



6

Stay Home Reader

Stories for Fun and Skills



VIVA EDUCATION

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HOW THIS BOOK WILL HELP YOU

Staying home and practising social distancing are simple yet decisive ways in which we all contribute to the epic battle against the Covid-19 pandemic. School closure is indeed the heavy price students and teachers have to pay as a result. However, this is no reason for learning to stop. As a committed provider of educational content, Viva Education has taken extraordinary steps to make learning accessible to every student via online means. We have released the vast range of online learning material on VivaDigital.in to learners and educators for unrestricted use.

Continuing this effort, we are proud to present our *Stay Home Readers* for classes 1 to 8, which have been specially compiled for home learning and remote teaching. Engagement is the key to better home learning, and this series adopts the route of stories to effective language-skill building. The content is enjoyable, stimulating and requires hardly any teacher supervision. We wish you safety and good health as you enjoy learning with these readers.

1

An Encounter with a Shark

The Coral Island, *written by R.M. Ballantyne, describes the adventures of Ralph Rover, Jack Martin and Peterkin Gay, shipmates on the sailing ship Arrow. Their vessel became a total wreck in a terrible storm but the three chums managed to reach an uninhabited island, where they lived for some time. The following story tells of an exciting fi shing adventure on the island shortly after their ship was wrecked.*

One day Peterkin came up from the beach, where he had been fi shing, and said in a very cross voice, "I'll tell you what, Jack, I'm not going to be humbugged with catching such tiny little fi sh any longer. I want you to swim out with me on your back, and let me fi sh in deep water!"

"Dear me, Peterkin!" replied Jack, "I had no idea you were taking your fi shing so much to heart, or I would have tried to get you out of your diffi culty long ago. What do you say to building a boat?"

"That would take far too long," was the reply; "I can't be bothered waiting for weeks and weeks. I would like to start at once."

Again Jack considered. "I have it!" he cried. "We will fell a large tree and launch the trunk of it into the water, so that when you want to fi sh you will have nothing to do but to swim out to it."

"I think a raft would be much better," said I.

"Much better," replied Jack, "but we have no ropes with which to bind the logs together. Perhaps we may find

something later to carry out that idea, but in the meantime let us try the tree.”

This was agreed on, so we started off to a spot not far distant, where we knew of a tree that would suit our purpose. This tree grew near the water’s edge, and as soon as we reached it, Jack threw off his coat. Wielding the axe with his sturdy arms, he hewed at it for a quarter of an hour without stopping. Then he passed and while he sat down to rest I continued the work. After I had hacked at the trunk for ten minutes, Peterkin took over and made a vigorous attack on it. When Jack again took his turn, a few more powerful blows brought the tree down with a terrible crash. This done, he cut three strong short poles from the branches, with which to roll the log down the beach into the sea, for, as it was nearly 80 centimetres thick at the large end, we could not move it without such help. With these levers, however, we managed to roll it slowly into the sea.



After we had cut some rough paddles we all set out on our log. It was with the utmost difficulty that we kept our home-made ship from rolling over and plunging us into the water. Not that we minded that much, but we preferred, if possible, to fish in dry clothes. To be sure, our trousers were wet, as our legs were dangling in the water on each side of the log; but as they could be easily dried, we did not care. After a half-an-hour's practice we were able to keep our balance quite steadily. Then Peterkin laid down his paddle, and having baited his line with a whole oyster, dropped it into the water.

“Now then, Jack,” said he, “be cautious; steer clear of that seaweed. There! That’s it; gently now, gently. I see a fellow at least a foot long down there, coming to – ha! That’s it! Oh, bother! He’s off.”

“Did he bite?” asked Jack, urging the log onwards with his paddle.

“Bite? Why of course he did! He took it into his mouth, but the moment I began to haul he opened his jaws and let it out again.”

“Let him swallow it next time,” said Jack, laughing at the sad expression on Peterkin’s face.

“There he is again,” cried Peterkin, his eyes flashing with excitement. “Look out! Now then! No! Yes! No! Why, the brute won’t touch it!”

“Never mind, lad,” said Jack, in a voice of sympathy, “we’ll move on, and offer it to some other fish.”

So saying, Jack plied his paddle; but scarcely had he moved from the spot when a fish with an enormous head and a small body darted from under a rock and swallowed the bait at once.



“Caught him this time – that’s a fact!” cried Peterkin, hauling in the line. “He’s swallowed the bait right down to his tail, I declare. Oh what a thumper!”

As the fish came struggling to the surface we leaned forward to see it and upset the log. Peterkin threw his arms round the fish, and in another instant we were all splashing about in the water.

A shout of laughter burst from us as we rose to the surface like three drowned rats and seized hold of the log. We soon recovered our positions, and sat more cautiously while Peterkin secured the fish, which had nearly escaped in the midst of our struggles.

Now, while we were intent upon our sport, we suddenly saw a ripple on the water, just a few yards away from us. Peterkin shouted to us to paddle in that direction, as he thought it was a big fish, and we might have a chance of catching it. But Jack, instead of doing so, said in a deep earnest tone –

“Haul up your line, Peterkin! Seize your paddle! Quick – it’s a shark!”

Peterkin quickly hauled up the line, and grasping his paddle, exerted himself to the utmost, while we also did our best to make for the shore. But we were a good way off, and the heavy log moved but slowly through the water. We saw the shark quite distinctly swimming round and round us, its sharp fin every now and then appearing above the water.

Suddenly Jack shouted, “Look out! There he comes!” and in a second we saw the monstrous fish dive close under us, and turn half over on its side. But we all made a great splashing with our paddles which no doubt frightened it away for that time, as we saw it immediately after, circling round us as before.

“Throw the fish to him,” cried Jack in a quick low voice, “we’ll make the shore in time if we keep him off for a few minutes.”

No sooner had the fish fallen in the water than we saw the shark sink. In another second we saw his white breast rising; for sharks always turn over on their side when about to seize their prey, their mouth being not at the point of their head like that of other fishes, but as it were, under their chin. In another moment his snout rose above the water; then his wide jaws, armed with a double row of teeth appeared. The dead fish was gulped down, and the shark sank out of sight.

But in a very few minutes it returned to us, and its quick motions led us to fear that it would attack us at once.

“Stop paddling,” cried Jack, suddenly. “I see it coming up behind us. Now, obey my order quickly. Our lives may depend on it. Ralph, Peterkin, do your best to balance the log. Don’t look out for the shark. Don’t glance behind you. Do nothing but balance the log.”

For a few seconds, that seemed long minutes to my mind, we sat thus silently, but I could not help glancing backward, in spite of Jack's orders. On doing so, I saw Jack sitting perfectly still like a statue, with his paddle raised, his lips firmly closed. I also saw the shark, to my horror, quite close under the log and in the act of darting towards Jack's foot.

In another moment the shark rose. Jack drew his leg suddenly from the water and threw it over the log. The monster's snout rubbed against the log as it passed, and showed its terrible jaws, into which Jack instantly plunged the paddle, thrusting it right down its throat. So violent was this act that Jack rose to his feet in doing it; the log rolled completely over, and we were once more plunged into the water. We all rose, spluttering and gasping, in a moment.

"Now then, strike out for shore!" cried Jack. "Here, Peterkin, catch hold of my collar, and kick out with a will."

