Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

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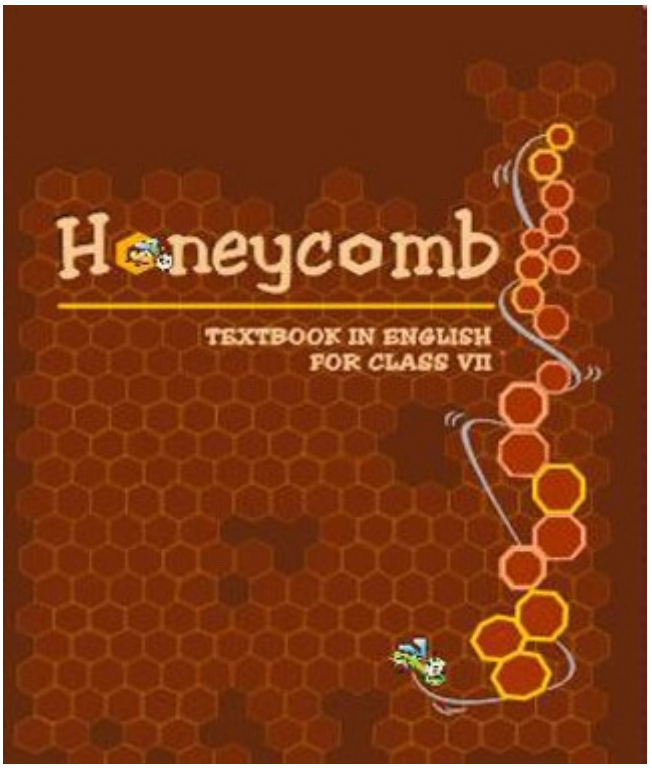
Honeycomb
TEXTBOOK IN ENGLISH
FOR CLASS VII

1. The Invention of Vita-Wonk

Mr Willy Wonka begins by inventing Wonka Vite, which makes people younger. But Wonka Vite is too strong. So some people disappear, because their age becomes Minus! One person actually becomes minus eighty-seven, which means he's got to wait eighty-seven years before he can come back. Mr Willy Wonka must invent a new thing...

Mr Wonka said, "So once again I rolled up my sleeves and set to work. Once again I squeezed my brain, searching for the new recipe... I had to create age... to make people old... old, older, oldest... 'Ha-ha!' I cried, for now the ideas were beginning to come. 'What is the oldest living thing in the world? What lives longer than anything else?' "

A tree," Charlie said.

"Right you are, Charlie! But what kind of a tree? Not the Douglas fir. Not the oak. Not the cedar. No, no, my boy. It is a tree called the Bristlecone pine that grows upon the slopes of Wheeler Peak in Nevada, U.S.A. You can find Bristlecone Pines on Wheeler Peak today that are over 4000 years old! This is fact, Charlie. Ask any dendrochronologist you like (and look that word up in the dictionary when you get home, will you please?). So that started me off. I jumped into the Great Glass Elevator and rushed all over the world collecting special items from the oldest living things...

* A PINT OF SAP FROM A 4000-YEAR-OLD BRISTLECONE PINE

* THE TOE-NAIL CLIPPINGS FROM A 168-YEAR-OLD RUSSIAN FARMER CALLED PETROVITCH GREGOROVITCH

* AN EGG LAID BY A 200-YEAR-OLD TORTOISE BELONGING TO THE KING OF TONGA l THE TAIL OF A 51-YEAR-OLD HORSE IN ARABIA

* THE WHISKERS OF A 36-YEAR-OLD CAT CALLED CRUMPETS l AN OLD FLEA WHICH HAD LIVED ON CRUMPETS FOR 36 YEARS

* THE TAIL OF A 207-YEAR-OLD GIANT RAT FROM TIBET l THE BLACK TEETH OF A 97-YEAR-OLD GRIMALKIN LIVING IN A CAVE ON MOUNT POPOCATEPETL

* THE KNUCKLEBONES OF A 700-YEAR-OLD CATTALOO FROM PERU..."

“All over the world, Charlie,” Mr Wonka went on “I tracked down very old and ancient animals and took an important little bit of something from each one of them — a hair or an eyebrow or sometimes it was no more than an ounce or two of the jam scraped from between its toes while it was sleeping. I tracked down THE WHISTLE-PIG, THE BOBOLINK, THE SKROCK, THE POLLYFROG, THE GIANT CURLICUE, THE STINGING SLUG AND THE VENOMOUS SQUERKLE who can spit poison right into your eye from fifty yards away. But there’s no time to tell you about them all now, Charlie. Let me just say quickly that in the end, after lots of boiling and bubbling and mixing and testing in my Inventing Room, I produced one tiny cupful of oily black liquid and gave four drops of it to a brave twenty-year-old Oompa-Loompa volunteer to see what happened.”

