



**Learn English Through Stories**

**A Series**

**A52**

**Adapted and modified by  
Kulwant Singh Sandhu**

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# 1. The Tunnel

By Ruskin Boond

It was almost noon. The jungle was quiet and hot. The railway tracks went through tall green trees. The tracks looked like two long black lines. They went into a dark tunnel in the hill.

Suraj stood near the tracks. He was waiting for the train. This was not a station. Suraj was not going on the train. He wanted to see the steam train come out of the tunnel.

Suraj came from the town on his bicycle. He took a path through the jungle to a small village. He left his bicycle there. Then he walked over a small hill to the tunnel.

Suraj heard a sound. It was the train's whistle. It was far away. He could not see the train. It was on the other side of the hill. Then he heard a loud noise, like thunder. The train was in the tunnel.

Suddenly, the steam train came out. It was big and loud. It was green, black, and gold. It looked like a dragon from Suraj's dreams. Sparks flew from the train. It made a loud noise in the jungle.

Suraj stepped back. The train was fast. Then it was gone. Only smoke was left. The smoke moved slowly over the trees.

The jungle was quiet again. Suraj looked at the smoke. Then he walked to the tunnel.

Inside the tunnel, it was dark. After a few steps, Suraj could not see anything. He looked back. The tunnel's entrance was bright with daylight. Ahead, the other end of the tunnel was a small circle of light.

The tunnel smelled like smoke from the train. No train would come for hours. The jungle was quiet now.

Suraj kept walking. He wanted to know what a tunnel was like. The walls were wet. A bat flew past him. A lizard ran on the ground.

When Suraj came out of the tunnel, the sunlight was bright. He covered his eyes. He looked at the hill with trees. He saw something move. It was orange and gold with a long tail. It was there for a moment, then it was gone.

Near the tunnel was a small hut. Flowers grew in front of the hut. There was a vegetable garden in the back. A watchman lived there. His job was to check the tunnel. Every day, he walked through it before the train came. If everything was okay, he went back to his hut. If something was wrong, he

waved a red flag. The train would slow down. At night, he used a lamp to check the tunnel. If there was danger, he waved the lamp. If everything was okay, he put the lamp by his hut and slept.

The watchman was on his cot. He was going to sleep. Then he saw Suraj come out of the tunnel. He waited until Suraj was close. Then he said, "Hello! I don't get many visitors. Sit down. Why were you in my tunnel?"

"Is it your tunnel?" asked Suraj.

"Yes," said the watchman. "It's my tunnel. Nobody else wants it. I let the government use it."

Suraj sat on the cot. "I wanted to see the train," he said. "After it left, I walked through the tunnel."

"What did you find?" asked the watchman.

"Nothing," said Suraj. "It was dark. When I came out, I saw an animal on the hill. I'm not sure what it was. It moved fast."

"It was a leopard," said the watchman. "My leopard."

"Do you own a leopard?" asked Suraj.

"Yes," said the watchman.

"Do you let the government use it?" asked Suraj.

"No," said the watchman. "I don't."

"Is it dangerous?" asked Suraj.

"No," said the watchman. "This leopard is not dangerous. It comes here sometimes. It stays for a few days."

"How long have you been here?" asked Suraj.

"Many years," said the watchman. "My name is Sunder Singh."

"My name is Suraj," said Suraj.

"There's one train in the day," said Sunder Singh. "Another comes at night. Have you seen the night train?"

"No," said Suraj. "What time does it come?"

"About nine o'clock," said Sunder Singh. "You can come and sit with me. After the train leaves, I'll take you home."

"I'll ask my parents," said Suraj. "Is it safe?"

"Yes," said Sunder Singh. "It's safer here than in the town. Nothing happens to me here. But in the town, a bus almost hit me last month."

Sunder Singh yawned. "I'm going to sleep now," he said. "It's too hot to work in the afternoon."

"Everyone sleeps in the afternoon," said Suraj. "My father sleeps after lunch."

"Animals sleep in the heat, too," said Sunder Singh. "Only boys stay awake."

Sunder Singh put a banana leaf over his face. It kept the flies away. Soon, he was snoring. Suraj stood up. He looked at the railway tracks. Then he walked back to the village.

The next evening, Suraj went to the watchman's hut. It was cooler now. A breeze moved through the trees. It smelled like mango flowers. Rain was coming soon.

Sunder Singh was waiting. He watered his garden. The flowers looked nice. He was making tea on a small stove.

"I'm making tea," said Sunder Singh. "Tea is good when you wait for a train."

They drank tea. They heard birds. A tailorbird sang. Other birds made noise. When it got dark, the birds were quiet. Sunder Singh lit his lamp. "It's time to check the tunnel," he said.

He walked to the tunnel. Suraj stayed on the cot. He drank his tea. In the dark, the trees seemed close. Suraj heard sounds. A deer made a noise. A fox cried. A bird made a strange sound. There were other sounds from the trees. They sounded like whispers. The trees seemed alive.