Peterkin did as he was told, and Jack struck out with such force that he cut through the water like a boat, while I, being

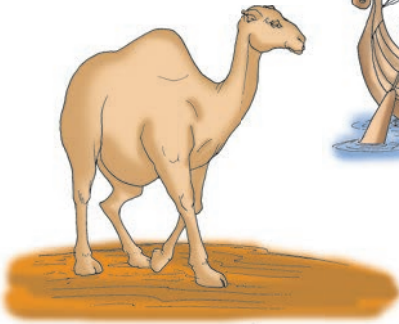
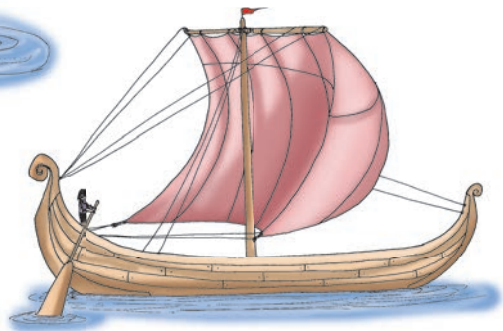


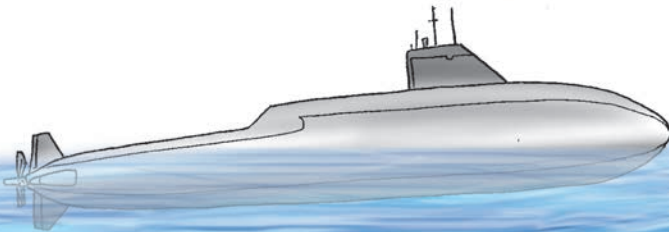
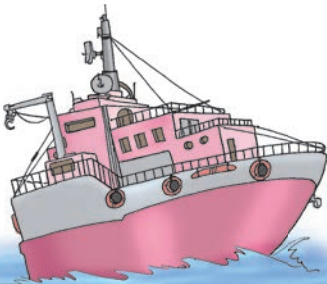
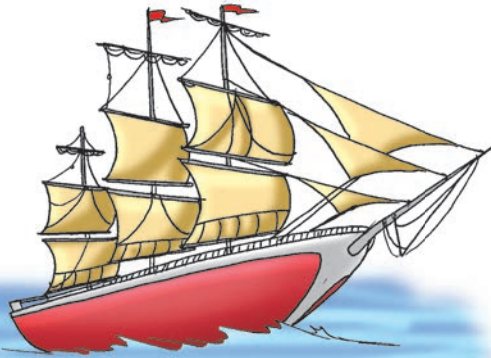
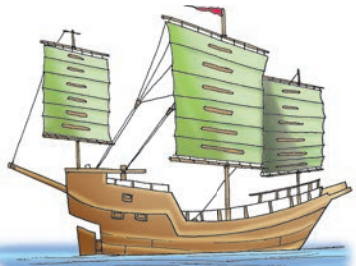
free, succeeded in keeping up with him. In a few minutes we reached shallow water, and landed in safety, though very much exhausted, and not a little frightened by our terrible adventure.

Questions on the Story

1. From which book is the story taken?
2. Who wrote the book?
3. How many boys are mentioned in the story?
4. Can you remember their names?
5. Who is the narrator of the story?
6. Who was very cross and why?
7. What did the boys finally decide to do?
8. How did they manage to launch the heavy tree-trunk?
9. What did they make to help them sail the log?
10. Why was it difficult to keep seated on the log?
11. Which boy was fishing with the line?
12. What did he use as bait?
13. How did the first fish escape?
14. How was the second fish caught?
15. What was the first sign of the presence of a shark?
16. What did the boys decide to do at once?
17. How did the shark act?
18. How did they keep the horrid creature away for a few minutes?
19. Describe the shark's attack.
20. How did the boys escape?

Interesting Pictures Showing the History of Ships





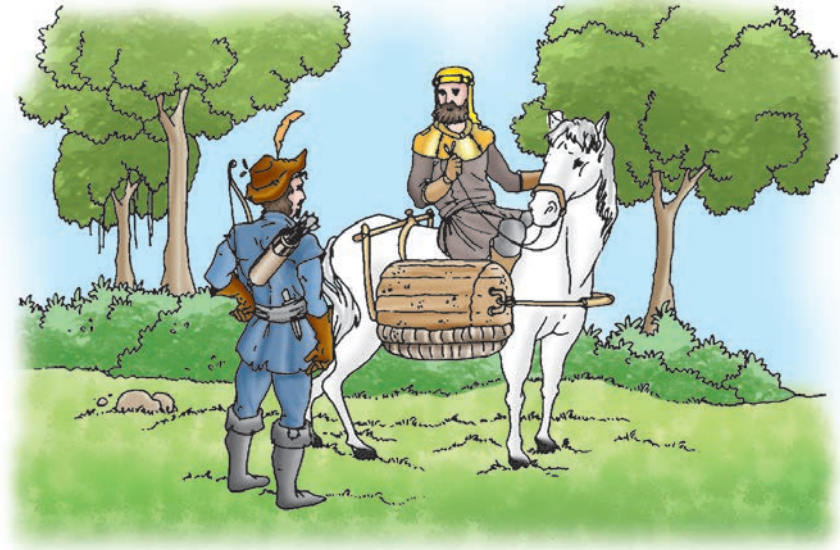
□ Development Exercises

1. What were the earliest means of water transport?
What raw materials were used to build them?
2. Kayaking is a popular water sport worldwide. Find out the following facts about kayaks:
 - (a) Who were the original developers of kayaks?
 - (b) What are the basic features of a kayak?
 - (c) What are the different kinds of modern kayaks?
3.
 - (a) Who were the Vikings?
 - (b) Describe Viking ships.
4. What is a cruise ship? What are the amenities offered in these kinds of ships?
5. What is known as the “ship of the desert”?
6.
 - (a) Describe the features of a submarine. How is it different from a submersible?
 - (b) What is a spaceship? Provide another name for a spaceship.
7. Describe the following kinds of ships and their uses.
 - (a) a frigate
 - (b) an ocean liner
 - (c) a cargo ship
8. Draw a rough diagram of a ship and mark the following parts:
 - (a) smokestack
 - (b) bow
 - (c) stern
 - (d) porthole
 - (e) boom
 - (f) bowsprit
 - (g) deck
 - (h) hull
 - (i) mast
 - (j) sail

9. Archeological evidences suggest that ancient Indians were master shipbuilders. Name the ancient Indian text compiled by Bhoja Narapati that describes shipbuilding technology.
10. (a) What are flagships?
(b) “This is the *flagship* project of our company this year.” Explain the use of the italicized word.
11. Thousands of people have lost their lives in shipwrecks at different points of time. What is the deadliest shipwreck that you have heard of?
12. What is the Bermuda Triangle? Where is it located?
13. What are “ghost ships” or “phantom ships”? Name a few books and movies which feature them.
14. In olden times ships were the only means of travelling to a different continent. The voyages took several months and the sailors had to face a lot of hardships. List a few famous explorers in history and the places they travelled to.
15. Today’s cruise ships offer a luxurious voyaging experience. Would you like to go on a “nowhere voyage” where the destination of your voyage would be unknown to you? Give reasons for your answer.
16. Which international organization deals with issues like maritime traffic, security and environmental pollution?
17. List a few books and movies that are based on:
 - (a) voyages
 - (b) shipwrecks
 - (c) pirates

2

A Tale of Robin Hood



Robin Hood and his band of outlaws lived in Sherwood Forest, near Nottingham in England. They led an exciting and dangerous life, robbing the rich, helping the poor, and defying the Sheriff of Nottingham, who tried to capture them. The following story tells how the outlaw chief cleverly outwitted the Sheriff.