“What did happen?” Charlie asked.

“It was fantastic!” cried Mr Wonka. “The moment he swallowed it, he began wrinkling and shrivelling up all over and his hair started dropping off and his teeth started falling out and, before I knew it, he had suddenly become an old fellow of seventy-five! And thus, my dear Charlie, was Vita-Wonk invented!”

2. Dad and the cat and the Tree

This morning a cat got
Stuck in our tree.
Dad said, “Right, just
Leave it to me.

The tree was wobbly,
The tree was tall.
Mum said, “For goodness’
Sake don’t fall!

“Fall?” scoffed Dad,
“A climber like me?
Child’s play, this is!
You wait and see.”

He got out the ladder
From the garden shed.
It slipped. He landed
In the flower bed.

“Never mind,” said Dad,
Brushing the dirt
Off his hair and his face
And his trousers and his shirt.

“We’ll try Plan B. Stand
Out of the way!”
Mum said, “Don’t fall
Again, O.K.?”

“Fall again?” said Dad.
“Funny joke!”
Then he swung himself up
On a branch. It broke.

Dad landed wallop
Back on the deck.
Mum said, “Stop it,
You’ll break your neck!

“Rubbish!” said Dad.
“Now we’ll try Plan C.
Easy as winking
To a climber like me!”

Then he climbed up high
On the garden wall.
Guess what?
He didn’t fall!

He gave a great leap
And he landed flat
In the crook of the tree-trunk —
Right on the cat!

The cat gave a yell
And sprang to the ground,
Pleased as Punch to be
Safe and sound.

So it's smiling and smirking,
Smug as can be,
But poor old Dad's
Still
Stuck
Up
The
Tree!

By KIT WRIGHT.

3. Fire: Friend and Foe

Early man didn't know what fire was, but he must have seen the damage it could cause. He must have watched lightning and volcanoes long before he began to use fire himself. Fire was powerful and dangerous, and he was frightened.

Fire may have puzzled early man but we now know that fire is the result of a chemical reaction. When the oxygen in the air combines with carbon and hydrogen in a fuel, a chemical reaction takes place. Energy in the form of heat and light is released in this process. This is what we call fire.

Three things are needed to make fire— fuel, oxygen and heat. Wood, coal, cooking gas and petrol are some examples of fuel. Oxygen comes from the air. That is why, when you blow on smouldering paper, it often bursts into flame. The third thing needed to make fire is heat. Fuel and oxygen do not make fire by themselves, or else a newspaper or a stick lying in the open would catch fire on its own. To burn a piece of paper or wood, we heat it before it catches fire. We generally do it with a lighted match. Every fuel has a particular temperature at which it begins to burn. This temperature is called the 'flash point' or 'kindling temperature' of the fuel.

It is sometimes said that fire is a good servant but a bad master. It only means that fire is very useful as long as it is kept under control. For instance, we use it to cook our food, warm our homes in winter and to generate electricity. But, on the other hand, if fire gets out of control it can be very dangerous. Each year thousands of homes and shops are damaged by fire. Vast areas of forest are also destroyed and hundreds of people are killed or injured.

Just as three things are needed to start a fire, there are three main ways in which a fire can be put out. In each, one of the three things needed for burning is taken away.

For example, we can take away the fuel. If the fire has no fuel to feed on, no burning can take place. We often let a fire die out simply by not adding more fuel to it.

The second way of putting out a fire is to prevent oxygen from reaching it. No supply of oxygen means no fire. Small fires can be put out or 'smothered' with a damp blanket or a sack. This stops oxygen reaching the burning material. Sometimes, carbon dioxide is used to extinguish fire. It does not allow oxygen to reach the burning material.

The third way of putting out a fire is to remove the heat. If the temperature can be brought down below the flash point, the fuel stops burning. You blow on a burning matchstick or a candle to put it out. In doing so, you remove the hot air around the flame bringing down its temperature below the flash point, and the candle goes out. Sometimes, water is sprayed on a fire. It absorbs heat from the burning fuel and lowers the temperature. The blanket of water also cuts off the supply of oxygen, and the fire is extinguished.

