

7 Big Brother



Do you have an elder sibling telling you what do and what not to do most of the times? If so, how do you feel about it? Discuss.

My brother was five years older than me, but only three classes ahead. He started studying at the same age as I did but he didn't want to hurry in an important matter such as education. He wanted to build on a strong foundation. So he took two years to do what could be done in one year. If the foundation was not strong how a building could be built to last?

I was younger. I was nine; he was fourteen. To check me and keep an eye on me was his birthright. And decency said that I must follow his command as if it was the Law.

He was studious by nature. He always sat with an open book in front of him. Sometimes, to rest his brain, he would draw pictures of birds, dogs or cats on the margins of his books and notebooks. Sometimes, he would write the same name or word or sentence over and over again. Sometimes, he would write things that had neither meaning nor sense. I tried my best to make sense of his riddles but I couldn't. I didn't have the courage to ask him. How could I dare to make sense of his writings!

I was not at all interested in studying. Sitting with a book for even one hour made me restless. The first chance I got, I would run away from



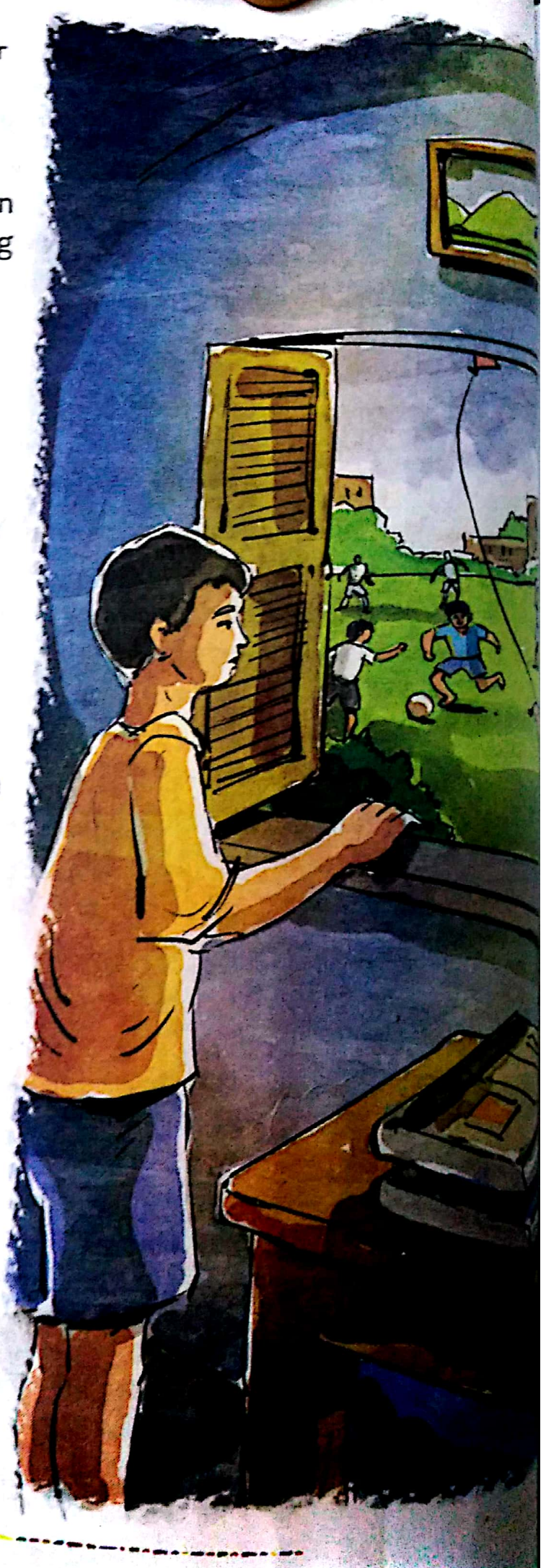
the hostel and go to the playground and sometimes play with marbles, sometimes fly paper butterflies, and my day would be made if a friend showed up. We would climb up on the roof and take turns jumping off, or swing on the gate and pretend it was a motor car. But the moment I entered the room and saw Big Brother, or Big B's angry face, I would get scared to death. His first question would be: 'Where were you?' The question was always asked in the same tone and my answer was always silence. I don't know why I could never say I had gone out to play. My silence would say that I accept my crime and Big B would have no other option but to greet me with the following words that showed both his love and anger: 'If you continue to study English like this, you can go on trying for the rest of your life and you still won't learn one word. Studying the English language is not a joke; everyone can't master it. Or else every Tom, Dick and Harry would be a master of English. You have to toil day and night to learn it, and you can never fully learn it either. All sorts of learned men can't actually write let alone speak in English. And you are such an idiot that you don't learn from my example. You can see for yourself how hard I work. And if you can't see, you are blind and stupid. Every day there is a play or a festival. Have you ever seen me go for even one of them? Every day there is a hockey or cricket match. I never go anywhere near them. I am always studying, yet I end up studying in the same class for two, sometimes even three years. Then, how do you expect to pass despite wasting all your time in fun and games? Do you want to spend the rest of your life in the same class? If this is the way you want to waste your life, you might as well go home. Why are you wasting our poor father's hard-earned money?')