One bright summer morning Robin met a butcher who chanced to come riding through the forest.

“Ho there! What are you carrying in those large baskets strapped to the sides of your horse?” he asked.

“Prime beef and mutton to sell at Nottingham market.” replied the butcher. “Do you wish to buy some?”

“I tell you what – I’ll buy all your meat, and your horse too,” said Robin with a laugh. “I’ve a great fancy to go to Nottingham and see what sort of a butcher I would make.”

The bargain was settled and, at Robin's request, the butcher also changed clothes with him in order to make his disguise complete. Soon after, the outlaw chief, whistling a merry tune, was on his way to market. He rode boldly into the centre of the town, and, having reached the busy market-place, set out his meat on display. Once ready, he began to call to the people who thronged the market, regarding the excellent quality of his meat, just as the other sellers were doing.

"Come and buy! Come and buy!" he shouted. "Buy the best beef and mutton in the market. Only a penny per pound."

The people, amazed at the cheap price, at once began to crowd round him; for of course, Robin had not the slightest idea about the cost of meat.

Meanwhile, the other butchers grew angry because Robin was obtaining all the trade in the market. They decided at once to find out all they could about this new rival who was ruining their trade. They sent him a special invitation to dine



that same day with them and the Sheriff. Robin accepted, for he was amused at the thought of being asked to dine with someone who was trying so hard to capture and imprison him.

When business for the day was over, the meat salesmen made ready to go to dinner. On the way the butchers asked Robin many personal questions, all of which he did not answer, so that when they reached the Sheriff's house, they knew no more about him than they did before. The Sheriff's wife received Robin very kindly, for she was struck by his noble manner and entertaining remarks. "Let me know," she said to him, "whenever you have meat to sell and I will buy from you."

At the dinner which followed, Robin, since he was a stranger and a special guest, was given the place of honour and sat at the Sheriff's right hand. The Sheriff, who was a greedy grasping man, judged that since Robin sold his meat at such a ridiculously low price, he must be something of a simpleton. This gave him a brilliant idea to try to make some money out of this rich yet stupid butcher.

"I suppose you own a very large herd," remarked the Sheriff.

"Yes, indeed," answered Robin, "I own some three hundred horned animals and at least a hundred acres of land."

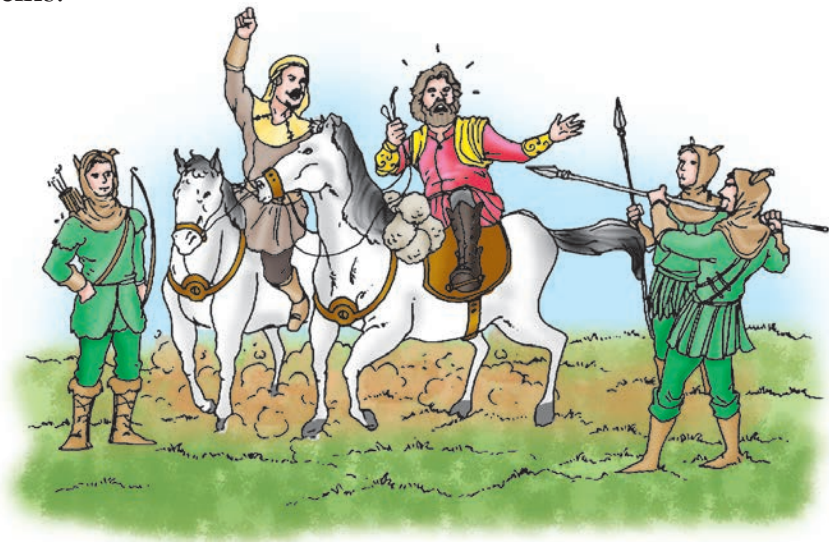
"Well then! Why not sell them to me?" said the Sheriff slyly. "I would give you a far better price than you would get from selling your meat at the market."

Robin, to the Sheriff's great surprise and delight, agreed, and it was arranged there and then that on the following day he would take the Sheriff to see the animals he was proposing to sell to him.

Next morning they set out, the Sheriff carrying the money bags for payment tied to his saddle, and mentally counting up the huge profit he was going to make out of his deal with this simple youth. But when they took the side road leading to Sherwood Forest, he began to feel nervous and afraid. Suddenly Robin pointed to a number of deer which grazed contentedly in the shade of some trees and asked the Sheriff for his opinion on the herd. The Sheriff knew at once that he had been tricked and muttered fearfully that he must return quickly to Nottingham in order to attend to some very important business.

“No, not just,” said Robin, and then he blew three sharp blasts on his hunting horn.

Suddenly a crowd of men, dressed in green uniforms, appeared like magic from behind nearby trees and bushes and quickly gathered in a close circle round them. The Sheriff turned pale with fear and tried to turn his horse away in order to escape. Robin, however, noticed the action and prevented the animal from running by holding tight to the reins.



The chief then addressed the outlaw band, “Men! I have a great surprise for you! I have brought our very good friend the Sheriff to dine with us.”

“Let us hope he has brought enough money to pay for his meal,” laughed one of the crowd.

“Alas, I – I have no m-mon-money with me,” stammered the now trembling Sheriff.

“And what do you have in those three heavy bags hanging to your saddle?” asked Robin.

“C–C–Corn,” stuttered the Sheriff, “th–they are filled with c–corn to feed my horse.”

“Well,” said Robin, “we should very much like to see the corn which you seem to guard so carefully.”

Several of the outlaws sprang forward, seized the bags, and emptied the contents on the grass. There, bright and shining, lay three large heaps of gold pieces.

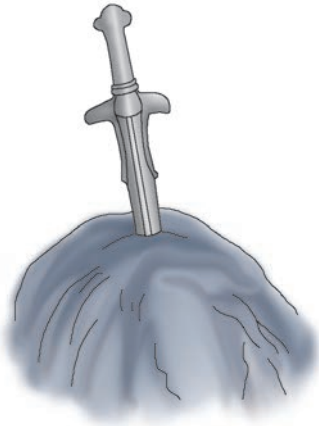
Robin then declared, “This money will be shared equally among my men, for you have robbed them on several occasions in the past. This will help to make amends for those misdeeds. As for you, Sheriff, you deserve to be hanged for your many evil actions, but, since your wife showed kindness to me, you shall go free.”

The Sheriff was then allowed to ride back to Nottingham, which he did sadly enough, what with the thought of the loss of his gold, the sorrowful knowledge that the outlaw chief had been completely in his power at his own house, and the bitter fact that he had been tricked and fooled so easily by his sworn enemy.