Some fires cannot be put out with water. If water is sprayed onto an oil fire, the oil will float to the top of the water and continue to burn. This can be very dangerous because water can flow quickly, carrying the burning oil with it and spreading the fire. Water should also not be used on fires caused by electrical appliances. The person spraying water might receive an electric shock and be killed. A carbon dioxide extinguisher is the best thing to fight an electrical fire.

We spend millions of rupees each year in fighting fires. And we spend more trying to find new ways of preventing fires from happening and getting out of control. On the whole, we have learnt rather well to control fire and put it to good use in our everyday life.

Long ago, there were no firemen. When fire broke out, everybody became a firefighter. People formed human chains (they still do if required) and passed buckets of water from a well or a pond to the blaze. Now there are laws about building construction which ensure that space is left between buildings to reduce the fire risk. Every new building, especially a public place, must ensure observance of fire prevention norms. Bands of firefighting workers with special equipment, known as fire brigades, are there to put out fires. Firefighters are highly trained people. They possess many skills. They cut off electricity supply, knock down dangerous walls, spray water and other materials to bring fire under control. They are also trained in first aid so that they can help people suffering from burns or from the effects of smoke.

The discovery of fire and its uses helped early man to cope with nature better and gradually adopt a settled mode of life. Fire is still worshipped in many parts of the world. Fire is indeed a friend but, as we know, it can be a dangerous enemy once it gets out of control.

4. Meadow Surprises

Meadows have surprises,
You can find them if you look;
Walk softly through the velvet grass,
And listen by the brook.

You may see a butterfly
Rest upon a buttercup
And unfold its drinking straws
To sip the nectar up.

You may scare a rabbit
Who is sitting very still;
Though at first you may not see him,
When he hops you will.

A dandelion whose fuzzy head
Was golden days ago
Has turned to airy parachutes
That flutter when you blow.

Explore the meadow houses,
The burrows in the ground,
A nest beneath tall grasses,
The ant's amazing mound.

Oh! Meadows have surprises
And many things to tell;
You may discover these yourself,
If you look and listen well.

5. Busy World

Bees are buzzing, frogs are hopping,
Moles are digging. There's no stopping
Vines from climbing, grass from growing,
Birds from singing, winds from blowing,
Buds from blooming. Bees are humming,
Sunbeams dancing, raindrops drumming.
All the world is whirling, dizzy,
Summertime is very busy!

6. A Bicycle in Good Repair

A man I knew proposed one evening we should go for a long bicycle ride together on the following day, and I agreed. I got up early, for me; I made an effort, and was pleased with myself. He came half an hour late; I was waiting for him in the garden. It was a lovely day. He said, “That’s a good-looking machine of yours. How does it run?”

“Oh, like most of them!” I answered; “easily enough in the morning; goes a little stiffly after lunch.”

He caught hold of it by the front wheel and the fork, and shook it violently.

I said, “Don’t do that; you’ll hurt it.”

I did not see why he should shake it; it had not done anything to him. Besides, if it wanted shaking, I was the proper person to shake it. I felt much as I should had he started whacking my dog.

He said, “This front wheel wobbles.”

I said, “It doesn’t if you don’t wobble it.” It didn’t wobble, as a matter of fact—nothing worth calling a wobble.

He said, “This is dangerous; have you got a hammer?” I ought to have been firm, but I thought that perhaps he really did know something about the business. I went to the tool shed to see what I could find. When I came back he was sitting on the ground with the front wheel between his legs. He was playing with it, twiddling it round between his fingers; the remnant of the machine was lying on the gravel path beside him.

He said, “It looks to me as if the bearings were all wrong.”

I said, “Don’t you trouble about it anymore; you will make yourself tired. Let us put it back and get off.”

He said, “We may as well see what is the matter with it, now it is out.” He talked as though it had dropped out by accident.

Before I could stop him he had unscrewed something somewhere, and out rolled all over the path some dozen or so little balls.

“Catch ‘em!” he shouted; “catch ‘em! We mustn’t lose any of them.”

He was quite excited about them. We grovelled round for half an hour, and found sixteen. He said he hoped we had got them all, because, if not, it would make a serious difference to the machine. I put them for safety in my hat. It was not a sensible thing to do, I admit.

He then said that while he was about it he would see to the chain for me, and at once began taking off the gear-case. I did try to dissuade him from that. I told him what an experienced friend of mine once said to me solemnly: “If anything goes wrong with your gear-case, sell the machine and buy a new one; it comes cheaper.”

He said, “People talk like that who understand nothing about machines. Nothing is easier than taking off a gear-case.”