I would listen to this lecture and start crying. I had no answer. I was guilty as charged. Big B was an old hand at giving lectures. He could say such hard-hitting things, aim such barbed arrows that my heart would break into pieces and my confidence would shatter. Yet I didn't have the strength for such do-or-die labour. At such times of despair, I would think, 'Maybe it is best to go back home. Why should I take on something that is beyond my abilities and destroy my life? I am willing to stay illiterate.' In an hour or

barbed	sharp
do-or-die	having or needing great determination
despair	feeling of having lost all hope

two, the clouds of despair would part and I would decide to study hard. I would make a timetable. After all, how could I begin work without first drawing up a scheme or a plan? There was no room for games and sports in this timetable. According to this plan, I would get up at six a.m., wash, eat my breakfast and sit down to study. From six to eight, it was English; eight to nine maths; nine to nine-thirty history; then eat my mid-day meal and go off to school. I would return from school at half-past three, rest for half an hour and start studying again.)

But it is one thing to make a timetable, another to follow it. I would break the rules from the very first day. The greenery of the sports field, the sweet breeze that blew there, the joy of running after the football, the pick-and-throw of *kabaddi**, the speed and sureness of volleyball—all these would pull me in strange



*sport of Indian origin

and unknown ways. Once on the sports field, I would forget everything else. That murderous timetable, those books that would blind me one day—I would remember nothing. And Big B would get yet another occasion to give his lecture. I began to run from the very sight of him. I would try my best to stay away from his all-seeing eyes. I would enter the room on tiptoe lest he spotted me. The moment he looked in my direction, I could feel my life ebbing out of me. I constantly felt as though a sword dangled above my head. But my interest in fun and games remained unabated despite the scolding's and insults.

* * *

The yearly exams took place. Big B failed, I not only passed but also stood first in my class. There was not only a difference of two classes between him and me. There was a lot I wanted to tell Big B: 'What happened to all your hard work? Look at me; I had a lot of fun playing and yet I have stood first in my class.'

But he was so sad that I felt truly sorry for him and the thought of sprinkling salt on his wounds seemed a shameful thing to do. My self-confidence, however, grew—as did my pride. And with it Big B's awe lessened. I began to take part in fun and games with a greater sense of freedom. I had decided: if he ever tries to give a lecture I shall tell him what I think. It was clear from my behaviour that Big B's days of tyrannical rule over me was a thing of the past.

Big B sensed it. He was quite clever in these simple matters. One day, when after playing *gulli-danda** all morning, I was returning home in time for my meal, Big B was ready and waiting to attack. He pounced on me, 'I can see that passing this year and coming first in your class has gone to your head. But, my dear brother, remember that many great men have lost their pride; you are nothing in comparison to them. You must have read about Ravan's fate. What have you learnt from reading about him? Or did you just read without understanding? Simply passing in history is not enough. You must understand whatever you read (Ravan

ebbing	gradually decreasing
unabated	continued without becoming weaker or lesser

*sport played with two sticks



ruled over a large empire. Such kings are called Chakravarti kings, or supreme rulers. Yet what was Ravan's end? Pride caused him to fall. In the end, there was no one with him. A man may do any wrong but he must not be proud. The day you become proud, your days are numbered. You have merely passed one class and it has gone to your head. Remember, you have not passed because of hard work; it is simply good luck, a matter of chance. But it won't happen every time. Don't go by the fact that I have failed. When you come to my class you will know how tough it is. When you have to read algebra and geometry, the history of England, and remember the names of the kings, all eight Henry's etc. And geometry... only God can save you from it! If, instead of a b c, you write a c b you end up losing all your marks. No one ever asks these cruel examiners what is the difference between a b c and a c b. Why do they kill innocent students over pointless, silly things? Whether you eat rice, dal and roti or dal, rice and roti—what is the difference? But do these examiners care? They want students to memorise every word that is written in the textbooks. And this learning by rote they have called Education.