(Adapted)

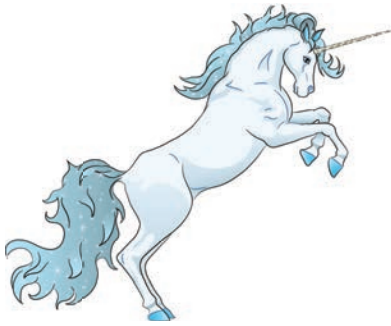
Interesting Facts about Medieval Myths and Legends

1. The Middle Ages are a period in European history from about **1000 CE to 1450 CE**. The word *medieval* means “connected to the Middle Ages”. Myths and legends were extremely popular in the Middle Ages. Some of the myths were based on imaginary beasts like the unicorn and the centaur and some on actual animals like the stag. Many mythical beasts of the medieval age appear in modern day books and movies like the Harry Potter series, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Several of the myths and legends were tales about the great knights of the Middle Ages. The English legends of King Arthur and Richard the Lionheart were immensely popular among them.
2. There are many English legends about the adventures of **King Arthur** and his Knights of the Round Table. King Arthur and his knights often fight dragons and other beasts while defending their kingdom. **Excalibur** was the legendary sword of King Arthur which had magical powers. Arthur is said to have pulled the sword from a stone in which it was stuck. It was believed that at the end of his life he told one of his men to throw it into the lake, and the Lady of the Lake caught it while coming out of water. According to another version of the story, he obtains the sword from the Lady of the Lake. All these stories have different versions because they were spread by word of mouth.
3. Another popular legend was about Richard I, who was the king of England from 1189 until 1199. He



was popularly known as **Richard the Lionheart** because of his reputation as a great military leader and warrior. The writers in the sixteenth century started portraying Robin Hood as the contemporary and supporter of King Richard. According to them, Robin Hood became an outlaw during the misrule of Richard's evil brother John while Richard was sent away at the Fourth Crusade, one of the wars fought between the Christians and the Muslims in the Middle Ages for the Holy Land of Jerusalem.

4. Many medieval myths have their origin in classical Greek and Roman times. References to creatures like the unicorn and the dragon can be found in *Naturalis Historia*, an ancient encyclopedia published by the Roman writer **Pliny the Elder**.
5. The **unicorn**, one of the most famous mythical creatures, is often described as a horselike or goatlike animal with a long horn sticking out of its forehead. It is supposedly a fierce beast which could only be caught by a young girl. Its horn is said to have the power to detect poisonous substances and cure sickness.



6. The **dragon** is probably the most popular of all the mythical creatures. It was portrayed as the deadliest of all serpents with wings and a long tail. It had sharp teeth and an arrow-like tongue and could breathe out fire. It could easily kill men and the source of its power was believed to lie in its long and scaly tail. The **wyvern** is a creature similar to the dragon which was featured in many coats of arms in England. The dragon and the wyvern are both symbols of power and courage.
7. The medieval age is known for its **tapestries**. A tapestry is a picture or pattern made by weaving coloured wool onto heavy cloth. Many of the tapestries woven during the Middle Ages included pictures of beasts like dragons and unicorns. *The Hunt of the Unicorn*, a famous series of seven tapestries, portrays the story of the hunt of a unicorn by a group of men.
8. **Heraldry**, the art of making seals or symbols, was considered very important in the medieval times because the symbols represented social status. Kings and knights had their own coats of arms. The symbols used in heraldry were mainly of animals, each of which

symbolizing a quality. The coat of arms of England, which is believed to be created by Richard the Lionheart, has three lions. The three golden lions on the red background represent bravery and strength.

9. ***The Canterbury Tales*** is a collection of stories written in Middle English by **Geoffrey Chaucer**. The English used by Chaucer was entirely different from the language we use today. These stories were widely read by the people. The tales are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at the Canterbury Cathedral. There are different tales such as a knight's tale, a cook's tale, a miller's tale, etc. These stories are considered very important because they represent the lives and beliefs of the people during the Middle Ages.
10. ***Ivanhoe***, a famous historical novel written by **Walter Scott**, is about a knight Wilfred Ivanhoe. Robin Hood appears in the story initially under the name Locksley, along with his Merry Men. This novel gives much information about the lifestyle and customs of medieval knights.

Questions on the Story

1. Where did Robin Hood and his band of outlaws live?
2. What kind of life did they have?
3. Who wanted to capture Robin Hood?
4. In what season did the story take place?
5. Who chanced to come riding through the forest?
6. Where was he going?

7. On what bargain did they settle?
8. What happened when Robin reached the market?
9. Why were the other butchers so angry?
10. Where did Robin dine that day?
11. Who treated him kindly?
12. What did the Sheriff ask Robin to do?
13. What arrangements were made?
14. What did the horned animals turn out to be?
15. How did Robin Hood summon his men?
16. What was the colour of their clothes?
17. Where was the money to pay for the cattle?
18. What did the Sheriff say was in the bags?
19. Why did the outlaw chief allow the Sheriff to go free?

Questions on the Interesting Facts

1. Explain the terms “Middle Ages” and “medieval”.
2. (a) Why do medieval stories and legends have different versions?
(b) Name any three medieval legends.
3. (a) What is “Excalibur”?
(b) What is its significance?
4. (a) Who was Richard the Lionheart?
(b) Why was he known by that name?
(c) How was he related to Robin Hood?
5. Who published *Naturalis Historia*? What kind of book was it?
6. Name a few mythical beasts that were popular in the medieval times.

7. Describe the appearance of
 - (a) a unicorn.
 - (b) a dragon.
8. What is *The Hunt of the Unicorn*?
9.
 - (a) What is heraldry?
 - (b) Why was it considered important in the Middle Ages?
 - (c) Describe the coat of arms of England.
10. Explain the term “crusades”.
11.
 - (a) What is *The Canterbury Tales*?
 - (b) What language did Chaucer use in *The Canterbury Tales*?
 - (c) Explain the context of the stories told in *The Canterbury Tales*.
12.
 - (a) Name Walter Scott’s historical novel set in the Middle Ages.
 - (b) Under what name does Robin Hood appear in it?
 - (c) What is the significance of this novel?

3

Racing the Forest Fire



“Hullo! Who can that be?” Joe Martin muttered as he was awakened from a sound sleep by a loud banging noise. Slipping out of bed, he unlocked the outside door, which was instantly thrown wide open by a violent gust of wind. An elderly man stumbled inside, and the boy saw that it was Mr Barker, the stationmaster of the little railway station at Bitter Creek.

“I must speak to your father,” he said in a breathless voice; and just at that moment Mr Martin called out to know who was there.

Mr Barker burst into his bedroom without waiting to be invited.

“It’s a forest fire, Bob,” he said, “I’ve just received a message saying that the folk at Three Pines are trapped. It seems that they did not expect this hurricane and they thought the fire would miss them. The wind has changed direction and now the fire is spreading so quickly that they have little chance of escape. They are almost surrounded by a ring of fire already.”

Mr Martin uttered a cry of horror, for he knew that weeks and weeks of dry weather produced many forest fires in that



part of Canada. He tried to struggle into a sitting position, but fell back with a groan of pain. He was a driver employed by the railway but was off work as he had met with an accident. While cleaning his engine he had slipped and had broken his leg in the fall. The stationmaster eyed him anxiously.

Mr Martin nodded.

“I’ll go,” he said, and made another attempt to rise. A look of pain crossed his face, and he fell back a second time.

“It’s no use,” he groaned. “I can’t move on account of my leg.”

Mr Barker bit his lower lip.

“What will happen to those poor souls in Three Pines?” he said. “They’ll be burned alive before we can reach them.”

At that moment Joe caught the old stationmaster by the arm.

“Let me drive!” the boy cried. “Dad had often allowed me to ride with him on the footplate between here and

Mooseville, and I know how to handle a locomotive. Don't I, Dad?"

Mr Martin gave a rather startled nod, but the station-master eyed him doubtfully.

"I can't let you do that," he said, "though I admire your pluck."

"But I can drive, really I can," Joe told him earnestly. "I'm sure I could manage Number 45. You must let me go, Mr Barker. It is the only chance of saving those people at Three Pines."