I had to confess he was right. In less than five minutes he had the gear-case in two pieces, lying on the path, and was grovelling for screws. He said it was always a mystery to him the way screws disappeared.

Common sense continued to whisper to me: ‘Stop him, before he does any more mischief. You have a right to protect your own property from the ravages of a lunatic. Take him by the scruff of the neck, and kick him out of the gate!’

But I am weak when it comes to hurting other people’s feelings, and I let him muddle on.

He gave up looking for the rest of the screws. He said screws had a knack of turning up when you least expected them, and that now he would see to the chain. He tightened it till it would not move; next he loosened it until it was twice as loose as it was before. Then he said we had better think about getting the front wheel back into its place again.

I held the fork open, and he worried with the wheel. At the end of ten minutes I suggested he should hold the fork, and that I should handle the wheel; and we changed places.

At length we did get the thing into position; and the moment it was in position he burst out laughing.

I said, “What’s the joke?”

He said, “Well, I am an ass!”

It was the first thing he had said that made me respect him. I asked him what had led him to the discovery.

He said, “We’ve forgotten the balls!”

I looked for my hat; it was lying topsy-turvy in the middle of the path.

He was of a cheerful disposition. He said, “Well, we must put back all we can find, and trust to providence.”

We found eleven. We fixed six on one side and five on the other, and half an hour later the wheel was in its place again. It need hardly be added that it really did wobble now; a child might have noticed it. He said it would do for the present.

I said, “Watching you do this is of real use to me. It is not only your skill that fascinates me, it is your cheery confidence in yourself, your inexplicable hopefulness, that does me good.”

Thus encouraged, he set to work to re-fix the gear-case. He stood the bicycle against the house, and worked from the off side. Then he stood it against a tree, and worked from the on side. Then I held it for him, while he lay on the ground with his head between the wheels, and worked at it from below, and dropped oil upon himself. Then he took it away from me, and doubled himself across it till he lost his balance and slid over on to his head.

Then he lost his temper and tried bullying the thing. The bicycle, I was glad to see, showed spirit; and the subsequent proceedings degenerated into little else than a rough-and-tumble fight between him and the machine. One moment the bicycle would be on the gravel path, and he on top of it; the next, the position would be reversed— he on the gravel path, the bicycle on him. Now he would be standing flushed with victory, the bicycle firmly fixed between his legs. But his triumph would be short-lived. By a sudden, quick movement it would free itself and, turning upon him, hit him sharply over the head with one of its handles.

At a quarter to one, dirty and dishevelled, cut and bleeding, he said, “I think that will do”, and rose and wiped his brow.

The bicycle looked as if it also had had enough of it. Which had received most punishment it would have been difficult to say. 1 took him into the back kitchen where, so far as was possible, he cleaned himself. Then 1 sent him home.

7. The Story of Cricket

Cricket grew out of the many stick-and-ball games played in England 500 years ago. The word ‘bat’ is an old English word that simply means stick or club. By the seventeenth century, cricket had evolved enough to be recognisable as a distinct game. Till the middle of the eighteenth century, bats were roughly the same shape as hockey sticks, curving outwards at the bottom. There was a simple reason for this: the ball was bowled underarm, along the ground and the curve at the end of the bat gave the batsman the best chance of making contact.

One of the peculiarities of cricket is that a Test match can go on for five days and still end in a draw. No other modern team sport takes even half as much time to complete. A football match is generally over in an hour-and-a-half. Even baseball completes nine innings in less than half the time that it takes to play a limited-overs match, the shortened version of modern cricket!

Another curious characteristic of cricket is that the length of the pitch is specified—22 yards— but the size or shape of the ground is not. Most other team sports such as hockey and football lay down the dimensions of the playing area. Cricket does not. Grounds can be oval like the Adelaide Oval or nearly circular, like Chepauk in Chennai. A six at the Melbourne Cricket Ground needs to clear much more ground than it does at Feroz Shah Kotla in Delhi.

There’s a historical reason behind both these oddities. Cricket was the earliest modern team sport to be codified. The first written ‘Laws of Cricket’ were drawn up in 1744. They stated, “the principals shall choose from amongst the gentlemen present two umpires who shall absolutely decide all disputes. The stumps must be 22 inches high and the bail across them six inches. The ball must be between five and six ounces, and the two sets of stumps 22 yards apart”. The world’s first cricket club was formed in Hambledon in the1760s and the Marylebone Cricket Club (MCC) was founded in 1787. During the 1760s and 1770s it became common to pitch the ball through the air rather than roll it along the ground. This change gave bowlers the options of length, deception through the air, plus increased pace. It also opened new possibilities for spin and swing. In response, batsmen had to master timing and shot selection. One immediate result was the replacement of the curved bat with the straight one. The weight of the ball was limited to between 5½ to 5¾ ounces, and the width of the bat to four inches. In 1774, the first leg-before law was published. Also around this time, a third stump became common. By 1780, three days had become the length of a major match, and this year also saw the creation of the first six-seam cricket ball.