Fortunately, it was time to go to school or no one knows when that lecture would have ended. My meal seemed tasteless. If I am insulted like this after passing, I wondered, what would be my fate if I failed?

The yearly examinations came around once again and it so happened that I passed once again and Big B failed yet again. I hadn't worked very hard but I don't know how I stood first in my class. I myself was amazed. Big B had tried his level best. He had memorised every word of the syllabus. He would study till ten in the night and then again from four in the morning and from six till nine before leaving for school. Yet he failed. I pitied him. When the results were announced, he burst into tears. My own joy was dimmed. If I had failed too Big B would have been less unhappy but who can undo the doings of Fate.

Munshi Premchand (1880–1936) was an Indian writer famous for his modern Hindi-Urdu literature. He is one of the most celebrated writers of the Indian subcontinent. Born as Dhanpat Rai, he began writing under the pen name Nawab Rai, but subsequently switched to Premchand. His works comprise more than a dozen novels, around 250 short stories, several essays and translations of various foreign literary works into Hindi. This story is translated in English by Rakshanda Jalil.



Exercises

A. Answer these questions.

1. What was Premchand's brother's apparent motto in life? What is your opinion regarding his motto?
2. Why could Premchand not 'dare to make sense of' his brother's writing?
3. How did Premchand spend his time?
4. What effects did Big B's words have on Premchand?
5. Why was Premchand advised to go home?
6. Why did Premchand design a timetable? How useful did it prove to be?
7. How did Premchand react to his brother's inability to pass the exams?
8. How did Premchand's brother try to convey the fact that the going would be tough in senior classes?
9. Quote a phrases or sentence from the text to prove the following:
 - a. Premchand was afraid of his brother.
 - b. Premchand respected his brother.
 - c. Premchand's brother was studious.

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *'And if you can't see you are blind and stupid.'*
 - a. Who is being referred to as blind and stupid? Why?
 - b. Would you consider this to be the correct assessment? Give reasons for your answer?
 - c. What are the speaker's views on the English language?
 - d. How did the listener feel at that moment?
2. *I was guilty as charged.*
 - a. Who is guilty and what is his offence?
 - b. Describe the person's feelings at this point of time?
 - c. Were these feelings permanent? Answer with suitable textual reference.
 - d. Do you think the person deserved to be pulled up by his elder brother? Give reasons for your answer.
3. *'A man may do any wrong but he must not be proud.'*
 - a. Who says this and what prompts him to do so?
 - b. What example and comparison does the speaker come up with? Why?
 - c. Do you feel that the example and comparison is an apt one?
 - d. Comment on the speaker's attitude in the given context.