Ruth Martin had entered the room just in time to hear her brother's offer. Ruth kept house for her widowed father, and she had been roused by the knocking on the front door. She looked rather white, but she supported her brother.

"Let Joe try," she said. "I know he can handle a locomotive and there is no other way of reaching Three Pines."

Mr Barker hesitated for a moment or two. Then the thought of the family trapped in the little clearing at Three Pines decided him.

"All right, you can make the attempts," he said. "They are getting steam up in Number 45 just now, and they will be ready by the time you have dressed."

But Joe had already dashed into his bedroom and was scrambling into his clothes.

"Good luck, son," Mr Martin said in a rather husky voice when the boy was ready. Ruth said nothing for fear she would show how scared she was.

"Remember to use your brakes going down that long hill near Three Pines," Mr Martin shouted, as Joe hurried from the house with Mr Barker.

When they reached the station, they found a big locomotive waiting there with steam hissing from its boilers.



The men who stood around asked many questions when they saw young Joe swing himself up on the footplate.

“It’s all right,” Mr Barker snapped impatiently. “Joe’s father can’t stir out of bed on account of his injury, but he thinks that the boy can take his place. It is our only hope of saving the folk at Three Pines, so don’t waste time arguing. Who will go with him as fireman?”

There were plenty of volunteers, and the stationmaster chose a big burly man named Sam Wilson.

Joe Martin’s heart was pounding as he reached for the throttle. The shining locomotive began to move with her three coaches, and the little crowd at the station raised a cheer. Joe swung out from the cab for a moment to wave to them; then he devoted his whole attention to the huge monster.

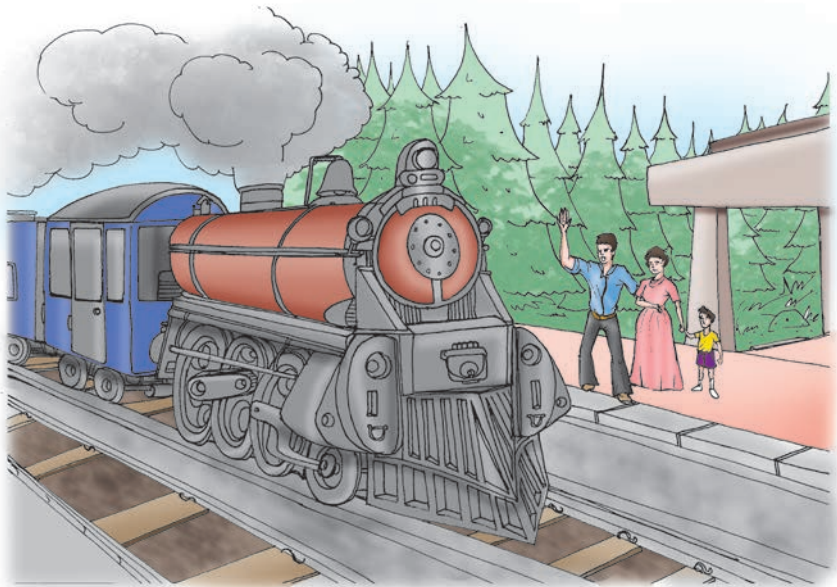
Before long they were travelling so fast that the engine was rocking from side to side, and Sam Wilson looked anxiously at the boy, and wondered whether he had lost control. But

Joe knew what he was doing, and did not slacken speed until they reached the long steep hill which led down to Three Pines. Then he shut off steam, put on the brakes and the train came to a standstill opposite the rough wooden cabin where the lumberman and his family lived.

By this time the forest fire was so near that they were almost deafened by the roar of the flames, which were shooting like fiery serpents through a great cloud of smoke which overhung the forest. From time to time there was a loud roar as some giant of the forest went crashing to the ground. Then a vast shower of red sparks would shoot skywards like a big rocket bursting.

“Thank goodness you have come,” the man said. “It was no use trying to get through the forest, and we had given up hope.”

Joe and Sam Wilson helped the lumberman and his family to load most of their cherished possessions into the coaches. Then they boarded the train and Joe put the engine



in reverse. Snorting and panting, it slowly climbed the steep gradient, pushing the three coaches ahead of it.

Long before they reached the top of the long climb, the forest fire was darting along one side of the railway track, and at times Joe was nearly blinded by hot smoke and flying embers. The boy was afraid that the metal rails would be so twisted by the heat that the train would be derailed before they could reach the open country.

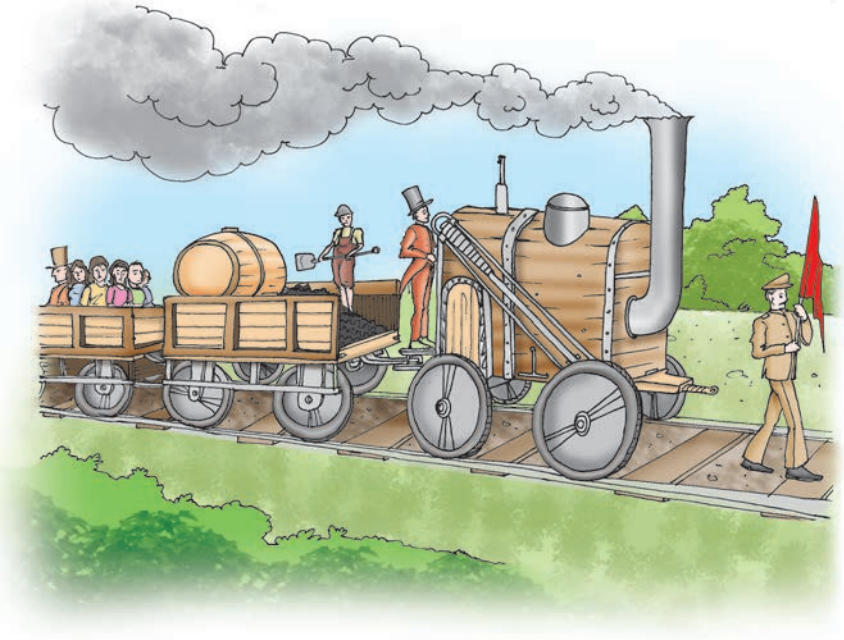
However, they reached the top of the long hill, and remembering what his father had told him, Joe used his brakes as they began the long descent on the other side. Now at this part the forest came close to the track on both sides, and the heat and smoke were worse than ever. Great tongues of flame leapt right across the track, and wrapped themselves round the train. One great burst of flames struck the locomotive and the terrific heat broke the glass in the cab. Some of the flying fragments cut their faces, and almost fainting with pain, they stumbled to the tender, and lay there in a heap.

Faster and faster the train travelled down the steep hill, till it was racing at one hundred kilometres an hour. Joe staggered to his feet, saw that the track ahead was clear of flames, and knew they were safe from the fire. Still there was another danger. He became alarmed by the rocking of the engine and so he closed the throttle. Then he gradually applied the brakes again, and slowly the thundering locomotive lost speed.

Soon, the lights of Bitter Creek came sparkling out of the darkness, and when Joe and Sam Wilson reached the station, they received a great welcome from their friends, who were anxiously awaiting their arrival.

Joe Martin grew up and become the driver of one of the big Canadian expresses. Although he has had a few exciting adventures, he is never likely to forget the time when, as a boy, he raced the forest fire in Locomotive Number 45.

