



Learn English Through Stories

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Lost Spring: Stories of Stolen Childhood

Part 1: Saheb's Story – The Boy Who Searches Garbage

Every morning, I see a boy named Saheb searching through piles of garbage near my house in Delhi. He looks for things to sell, like old bottles, plastic, or even a coin. "Sometimes I find a rupee in the garbage," he says, his eyes shining. A rupee is a small amount of Indian money, but for Saheb, it's like finding treasure.

I ask him, "Why do you do this, Saheb?" He looks down and says, "I have no other work." Saheb's family came from Dhaka, a city in Bangladesh, many years ago. Storms destroyed their fields and home, so they moved to Seemapuri, a poor area near Delhi. In Seemapuri, many families survive by collecting things from garbage to sell. They are called ragpickers.

"Why don't you go to school?" I ask. Saheb replies, "There's no school near my house. If they build one, I'll go." I smile and say, "If I start a school, will you come?" Saheb nods happily, "Yes!" A few days later, he runs to me and asks, "Is your school ready?" I feel bad because I didn't really mean to promise a school. In Saheb's world, people often make promises they can't keep.

One day, I ask, "What's your name?" He says, "Saheb-e-Alam." It means "lord of the universe" in his language, but Saheb doesn't know this. If he did, he might find it funny, because his life is hard, not like a lord's. He walks with his friends, a group of boys with no shoes, who come out in the morning and disappear by noon. I start to recognize them all.

I ask one boy, "Why don't you wear chappals?" He says, "My mother didn't take them from the shelf." Another boy wears shoes that don't match, and he looks shy when I notice. A third boy says, "I want chappals, but I've never had any." In India, many children walk barefoot, not because it's a tradition, but because their families are too poor to buy shoes.

I remember a story about a boy from Udipi, a town in Karnataka. His father was a priest in a temple. Every day, the boy prayed for a pair of shoes as he walked to school. Years later, I visited that temple. It looked old and quiet. The new priest's son came home from school, wearing a uniform and shoes. He threw his bag on a bed. I thought of another boy who prayed, "Let me never lose my shoes." That boy's wish came true, but children like Saheb still walk barefoot.

Seemapuri is a poor place, far from Delhi's big buildings, even though it's nearby. Families from Bangladesh came here in 1971. They live in small houses made of mud, with roofs of tin or plastic. There's no clean water or proper toilets. About 10,000 ragpickers live here. They don't have papers to show who they are, but they have ration cards to buy cheap food. One woman in a torn sari says, "We left our green fields and rivers because we had no food. Here, we can eat and sleep."

For these families, garbage is like gold. It helps them buy food and live, even if their homes are not strong. For children like Saheb, garbage is exciting. "I found a ten-rupee note once!" he says happily. Finding money in garbage gives children hope, but for their parents, it's just hard work to survive.

One cold morning, I see Saheb by a fence, watching two men play tennis at a club. He wears old tennis shoes with a hole, given by someone. For Saheb, even broken shoes are special because he never had any before. "I like tennis," he says, but he can only watch from outside. Sometimes, the gatekeeper lets him use the swing when no one is there.

Later, I see Saheb carrying a heavy metal can. "I work at a tea shop now," he says. "I get 800 rupees and food every month." But he doesn't look happy anymore. The metal can belongs to the shop owner, and Saheb isn't free like before. When he carried a garbage bag, it was his own. Now, he works for someone else, and his childhood is fading away.

Part 2: Mukesh's Story – The Boy Who Dreams of Cars

In Firozabad, a town in Uttar Pradesh, I meet Mukesh, a boy with a dream. "I want to be a motor mechanic," he says. "I'll learn to drive a car." Firozabad is famous for making bangles—colourful glass bracelets that women wear in India. Almost every family here makes bangles, including Mukesh's.

Making bangles is tough work. Families sit in small, dark rooms with hot ovens. The air has glass dust, which can make people blind. It's against the law for children to work in these places, but about 20,000 children in Firozabad do. Their eyes get weak because they work in the dark all day.

Mukesh takes me to his home. It's a small house with broken walls and no windows. People and animals live together inside. A young woman, Mukesh's brother's wife, cooks vegetables on a fire. Her eyes are red from smoke, but she smiles. She is the bahu, the daughter-in-law, and takes care of the family. When Mukesh's father comes home, she covers her face with a sari, as is the custom in many Indian families. Mukesh's father was a tailor, then a bangle maker, but he never earned enough to fix their house or send his sons to school. He only taught them to make bangles.

