LETS

Learn English Through Stories

F Series

F71

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Contents:

Dead Man's Riddle

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Often, when there are two or more brothers in a family, they want to divide their parents' property between them and get into arguments and court cases over this.

In the villages, the panchayat decides how the property should be divided. In my childhood, I used to attend meetings of the panchayat with my grandfather where the division of some villager's property would be discussed. The elders would assemble and call the brothers who were fighting for the property. If there were three brothers, they would make three divisions of the property, each of approximately the same value. For example, each part would contain a little bit of gold, some silver and vessels. The values of all the articles in each group would be approximately fixed by the elders of the villages. It was difficult to always make the value of each part equal to the others. In such a situation, the youngest brother would get to choose his part first. The logic behind it was that he had stayed the least number of days with his parents. In those days, in villages, staying with parents was also considered an asset.

The village elders were all well-respected and everyone knew they were impartial. Their decisions were final and no one went to court against them. Going to court for such matters was considered a waste of time and energy. There is a saying in the village that if two feuding parties approach the court, both parties lose money, only the advocate becomes rich.

Once, there was such a disagreement in the division of property of a certain family. The Sarpanch tried his best to make the brothers agree to a certain division but they just would not accept the decision. Finally, Sarpanch Som Gowda told a story which everyone listened to carefully.

It seems, a long time back, in our village itself, there lived a rich man. He had three sons who never agreed with their father about anything. The rich man had a friend called Sumanth, who was well educated and very wise. He would say, time will teach them everything, don't be in a hurry.

One day, the old man died. He left seventeen horses, lots of gold and land for his sons. He wrote a will which was very strange. He divided the land and gold into three parts but for the division of horses there was a riddle. Nobody could understand the riddle. It said, 'The half of the total horses should be given to the elder son, in the remaining half two-third should be given to the second son and what remains out of that two-third should be given to the third son.'

Seventeen was the total number of horses. Half of it meant eight and a half horses to the elder son. That meant one had to kill a horse to divide it. Subsequently, two-third of eight would mean one more horse had to be killed. The old man loved his horses immensely and would never have wanted any of them killed. So what did he mean? The brothers scratched their heads for a few days over the will.

When they could not come up with a solution, they showed the will to their father's friend. Sumanth read it and smiled.

He replied, 'It is very easy. Tomorrow morning I will come and divide the horses.'

The next day, everybody assembled in the ground. All seventeen horses were standing in a row.

Sumanth came on his own horse. He made his horse stand along with the other horses.

He said, 'Now there are eighteen horses. I am as good as your father. Let us divide the horses as per the will.'

But the sons objected. 'You have added your horse to our horses, that was not our father's wish.'

Sumanth said, 'Don't worry, wait until the division is over. I will take my horse back. Out of these eighteen horses as per the will, half will go the elder son. Half of eighteen is nine, so the elder one gets nine horses. Now there are nine remaining, out of nine two-third means six horses will go the second son. Now there are three remaining. Two-third of three means two horses out of three, will go to the third son. One horse is left, which was any way not yours. It is mine and I am taking it and going home.'

All the people who had assembled were puzzled. The three sons did not know how the division took place without killing a horse. They went to Sumanth and asked, 'Uncle, how did you manage without killing any horse?'

Sumanth smiled and said, 'Experience has taught me many things in life. Your father also knew it. Many a times, a work may look impossible. But if someone gives the smallest suggestion, you can work on it. That is the reason your father wrote his will in such a way that you were forced to take somebody's advice. You may think you know everything, but please remember you are still a student. Life is an eternal teacher, provided you have an open mind.'

Som Gowda concluded, 'That's the way elders have taught us lessons. Experience is the best teacher in life. Elders have seen many ups and downs in their lives and interacted with many people. During the process they have

acquired knowledge which can't be taught in a school or college. It has to be learnt over a period of time. Now it is left to you people to make the decision.'

The three brothers, after listening to the story, agreed to the panchayat's division of their property.

Comprehension Questions

Question 1: Where were property disputes in the village typically settled?
Question 2: Who got to choose their share first when property divisions were not equal?
Question 3: What did the village saying suggest about going to court?
Question 4: Who was the sarpanch in the story?
Question 5: How many sons did the rich man in the story have?
Question 6: How many horses were to be divided among the sons according to the will?
Question 7: What was the problem with dividing the horses as per the will?
Question 8: Who solved the riddle about the horses, and what did he do to help?
Question 9: How many horses did the second son receive after the division?
Question 10: What lesson did Sumanth say the father wanted his sons to learn?

Answers

Answer 1: Property disputes were settled by the panchayat in the village.
Answer 2: The youngest brother got to choose his share first when divisions were not equal.
Answer 3: The saying was that if two parties go to court, both lose money, and only the advocate becomes rich.
Answer 4: The sarpanch was Som Gowda.
Answer 5: The rich man had three sons.
Answer 6: There were seventeen horses to be divided among the sons.
Answer 7: The problem was that dividing seventeen horses into half, two-thirds of the remainder, and two-thirds of what remained resulted in fractions, suggesting a horse would need to be killed.
Answer 8: Sumanth solved the riddle by adding his own horse, making eighteen horses, and dividing them according to the will.
Answer 9: The second son received six horses.
Answer 10: Sumanth said the father wanted his sons to learn to seek advice and recognize that they don't know everything, as life is an eternal teacher.

3. Grammar Page

Grammar Practice: Change into indirect speech.

1. "I'm going to Dharan next week."
   He said that...........................to Dharan..........................week.
2. "They haven't spoken to their parents for six months."
   She said that they...........................to their parents for six months.
3. "Sudha doesn't want to go out with me."
   He said that Sudha...........................to go out with..........................
4. "You'll have to be here at 3 o'clock this afternoon."
   She told me that I...........................at 3 o'clock..........................
5. "I visited Pokhara three weeks ago."
   I said that I...........................three weeks..........................
6. "You must bring me the money tomorrow."
   He told us that...........................the money..........................
7. "I often go to the park."
   She told us that she often...........................to the park.
8. "I'm going to do it now if you'll let me."
   She told him that she...........................if he..........................
9. "I don't know where he can be."
   She said that she...........................where..........................
10. "I must go to the bank."
    She told me that...........................to the bank.
11. "He may refuse to do it."
    She said that...........................to do it.
12. "You should call him."
    She said that I...........................
13. "Did you go there alone?"
    He asked her if...........................there alone.
14. "Did you go to the USA in 2005?"
    He asked if...........................to the USA in 2005.
15. "How long have you been in Darjeeling?"
    He asked her how long...........................in Darjeeling.
16. "When did you visit Delhi?"
    I asked him when...........................Delhi.

Answers

1. He said that he was going to Dharan the following week.
2. She said that they hadn't spoken to their parents for six months.

3. He said that Sudha didn't to go out with him.
4. She told me that I had to be there at 3 o'clock that afternoon.
5. I said that I had visited three weeks before.
6. He told us that we had to bring the money the following day.
7. She told us that she often went to the park.
8. She told him that she was going to do it if he would let her.
9. She said that she didn't know where he could be.
10. She told me that she had to go to the bank.
11. She said that he might refuse to do it.
12. She said that I should call him.
13. He asked her if she had gone there alone.
14. He asked if I had gone to the USA in 2005.
15. He asked her how long I had been in Darjeeling.
16. I asked him when he had visited Delhi.