Interesting Facts about Railways



1. Nearly two hundred years ago the packhorse, the bullock cart, the camel caravan, the wagon and the canal barge were the only means of carrying goods from one part of the country to another, and if people wished to travel they had the choice of walking, riding on horseback, or going by stage-coach. In 1825, the first steam railway train to carry passengers travelled between the towns of Darlington and Stockton in the North of England. Invented by a clever engineer named George Stephenson, the strange new steam

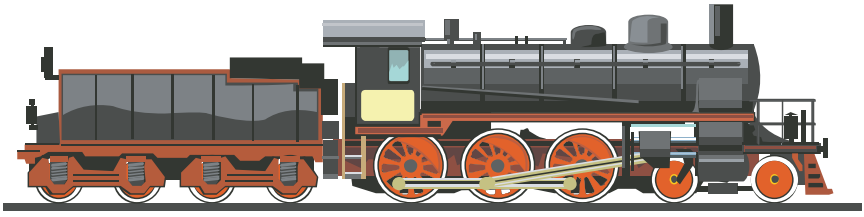
monster, which drew wagons along rails, caused great interest and excitement. At first, people thought this way of travel was dangerous and they said that trains went too fast and could easily overturn and that the engine might burst and kill the passengers.

2. The slow and heavy engines of the earliest trains were replaced by lighter and faster models as time went by. By the end of the nineteenth century a giant cobweb of railway lines had spread throughout Britain, and passengers could make journeys comfortably at a speed of 96 kilometres per hour. Enormous quantities of goods were carried, too, but at a slower speed.

3. The British established railway networks in the countries they ruled, including India and present-day Pakistan. The railway came to India in 1853. This was mainly for the use of the military. By the time of independence India had one of the largest railway networks in the world. “Bholu the guard elephant” is the mascot of Indian Railways.



4. The steam engine was fired by coal, and an open truck immediately behind the engine carried the supply needed to stoke the fire during the journey. A fireman travelled in the cab of the engine with the driver, and it was his duty to feed the small furnace which boiled the water to make the steam. A dirty plume of smoke in the distance was usually the first sign of the approach of the steam train.

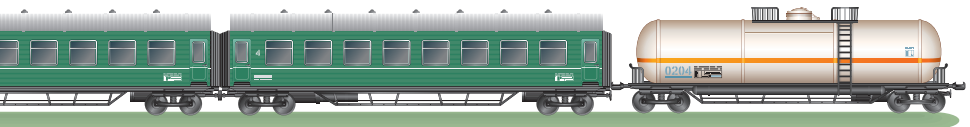


5. Trains continued to be driven by steam until after 1960, but nowadays most trains are run by electricity or are diesel powered. The power for **electric trains** is conducted to the trains either by an overhead cable or by a third rail. Those with **diesel engines** use the engine to generate the electric power needed to drive them. The trains, and the countryside, are now much cleaner, and greater speeds can be achieved. Long distance trains average about 120 kilometres per hour.
6. A passenger train is made up of several coaches linked to an engine. Modern coaches are of the corridor type, with comfortable seats on either side of a central passage. On long-distance trains there are usually kitchens and dining cars so that passengers may have meals. Sleeping berths are provided on trains which make long overnight journeys possible.
7. Heavy goods, such as coal and iron, are still carried in open trucks like those used in the first railways. An engine can pull a great many of these, but such a goods train travels slowly at 64 kilometres per hour. Other goods travel on freightliners. A freightliner may have as many as 30 flat bogie wagons; the goods to be

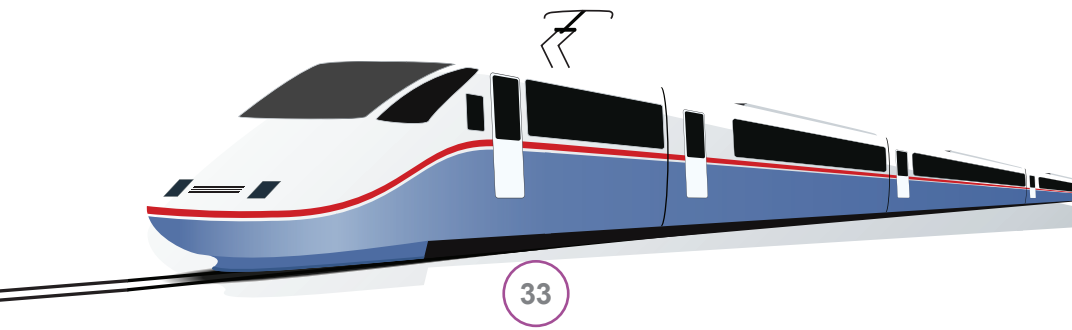


carried are packed in big containers at the warehouse or factory, then taken by lorry to the freight depot, where the containers are lifted on to the wagons. When the train arrives at its destination, it can be quickly unloaded, and loaded up again for another journey. Freightliners can travel at an average speed of 100 kilometres per hour.

8. Other special kinds of goods trains are the oil train and the car transporter. The oil train has tubular shaped tanks into which the oil is pumped at the dockside or oil refinery. When the train load arrives the oil can either be siphoned out of the tanks, or the tanks may be transferred to a lorry for delivery to works or garages. The motor car train has a double row of flat platforms on which the cars can travel safely.
9. Signals are erected at intervals along the railway track. When the signal arm with a red stripe is in a horizontal position the train must stop. If this signal arm is raised upward, the train may safely travel forward. When the signal arm with a yellow stripe is horizontal, this is a warning to the driver to go slowly and watch out for danger ahead. At night the signals show bright red, yellow or green lights. In addition to the colour signals given to the train driver, a bell rings within the driver's cab as he approaches a green signal; but if it is a yellow signal a horn sounds, and the brakes are applied automatically.



10. Practically all signalling is electrically controlled. The signalman sits in front of a lighted panel on which is shown a diagram of the track under his control. The signalman can see the trains on his diagram while they are several miles away. By pressing two buttons he sets the route which the train is to follow; when he presses the first button, this checks that the route is clear, and when he presses the second button this changes the points needed for the route and operates the signal to let the train through.
11. When we travel by train we see the engine driver, the porters who help with our luggage and the inspector who examines our tickets on the train. But as well as these a great many people are employed looking after the track, making sure that the sleepers are holding the lines firmly, and repairing and cleaning engines and carriages.
12. A metro is a train service meant for travel within a city and its suburbs. Some cities have a monorail system in which trains run on elevated tracks above the busy city traffic.
13. Trains that run at very high speeds are now common in many European and Asian countries. The fastest train in the world is the Shanghai Maglev. Its maximum speed is 431 kilometres per hour and the average speed is 251 kilometres per hour.



❑ Questions on the Story

1. In which country did the story take place?
2. Give the boy's name.
3. What was his father's name?
4. Who awakened the household by banging on the door?
5. From where had he come?
6. What message did the visitor bring?
7. Why did he go to Mr Martin's house?
8. What was the stationmaster's plan of rescue?
9. Why was Mr Martin unable to go?
10. Who pleaded to go in his place?
11. What was the number of the locomotive?
12. How many coaches were attached to the engine?
13. Who went with the boy as fireman?
14. Why did Joe put on the brakes before reaching Three Pines?
15. Who lived there?
16. On arrival, what did they place in the coaches?
17. How could the frozen fire derail the train?
18. What happened to them when they were overcome by flames in the engine-cab?
19. Who welcomed them at Bitter Creek?
20. What did Joe Martin become when he grew up?

❑ Questions on the Interesting Facts

1. How did people travel before there were trains?
2. (a) Who invented the first steam railway train to carry passengers?
(b) Between which towns did it travel?