Sunder Singh was in the tunnel. He checked his lamp. He knew the night sounds. They didn't bother him. But he heard something else. It was a soft step and a rustle of leaves. He looked into the dark. Then he hummed a song and went back to Suraj.

Ten minutes later, the night train would come. Sunder Singh sat on the cot. Then they heard a new sound. It was like someone cutting a tree.

"What's that?" whispered Suraj.

"It's the leopard," said Sunder Singh. "It's in the tunnel."

"The train is coming soon," said Suraj.

"Yes," said Sunder Singh. "If the leopard stays, the train will hit it. I don't want that."

"Won't the leopard attack us?" asked Suraj. He was worried.

"Not this leopard," said Sunder Singh. "It knows me. It likes goats and dogs, not people. I'll take my axe. You stay here, Suraj."

“No,” said Suraj. “I’ll come with you. I don’t want to stay alone.”

“Okay,” said Sunder Singh. “Stay behind me. Don’t be afraid.”

Sunder Singh held his lamp high. He walked into the tunnel. He shouted to scare the leopard. Suraj followed him. Suraj wanted to shout, but his throat was dry.

They walked a little way. The lamp showed the leopard. It was on the tracks. It was not big, but it looked strong. It showed its teeth and growled. Its tail moved.

Suraj and Sunder Singh shouted together. Their voices were loud in the tunnel. The leopard was scared. It didn’t know how many people were there. It turned and ran into the dark.

To be sure, Sunder Singh and Suraj walked through the tunnel. When they came back, the tracks started to shake. The train was coming.

Suraj touched the tracks. They were shaking. He heard the train’s noise. The train came around the hill. It was loud and bright. Sparks flew. It went into the tunnel. It passed Suraj like a dragon from his dreams.

When the train was gone, the jungle was quiet. The forest felt alive again. The tracks still shook a little.

A week later, Suraj was on the same train. He was with his father. His father was writing in a notebook. He was doing work. Suraj looked out the window. It was dark outside.

Suraj’s father was going to Delhi for business. He took Suraj with him. “Suraj is always out,” his father said. “He should learn about my work.”

The train went through the jungle. Suraj saw small lights from villages. The train made a noise over a bridge. Suraj knew they were near the tunnel. He looked out. The train’s whistle was loud.

Then Suraj saw a lamp. He couldn’t see Sunder Singh, but he knew his friend was there.

The train went into the tunnel and out again. It left the jungle and went across the plains. Suraj looked into the dark. He thought about the tunnel and the watchman. Sunder Singh and his lamp were like a small light for the trains and leopards in the jungle.

## 2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

1. Where does Suraj go to see the train?
2. What does Suraj ride to get to the village?
3. What does the train look like to Suraj?
4. What animal does Suraj see on the hill?
5. Who lives near the tunnel?
6. What is Sunder Singh's job?
7. What does Sunder Singh do if there is danger in the tunnel?
8. Why does Suraj go to the tunnel at night?
9. What animal is in the tunnel when Suraj and Sunder Singh go inside?
10. What happens to the leopard when Suraj and Sunder Singh shout?

## **Answers**

1. Answer: Suraj goes to the tunnel in the jungle to see the train.
2. Answer: Suraj rides a bicycle to get to the village.
3. Answer: The train looks like a dragon from Suraj's dreams. It is green, black, and gold.
4. Answer: Suraj sees a leopard on the hill.
5. Answer: The watchman, Sunder Singh, lives near the tunnel.
6. Answer: Sunder Singh's job is to check the tunnel and make sure it is safe for the train.
7. Answer: If there is danger, Sunder Singh waves a red flag in the day or a lamp at night to slow the train.
8. Answer: Suraj goes to the tunnel at night to see the night train and sit with Sunder Singh.
9. Answer: A leopard is in the tunnel.
10. Answer: The leopard gets scared and runs away into the dark.

### 3. Picture Dictionary



**paddle** (पैडल) A long thin piece of wood with a flat piece at each end. You use a paddle to make a canoe go along in the water. छोटा चप्पू; पतवार.



**paddock** (पैडॉक) A small field. जानवरों का बाड़ा; छोटा खेत.



**padlock** (पैडलॉक) A lock which is movable. बाहर लटकने वाला ताला.



**page** (पेज) One side of a piece of paper in a book. पन्ना.



**pagoda** (पैगोडा) A Chinese temple. जापान; चीन; बर्मा आदि के बौद्ध मन्दिर.



**pail** (पेल) Another name for a bucket. बाल्टी; जलपात्र.



**paint** (पेन्ट) A liquid you paint on something to make it a different colour. रंग; रंगन; रंगना.



**palm** (पाम) A tree which grows in hot countries. ताड़ का पेड़; ताड़ वृक्ष.



**palm** (पाम) The inside surface of your hand. हथेली.

**pancake** (पैनकेक) A food you make with eggs, flour and milk. A pancake is very thin. चिल्ला; चोला.



**panda** (पैंडा) A small animal with red-dish-brown fur. A giant panda is a large black and white animal which lives in China. भालू जैसा पशु.

