”

Nishad had obviously not been paying too much attention to my list of facts. All he could say was, “Poor man, Maya, he must be so lonely if he doesn’t have any friends.”

“How can a crook have friends, idiot?” I almost shouted.

“At least he has one friend, the one who meets him on Sundays,” said Nishad.

A brilliant thought occurred to me just then. “That man must be Mr Nath’s accomplice in crime,” I said. “Maybe he keeps all the loot and he comes now and then to give part of it to his partner, Mr Nath, for expenses. That’s it! I’m sure I’m right.”

“If you insist on calling him a criminal, I don’t think I want to discuss anything with you, Maya,” said Nishad angrily. “He can’t be such a bad man if he gives Ramesh such generous tips.”

“Ramesh probably knows something about his past, so Mr Nath must be bribing him to keep quiet,” I said.

Nishad glared at me with his arms tightly crossed across his chest. I was beginning to get fed up with him.

“How can we make any progress with our investigations if you take that attitude, Seven?” I asked.

“I’ll cooperate only if you give up this idea about him being an escaped crook,” said Seven.

“You really make me angry.”

I almost hit him. “I make you angry, you stupid oaf,” I shouted. “You make me mad! What is the point of all these enquiries if he’s not a crook? If you think he’s a nobody, what’s the idea of bothering about him, please tell me?”

Nishad looked thoughtful. "I'd like to find out why he's so thin and why he's so lonely. I want to know why he doesn't have any friends and lives alone."

"Try to understand, Seven," I told him, "if he's lived in Shankar House for a year and hasn't made a single friend, there's something wrong. He's obviously scared that someone will recognise him and give him up to the cops." "Maybe no one's tried to make friends with him," Nishad protested.

"Why should anyone bother? You've seen what a nasty bear he is," I said.

"I don't care," said Nishad stubbornly, "I like him and I'm going to try and be his friend."

"Friends with a crook! Ha! You're crazy, Seven," I said. "The cops will take you to jail with him. Do you want that to happen, you idiot?"

Nishad merely glared at me and quietly walked out of the room. My theories seemed to have made no impression on him at all.