If you look at the game's equipment, you can see how cricket both changed with changing times and yet fundamentally remained true to its origins in rural England. Cricket's most important tools are all made of natural, preindustrial materials. The bat is made with leather, twine and cork. Even today both bat and ball are handmade, not industrially manufactured. The material of the bat changed slightly over time. Once it was cut out of a single piece of wood. Now it consists of two pieces, the blade which is made out of the wood of the willow tree and the handle which is made out of cane that became available as European colonialists and trading companies established themselves in Asia. Unlike golf and tennis, cricket has refused to remake its tools with industrial or man-made materials: plastic, fibreglass and metal have been firmly rejected.

But in the matter of protective equipment, cricket has been influenced by technological change. The invention of vulcanised rubber led to the introduction of pads in 1848 and protective gloves soon afterwards, and the modern game would be unimaginable without helmets made out of metal and synthetic lightweight materials.

The origins of Indian cricket are to be found in Bombay and the first Indian community to start playing the game was the small community of Zoroastrians, the Parsis. Brought into close contact with the British because of their interest in trade and the first Indian community to westernise, the Parsis founded the first Indian cricket club, the Oriental Cricket Club, in Bombay in 1848. Parsi clubs were funded and sponsored by Parsi businessmen like the Tatas and the Wadias. The white cricket elite in India offered no help to the enthusiastic Parsis. In fact, there was a quarrel between the Bombay Gymkhana, a whites-only club, and Parsi cricketers over the use of a public park. The Parsis complained that the park was left unfit for cricket because the polo ponies of the Bombay Gymkhana dug up the surface. When it became clear that the colonial authorities were prejudiced in favour of their white compatriots, the Parsis built their own gymkhana to play cricket in. The rivalry between the Parsis and the Bombay Gymkhana had a happy ending for these pioneers of Indian cricket. A Parsi team beat the Bombay Gymkhana at cricket in 1889, just four years after the foundation of the Indian National Congress in 1885, an organisation that was lucky to have amongst its early leaders the great Parsi statesman and intellectual Dadabhai Naoroji.

Modern cricket is dominated by Tests and one-day internationals, played between national teams. The players who become famous, who live on in the memories of cricket's public, are those who have played for their country. The players Indian fans remember even now are those who were fortunate enough to play Test cricket. C.K. Nayudu, an outstanding Indian batsman of his time,

lives on in the popular imagination when some of his great contemporaries like Palwankar Vithal and Palwankar Baloo have been forgotten. Even though Nayudu was past his cricketing prime when he played for India in its first Test matches against England starting in 1932, his place in India's cricket history is assured because he was the country's first Test captain.

India entered the world of Test cricket in 1932, a decade and a half before it became an independent nation. This was possible because Test cricket from its origins in 1877 was organised as a contest between different parts of the British empire, not sovereign nations. The first Test was played between England and Australia when Australia was still a white-settler colony. Similarly, the small countries of the Caribbean that together make up the West Indies team were British colonies till well after the Second World War.

Television coverage changed cricket. It expanded the audience for the game by beaming cricket into small towns and villages. It also broadened cricket's social base. Children who had never previously had the chance to watch international cricket because they lived outside the big cities, could now watch and learn by imitating their heroes.

The technology of satellite television and the world-wide reach of multi-national television companies created a global market for cricket. Matches in Sydney could now be watched live in Surat. Since India had the largest viewership for the game amongst the cricket-playing nations and the largest market in the cricketing world, the game's centre of gravity shifted to South Asia. This shift was symbolised by the shifting of the ICC headquarters from London to tax-free Dubai.

One hundred and fifty years ago the first Indian cricketers, the Parsis, had to struggle to find an open space to play in. Today, the global marketplace has made Indian players the best-paid, most famous cricketers in the game, men for whom the world is a stage. This transformation was made up of many smaller changes: the replacement of the gentlemanly amateur by the paid professional, the triumph of the one-day game as it overshadowed Test cricket in terms of popularity, and the remarkable changes in global commerce and technology.