



# Learn English Through Stories

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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## THE STORY OF THE GOOD LITTLE BOY

Once there was a good little boy by the name of Jacob Blivens. He always obeyed his parents, no matter how absurd and unreasonable their demands were; and he always learned his book, and never was late at Sabbath-school. He would not play hookey, even when his sober judgment told him it was the most profitable thing he could do. None of the other boys could ever make that boy out, he acted so strangely. He wouldn't lie, no matter how convenient it was. He just said it was wrong to lie, and that was sufficient for him. And he was so honest that he was simply ridiculous. The curious ways that that Jacob had, surpassed everything. He wouldn't play marbles on Sunday, he wouldn't rob birds' nests, he wouldn't give hot pennies to organ-grinders' monkeys; he didn't seem to take any interest in any kind of rational amusement. So the other boys used to try to reason it out and come to an understanding of him, but they couldn't arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. As I said before, they, could only figure out a sort of vague idea that he was "afflicted," and so they took him under their protection, and never allowed any harm to come to him.

This good little boy read all the Sunday-school books; they were his greatest delight. This was the whole secret of it. He believed in the good little boys they put in the Sunday-school book; he had every confidence in them. He longed to come across one of them alive once; but he never did. They all died before his time, maybe. Whenever he read about a particularly good one he turned over quickly to the end to see what became of him, because he wanted to travel thousands of miles and gaze on him; but it wasn't any use; that good little boy always died in the last chapter, and there was a picture of the funeral, with all his relations and the Sunday-school children standing around the grave in pantaloons that were too short, and bonnets that were too large, and everybody crying into handkerchiefs that had as much as a yard and a half of stuff in them. He was always headed off in this way. He never could see one of those good little boys on account of his always dying in the last chapter.

Jacob had a noble ambition to be put in a Sunday school book. He wanted to be put in, with pictures representing him gloriously declining to lie to his mother, and her weeping for joy about it; and pictures representing him standing on the doorstep giving a penny to a poor beggar-woman with six children, and telling her to spend it freely, but not to be extravagant, because extravagance is a sin; and pictures of him magnanimously refusing to tell on

the bad boy who always lay in wait for him around the corner as he came from school, and welted him so over the head with a lath, and then chased him home, saying, "Hi! hi!" as he proceeded. That was the ambition of young Jacob Blivens. He wished to be put in a Sunday-school book. It made him feel a little uncomfortable sometimes when he reflected that the good little boys always died. He loved to live, you know, and this was the most unpleasant feature about being a Sunday-school-book boy. He knew it was not healthy to be good. He knew it was more fatal than consumption to be so supernaturally good as the boys in the books were he knew that none of them had ever been able to stand it long, and it pained him to think that if they put him in a book he wouldn't ever see it, or even if they did get the book out before he died it wouldn't be popular without any picture of his funeral in the back part of it. It couldn't be much of a Sunday-school book that couldn't tell about the advice he gave to the community when he was dying. So at last, of course, he had to make up his mind to do the best he could under the circumstances--to live right, and hang on as long as he could and have his dying speech all ready when his time came.

But somehow nothing ever went right with the good little boy; nothing ever turned out with him the way it turned out with the good little boys in the books. They always had a good time, and the bad boys had the broken legs; but in his case there was a screw loose somewhere, and it all happened just the other way. When he found Jim Blake stealing apples, and went under the tree to read to him about the bad little boy who fell out of a neighbor's apple tree and broke his arm, Jim fell out of the tree, too, but he fell on him and broke his arm, and Jim wasn't hurt at all. Jacob couldn't understand that. There wasn't anything in the books like it.

And once, when some bad boys pushed a blind man over in the mud, and Jacob ran to help him up and receive his blessing, the blind man did not give him any blessing at all, but whacked him over the head with his stick and said he would like to catch him shoving him again, and then pretending to help him up. This was not in accordance with any of the books. Jacob looked them all over to see.

One thing that Jacob wanted to do was to find a lame dog that hadn't any place to stay, and was hungry and persecuted, and bring him home and pet him and have that dog's imperishable gratitude. And at last he found one and was happy; and he brought him home and fed him, but when he was going to

pet him the dog flew at him and tore all the clothes off him except those that were in front, and made a spectacle of him that was astonishing. He examined authorities, but he could not understand the matter. It was of the same breed of dogs that was in the books, but it acted very differently. Whatever this boy did he got into trouble. The very things the boys in the books got rewarded for turned out to be about the most unprofitable things he could invest in.

Once, when he was on his way to Sunday-school, he saw some bad boys starting off pleasuring in a sailboat. He was filled with consternation, because he knew from his reading that boys who went sailing on Sunday invariably got drowned. So he ran out on a raft to warn them, but a log turned with him and slid him into the river. A man got him out pretty soon, and the doctor pumped the water out of him, and gave him a fresh start with his bellows, but he caught cold and lay sick abed nine weeks. But the most unaccountable thing about it was that the bad boys in the boat had a good time all day, and then reached home alive and well in the most surprising manner. Jacob Blivens said there was nothing like these things in the books. He was perfectly dumfounded.

When he got well he was a little discouraged, but he resolved to keep on trying anyhow. He knew that so far his experiences wouldn't do to go in a book, but he hadn't yet reached the allotted term of life for good little boys, and he hoped to be able to make a record yet if he could hold on till his time was fully up. If everything else failed he had his dying speech to fall back on.