3. (a) At what speed did trains travel in 1900?
(b) How was steam to drive the train obtained?
4. (a) How are trains driven nowadays?
(b) Can you describe a modern long-distance train?
5. (a) How are heavy goods like coal carried?
(b) Describe some of the trains which carry other kinds of freight.
6. What must the train driver do when
 - (a) the signal arm with a red stripe is horizontal?
 - (b) the signal arm with a yellow stripe is horizontal?
7. What warning does the driver receive when a train approaches a yellow signal at night?
8. Signalling is electrically controlled. What happens when
 - (a) the signaller presses the first button?
 - (b) he presses the second button?
9. On a rail journey you might see:
 - (a) a pilot
 - (b) a porter
 - (c) a driver
 - (d) an inspector
 - (e) a ticket collector
10. What other workers are needed to keep the railways in order?
11. What is the name of a train that runs within a city and its suburbs?
12. Which is the fastest train and how fast is it?

□ Development Exercises

1. All the trouble was caused by a fire in the forest. What different kinds of trees would you expect to find in a forest?
2. In the story the rescue was made by train. How many other ways of quick travel can you name?
3. Wood burns easily.
 - (a) Name four materials which can be set on fire quickly.
 - (b) Why is it dangerous to play near a fire?
 - (c) Why should we always be very careful with matches?
4. Why are the following worn?
bib, apron, overall, oilskin-coat, wet-suit
5. What name is given to each of the following?
 - (a) A fast train which makes few stops on a long journey
 - (b) A train which stops at every station
6. Water is made into steam in the engine's boiler. For what purpose is each of the following used?
kettle, oven, furnace, urn, refrigerator, percolator
7.
 - (a) Why are tunnels made?
 - (b) Why are railway bridges built?
 - (c) Of what use is a railway timetable?
8. What name best describes the clothes a train driver would wear while working?

4

Once There Was a King



I remember vividly that evening in Calcutta when the fairy story began. The rain and the storm had been never-ending. The whole of the city was flooded. The water was knee-deep in our lane. I had a faint hope, which was almost a certainty, that my tutor would not be able to come that evening. I sat on the stool in the far corner of the veranda looking down the lane, with a heart beating faster and faster. I prayed, “Please, God, send some more rain till half-past seven is over.” I believed that the only purpose of the rain was to save one small boy from his tutor for at least one evening.

But alas, not only did the rain not slow down but my teacher still managed to make it to my house!

Exactly on time, I saw his approaching umbrella. As soon as I saw his umbrella, I ran as hard as I could to my mother’s

room. My mother and my grandmother were sitting opposite each other playing cards by the light of a lamp. I ran into the room, and flung myself on the bed beside my mother, and said: "Mother dear, the tutor has come, and I have such a bad headache; couldn't I have no lessons today?"

I hope no child of immature age will be allowed to read this story, and I sincerely trust it will not be used in textbooks. For what I did was dreadfully bad; and I received no punishment. On the contrary, my wickedness was rewarded with success.

My mother said to me: "All right," and turning to the servant added: "Tell the tutor that he can go back home."

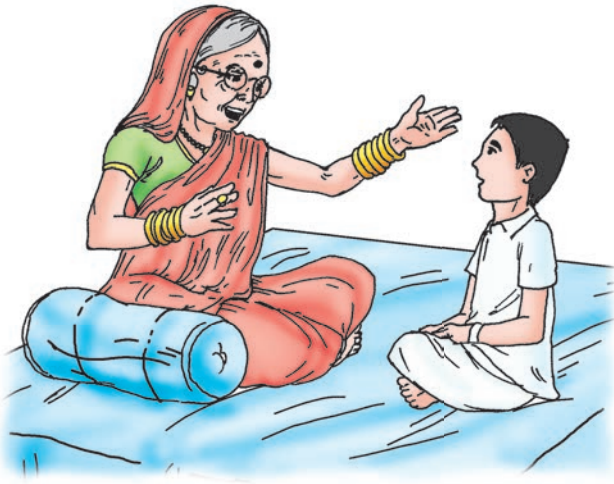
It was perfectly plain that she didn't think my illness very serious, as she went on with her game as before, and took no further notice. And I also, burying my head in the pillow, laughed to my heart's content. We perfectly understood one another, my mother and I.

But everyone must know what it is for a boy of seven years old to continue to pretend to be ill and not be able to do anything. After about a minute I got hold of Grandmother, and said: "Grannie, do tell me a story." I bothered them till at last my mother threw down the cards and said: "You had better do what he wants. I can't manage him."

As soon as Mother had given way, I rushed at Grannie. I got hold of her hand, dragged her inside my mosquito curtain on to the bed. I jumped up and down with joy, and when I had got a little quieter, said: "Now, Grannie, let's have the story!"

Grannie went on: "And the king had a queen." That was good to begin with. He had only one queen.

We next hear that the king did not have any son. At the age of seven I didn't think there was any need to bother if



a man had had no son. Nor are we greatly excited when we hear that the king had gone away into the forest to pray in order to get a son. There was only one thing that would have made me go into the forest, and that was to get away from my tutor!

But the king left behind with his queen a small girl, who grew up into a beautiful princess.

Twelve years passed away, and the king went on praying, and never thought of his beautiful daughter. The princess grew up and reached the age of marriage. But even then the king did not return and the daughter also passed the marriageable age. And the queen pined away with grief and cried: "Is my golden daughter destined to die unmarried? Ah me! What a fate is mine!"

Then the queen sent men to the king to entreat him earnestly to come back for a single night and take one meal in the palace. The king agreed.

The queen cooked with her own hand, and with the greatest care, sixty-four dishes, and made a seat for him of sandalwood, and arranged the food in plates of gold and cups

of silver. The princess stood behind with the peacock-tail fan in her hand. The king, after twelve years' absence, came into the house, and the princess waved the fan, lighting up all the room with her beauty. The king looked in his daughter's face, and forgot to take his food.

At last he asked his queen: "Pray, who is this girl whose beauty shines as the gold image of the goddess? Whose daughter is she?"

The queen beat her forehead, and cried: "Ah, how evil is my fate! Do you not know your own daughter?"

The king was struck with amazement. He said at last, "My tiny daughter has grown to be a woman."

"What else?" the queen said with a sigh. "Do you not know that twelve years have passed by?"

"But why did you not give her in marriage?" asked the king.

"You were away," the queen said. "And how could I find her a suitable husband?"

The king became vehement with excitement. "The first man I see tomorrow," he said, "when I come out of the palace shall marry her."

The princess went on waving her fan of peacock feathers, and the king finished his meal.

The next morning, as the king came out of his palace, he saw the son of a Brahman gathering sticks in the forest outside the palace gates. His age was about seven or eight.

The king said: "I will marry my daughter to him."

Who can interfere with a king's command? At once the boy was called, and the marriage garlands were exchanged between him and the princess.

At this point I came up close to my wise Grannie and asked her eagerly: "What then?"

In the bottom of my heart there was a wish to substitute myself for that fortunate wood-gatherer of seven years old. The night was resonant with the patter of rain. The earthen lamp by my bedside was burning low. My grandmother's voice droned on as she told the story. And all these things served to create, in my imagination, a live picture of the story; and suddenly I was the young boy gathering wood. In my imagination, I was married to the most beautiful princess. She had a gold band on her hair and gold earrings in her ears. She had a necklace and bracelets of gold, and a golden waist-chain round her waist, and a pair of golden anklets tinkled above her feet.