Mukesh's grandmother says, "This is our karam—our fate." She believes their family must make bangles because of their caste, the group they were born into. Her husband went blind from the glass dust, and she thinks they can't change their life. In Firozabad, bangles are everywhere—yellow, green, blue, pink, and purple. They are piled in yards and on carts. In dark rooms, children and parents work by small lamps, joining glass pieces to make bangles. Their eyes get used to the dark, but many lose their sight before they grow up.

I see Savita, a young girl, making bangles with an older woman. Savita works fast, like a machine. She doesn't know that bangles are special for married women in India. One day, when she gets married, she'll wear red bangles and a veil. The older woman next to her says, "I've never had enough food in my life." Her husband, an old bangle maker, says, "I only know bangles. I made a house for my family." But their house is small and broken.

In Firozabad, everyone says they have no money to do anything except make bangles. The young men say the same as their fathers. Life here feels stuck. I ask some boys, "Why don't you work together to sell bangles yourselves?" They say, "The police will catch us and say it's wrong. We'll go to jail." They are scared and have no one to guide them. Their fathers are tired, and the boys feel trapped.

There are two worlds in Firozabad: the poor families, stuck because of poverty and caste, and the powerful people—shop owners, police, and others—who keep them trapped. Children like Mukesh grow up with this heavy life, just like their parents. But Mukesh is different. He says, "I want to be a motor mechanic." He plans to walk to a garage far away to learn. I ask, "Do you want to fly a plane?" He looks down and says, "No." Planes don't fly over Firozabad, but cars pass by, and Mukesh dreams of them.

Conclusion

Saheb and Mukesh are boys with small dreams, but their lives are hard. Saheb's joy in finding a coin and Mukesh's wish to fix cars show they have hope. But in Seemapuri and Firozabad, children work instead of going to school or playing. Their stories make us think: How can we help children like them have a better life? Maybe we can support schools or speak up about child labour. Every child deserves a chance to dream and grow.

2. Comprehension Questions and Answers

Question 1: Where does Saheb live, and why did his family move there?

Question 1: What does Saheb do every morning, and what does he hope to find?

Question 3: Why does Saheb say he cannot go to school?

Question 4: What is the meaning of Saheb's name, and why is it ironic?

Question 5: Why do many children in Seemapuri walk barefoot?

Question 6: What job does Saheb take later, and how does it change him?

Question 7: What is Mukesh's dream in Firozabad, and how is it different from his family's work?

Question 8: Why is making bangles dangerous for children like Mukesh?

Question 9: What does Mukesh's grandmother believe about their family's work?

Question 10: Why don't the young men in Firozabad start their own group to sell bangles?

Answers

Answer 1: Saheb lives in Seemapuri, a poor area near Delhi. His family moved from Dhaka, Bangladesh, because storms destroyed their fields and home.

Answer 2: Saheb searches through garbage every morning. He hopes to find valuable things like a rupee or a ten-rupee note.

Answer 3: Saheb says there is no school near his house in Seemapuri.

Answer 4: Saheb's name, Saheb-e-Alam, means "lord of the universe." It is ironic because he is poor and lives a hard life, not like a lord.

Answer 5: They walk barefoot because their families are too poor to buy shoes, not because of tradition.

Answer 6: Saheb works at a tea shop, earning 800 rupees and food. He looks less happy and loses his freedom because he works for someone else.

Answer 7: Mukesh dreams of becoming a motor mechanic and driving a car. His family makes bangles, which is different from his dream.

Answer 8: Making bangles is dangerous because the glass dust and dark rooms can make children lose their eyesight.

Answer 9: She believes their family must make bangles because it is their karam (fate) and caste, and they cannot change it.

Answer 10: They are afraid the police will arrest them and say it's wrong, and they have no leader to guide them.

3. Grammar page

Should is a **helping** or **auxiliary verb**. Use **should** to talk about necessary actions or things that people ought to do.



Children **should not play** in traffic.



You **should** always **look** before crossing the street.

If you are tired you **should go** to bed early.

You **should know** how to spell your own name.

We **should** all **drink** more water.

You **should do** more exercise.

Should I **turn** off the computer when I'm not using it?

Shouldn't you **tell** your Mom if you're going out?

We **should** always thank people for presents, **shouldn't** we?



Learn these contractions:

I would = I'd

you would = you'd

he would = he'd

she would = she'd

we would = we'd

they would = they'd

should not = shouldn't

would not = wouldn't