He examined his authorities, and found that it was now time for him to go to sea as a cabin-boy. He called on a ship captain and made his application, and when the captain asked for his recommendations he proudly drew out a tract and pointed to the word, "To Jacob Blivens, from his affectionate teacher." But the captain was a coarse, vulgar man, and he said, "Oh, that be blowed! that wasn't any proof that he knew how to wash dishes or handle a slush-bucket, and he guessed he didn't want him." This was altogether the most extraordinary thing that ever happened to Jacob in all his life. A compliment from a teacher, on a tract, had never failed to move the tenderest emotions of ship captains, and open the way to all offices of honor and profit in their gift--it never had in any book that ever he had read. He could hardly believe his senses.

This boy always had a hard time of it. Nothing ever came out according to the authorities with him. At last, one day, when he was around hunting up bad

little boys to admonish, he found a lot of them in the old iron foundry fixing up a little joke on fourteen or fifteen dogs, which they had tied together in long procession, and were going to ornament with empty nitroglycerin cans made fast to their tails. Jacob's heart was touched. He sat down on one of those cans (for he never minded grease when duty was before him), and he took hold of the foremost dog by the collar, and turned his reproving eye upon wicked Tom Jones. But just at that moment Alderman McWelter, full of wrath, stepped in. All the bad boys ran away, but Jacob Blivens rose in conscious innocence and began one of those stately little Sunday-school book speeches which always commence with "Oh, sir!" in dead opposition to the fact that no boy, good or bad, ever starts a remark with "Oh, sir." But the alderman never waited to hear the rest. He took Jacob Blivens by the ear and turned him around, and hit him a whack in the rear with the flat of his hand; and in an instant that good little boy shot out through the roof and soared away toward the sun with the fragments of those fifteen dogs stringing after him like the tail of a kite. And there wasn't a sign of that alderman or that old iron foundry left on the face of the earth; and, as for young Jacob Blivens, he never got a chance to make his last dying speech after all his trouble fixing it up, unless he made it to the birds; because, although the bulk of him came down all right in a tree-top in an adjoining county, the rest of him was apportioned around among four townships, and so they had to hold five inquests on him to find out whether he was dead or not, and how it occurred. You never saw a boy scattered so.

Thus perished the good little boy who did the best he could, but didn't come out according to the books. Every boy who ever did as he did prospered except him. His case is truly remarkable. It will probably never be accounted for.

## The Story of the Good Little Boy: Version 2

Once there was a boy named Jacob Blivens. He was very good. He always obeyed his parents, even when their rules were strange. He studied hard, went to Sunday school on time, and never skipped school, even when he wanted to. Other boys thought Jacob was odd. He didn't lie, even when it was easier to lie. He was so honest that it seemed silly. He didn't play games on Sunday, steal from birds' nests, or tease animals. The other boys couldn't understand him. They thought he was different, so they protected him and kept him safe.

Jacob loved reading Sunday-school books. These books told stories about perfect boys who were always good. Jacob believed in these boys and wanted to meet one, but they always died in the stories. Every time he read about a good boy, he checked the end of the book. The boy was always dead, with a picture of his funeral. Everyone cried around the grave. Jacob was disappointed because he could never meet these boys.

Jacob's dream was to be in a Sunday-school book. He wanted pictures showing him refusing to lie to his mother, giving money to a poor woman, or forgiving a bad boy who hurt him. He wanted to be famous for being good. But Jacob worried because the good boys in the books always died young. He loved life and didn't want to die. Still, he decided to be as good as possible and prepare a great speech for when he died.

But things always went wrong for Jacob. In the books, good boys had fun, and bad boys got hurt. With Jacob, it was the opposite. Once, he saw Jim stealing apples. Jacob tried to read him a story about a bad boy who fell from a tree and broke his arm. But Jim fell on Jacob, and Jacob broke his arm instead. Jacob was confused because this never happened in the books.

Another time, some boys pushed a blind man into the mud. Jacob helped the man up, expecting thanks. Instead, the man hit Jacob with his stick and yelled at him. Jacob checked his books, but he couldn't find a story like this.

Jacob also wanted to help a hungry, lame dog. He brought the dog home and fed it. But when he tried to pet it, the dog attacked him and tore his clothes. Jacob was shocked. The dogs in the books were always grateful.

One day, Jacob saw bad boys sailing on Sunday. In his books, boys who sailed on Sunday always drowned. Jacob ran to warn them, but he fell into the river.

A man saved him, but Jacob got sick and stayed in bed for weeks. The bad boys were fine and had fun. Jacob didn't understand why his life was so different from the books.

Jacob kept trying to be good. He thought he could be a cabin boy on a ship, like in the books. He showed the ship's captain a note from his teacher praising him. But the captain laughed and said the note didn't prove Jacob could work on a ship. Jacob was surprised because, in the books, teachers' notes always helped boys get jobs.

Finally, one day, Jacob saw bad boys playing a cruel trick. They tied empty cans to the tails of fifteen dogs. Jacob wanted to stop them. He sat on a can and started to scold the boys. But an angry man, Alderman McWelter, thought Jacob was part of the trick. He grabbed Jacob and hit him. Suddenly, the cans exploded. Jacob flew into the sky with the dogs. He landed in pieces across many towns. There was no time for his dying speech.

Jacob tried to be like the good boys in the books, but he never succeeded. His story is strange and hard to explain.