So with a throb of joy and delight, I asked Grannie: "What then?"

Grannie went on: Then the princess took her little husband away in great distress, and built a large palace with seven wings, and began to cherish her husband with great care.

I jumped up and down in my bed and clutched at the bolster more tightly than ever and said: "What then?"

Grannie continued: The little boy went to school and learned many lessons from his teachers, and as he grew up his class-fellows began to ask him: "Who is that beautiful lady who lives with you in the palace with the seven wings?" The Brahman's son was eager to know who she was. He could only remember how one day he had been gathering sticks, and a great disturbance arose. But all that was so long ago, that he had no clear recollection.

Four or five years passed in this way. His companions always asked him: "Who is that beautiful lady in the palace with the seven wings?" And the Brahman's son would come

back from school and sadly tell the princess: “My school companions always ask me who is that beautiful lady in the palace with the seven wings, and I can give them no reply. Tell me, oh, tell me, who you are!”

The princess said: “Let it pass today. I will tell you some other day.” And every day the Brahman’s son would



ask, “Who are you?” and the princess would reply: “Let it pass today. I will tell you some other day.” In this manner four or five more years passed away.

At last the Brahman’s son became very impatient, and said: “If you do not tell me today who you are, O beautiful lady, I will leave this palace with the seven wings.” Then the princess said: “I will certainly tell you tomorrow.”

Next day the Brahman’s son, as soon as he came home from school, said: “Now, tell me who you are.” The princess said: “Tonight I will tell you after supper, when you are in bed.”

The Brahman’s son said: “Very well”, and he began to count the hours in expectation of the night. And the princess, on her side, spread white flowers over the golden bed, and lighted a gold lamp with fragrant oil, and adorned her hair, and dressed herself in a beautiful robe of blue, and began to count the hours in expectation of the night.

That evening when her husband, the Brahman’s son, had finished his meal, too excited almost to eat, and had gone to the golden bed in the bed-chamber strewn with flowers,

he said to himself: “Tonight I shall surely know who this beautiful lady is in the palace with the seven wings.”

The princess took for herself the food that was left over by her husband, and slowly entered the bed-chamber. She had to answer that night the question which her husband had been asking for so many years. And as she went up to the bed to tell him, she found a serpent had crept out of the flowers and had bitten the Brahman’s son. Her boy-husband was lying on the bed of flowers, with face pale in death.

My heart suddenly ceased to throb, and I asked with choking voice: “What then?”

Grannie said, “Then . . .”

But what is the use of going on any further with the story? But the child’s faith never admits defeat, and it would snatch at the mantle of death itself to turn him back. It would be outrageous for him to think that such a story of one teacherless evening could so suddenly come to a stop.

Therefore, the grandmother had to call back her story and change the unhappy ending. She did this simply by saying that the dead body was floated on a banana stem on the river, and a magician read some incantations.

But on that rainy night, death lost all its horror in my sleepy mind that did not want to hear a sad end. Death looked like a long slumber of a single night. When the story ended, my tired eyelids were weighed down with sleep. And it sent the small boy floating on the back of sleep only to be woken up in the morning after some verses of incantation.

Rabindranath Tagore

Facts about Child Marriage

1. The UNICEF defines child marriage as a system of formal marriage or union where individuals are married off before they reach the age of 18. This social evil mainly affects the girls who face several health hazards because of early marriage.
2. The United Nations condemns child marriage as a gross violation of human rights. The causes of child marriage include poverty, illiteracy, bride price, dowry, religious and social pressures, regional customs and cultural traditions.
3. Most governments have outlawed child marriage. Indian law made child marriage absolutely illegal in 2006 by passing the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, which came into effect on 1 November 2007.
4. Child marriage existed in ancient and medieval societies and in most places around the world. Today, child marriages are more visible and widespread in developing areas such as Africa, South Asia, Southeast and East Asia, West Asia, Latin America and Oceania.
5. In Ancient Rome, girls married above the age of 12 and boys above age 14. English civil laws were derived from Roman laws and in the Middle Ages, marriages before the age of 16 were common. In Imperial China, child marriage was the norm.
6. In Iran, girls may marry at 13, provided they have the permission of their father. Boys may marry after the age of 15. In western Pakistan and Afghanistan, in some cases, girls are married to settle disputes between families.

7. Child marriages have severe consequences. There exists, obviously, the lasting effect on the girl's physical health. As the girl grows older, she might also face social isolation. In most cases, early pregnancies limit education. This makes them unable to earn for themselves and keeps them always dependent.

❑ Questions on the Story

1. Where did the story take place?
2. Name the author.
3. Who was the little boy waiting for?
4. What did the boy hope would happen and what did he pray to God for?
5. What did he do when he saw his tutor approach?
6. What excuse did he give his mother to escape his lessons?
7. Why does the author hope no child of immature age reads the story?
8. Why is it difficult for a boy of seven years to pretend to be ill for long?
9. What did the little boy do instead?
10. How did the grandmother begin the story?
11. Why did the king in the story go away into the forest?
12. Did the boy think it was necessary for the king to go into the forest in order to get a son?
13. Who did the king leave behind with his queen?
14. Why did the king not return in twelve years?
15. Finally, why did he agree to come back to his kingdom for a night?

16. What preparations were made for him?
17. Why did the princess have to marry a boy of seven?
18. Why couldn't the princess tell the young Brahman boy who she was?
19. Why did she finally agree to tell him who she was?
20. What happened on the night the princess was supposed to tell the boy who she was?

❑ Questions on the Facts about Child Marriage

1. How does the UNICEF define child marriage?
2. Who is most affected by this social evil?
3. What are some major challenges young girls face after having gone through an early marriage?
4. List some causes of child marriage.
5. Why is child marriage considered to be a gross violation of human rights?
6. Which Act prohibits child marriage in India?
7. Is child marriage a new phenomenon?
8. List some areas where child marriage is more visible and widespread.
9. What are the acceptable ages of marriage in Iran, western Pakistan and Afghanistan?
10. What are some consequences of child marriage?

❑ Development Exercises

1. On a map of Asia point out the following places:
 - (a) Kolkata
 - (b) Bengaluru
 - (c) Gandhinagar
 - (d) Colombo
 - (e) Lahore
 - (f) Beijing

2. Fairy tales are usually short stories which feature fantastical characters such as elves, gnomes, etc. The original spelling of the word *fairy* was *faerie*. Such spellings are called “archaic spellings”. Can you find out more such words with archaic spellings?
3. The word *umbrella* evolved from the Latin *umbella*. An *umbel* is a flat-topped rounded flower or *umbra*, meaning shaded or shadow. *-Ella* in French is used as a suffix added to words, attaching the meaning of “little”, thus an umbrella is a “little shadow”. Discuss the origins of the following words:
 - (a) malaria
 - (b) helicopter
 - (c) robot
 - (d) disaster
 - (e) juggernaut
4. Mawsynram in the Indian state of Meghalaya is the wettest place on earth as it receives an annual rainfall of 11,872 millimetres. Do you know which is
 - (a) the Land of the Rising Sun?
 - (b) the Dark Continent?
 - (c) the Cockpit of Europe?
 - (d) the Windy City?
 - (e) the Gift of the Nile?
 - (f) the Sugar Bowl of the World?
5. In olden times, the king was considered to be the highest figure of authority, almost a divine figure. Most countries today have democracy. What is your understanding about this form of government?