8 Cradle Song

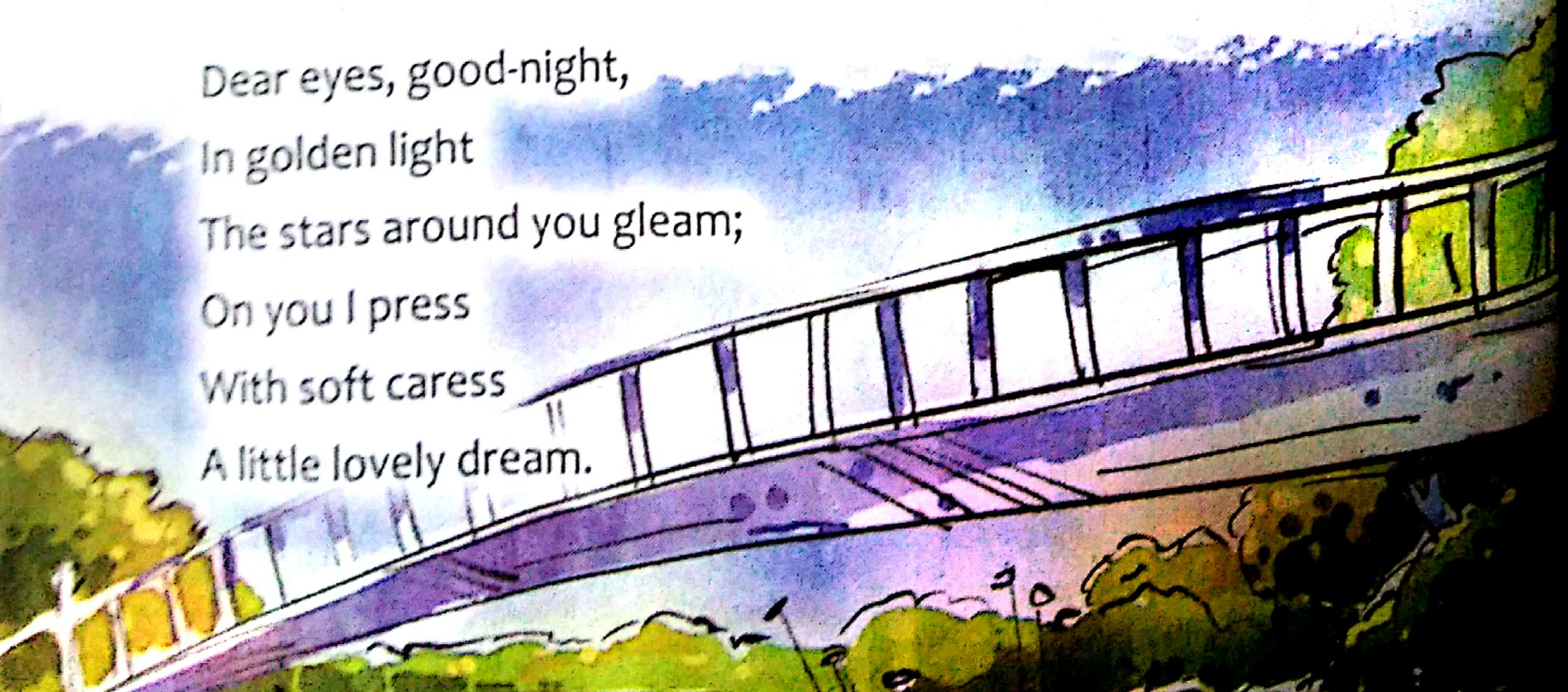


Most of us were sung lullabies when we were babies. Do you remember any of them now? Discuss.

FROM groves of spice,
O'er fields of rice,
Athwart the lotus-stream,
I bring for you,
Aglint with dew
A little lovely dream.
Sweet, shut your eyes,
The wild fire-flies
Dance through the fairy neem;
From the poppy-bole
For you I stole
A little lovely dream.

grove	small group of trees
athwart	across
aglint	glittering
bole	stem of a plant
gleam	shine with a pale light
caress	gentle touch

Dear eyes, good-night,
In golden light
The stars around you gleam;
On you I press
With soft caress
A little lovely dream.



Sarojini Naidu (1879–1949) was also known as 'The Nightingale of India'. She was a child prodigy who began writing poems at the age of 12. She was not only a poet but a great patriot, politician, orator and administrator as well. She was a subtle poet and wrote poetry based on the beauty of simple joys and sorrows of life. Her poetry included children's poems, nature poems and poems on love and death.

Exercises

A. Answer these questions.

1. What does the title of the poem suggest to you?
2. Show how the poet has recreated a picture of the Indian countryside in the poem.
3. Which line in the poem has been repeated thrice and why?
4. Has the child fallen asleep in the poem? Quote a line in support of your answer.
5. Why is the person wishing the eyes of the child 'good-night'?
6. Why is the expression 'fairy neem' used by the poet?

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *For you I stole*

A little lovely dream

- a. Who is uttering these words and whom are they addressed to?
- b. In this context is stealing an offence? Justify your answer.
- c. Where did the person steal from?

2. *On you I press*

With soft caress

- a. What is being referred to here?
- b. Describe the mood and feelings of the narrator in the given context.
- c. Quote an expression from this stanza to bring out the person's deep love.

C. This poem has many images and words associated with light. Make a list of all such words.

D. Use these words in sentences of your own.

1. spice
2. grove
3. wild
4. gleam
5. dew

E. Name at least five kinds of verse with a suitable example for each.

F. What kind of imagery has the poet mostly used in the poem? Quote with the relevant examples.

12 His First Flight



We often come across difficult situations in our day to day lives. Taking the first step is the toughest, but once we take that step the rest is accomplished. Have you experienced something similar? Discuss.

The young seagull was alone on his ledge. His two brothers and his sister had already flown away the day before. He had been afraid to fly with them. Somehow when he had taken a little run forward to the brink of the ledge and attempted to flap his wings he became afraid. The great expanse of sea stretched down beneath, and it was such a long way down—miles down. He felt certain that his wings would never support him; so he bent his head and ran away back to the little hole under the ledge where he slept at night. Even when each of his brothers and his little sister, whose wings were far shorter than his own, ran to the brink, flapped their wings, and flew away, he failed to muster up courage to take that plunge which appeared to him so desperate. His father and mother had come around calling to him shrilly, upbraiding him, threatening to let him starve on his ledge unless he flew away. But for the life of him he could not move.

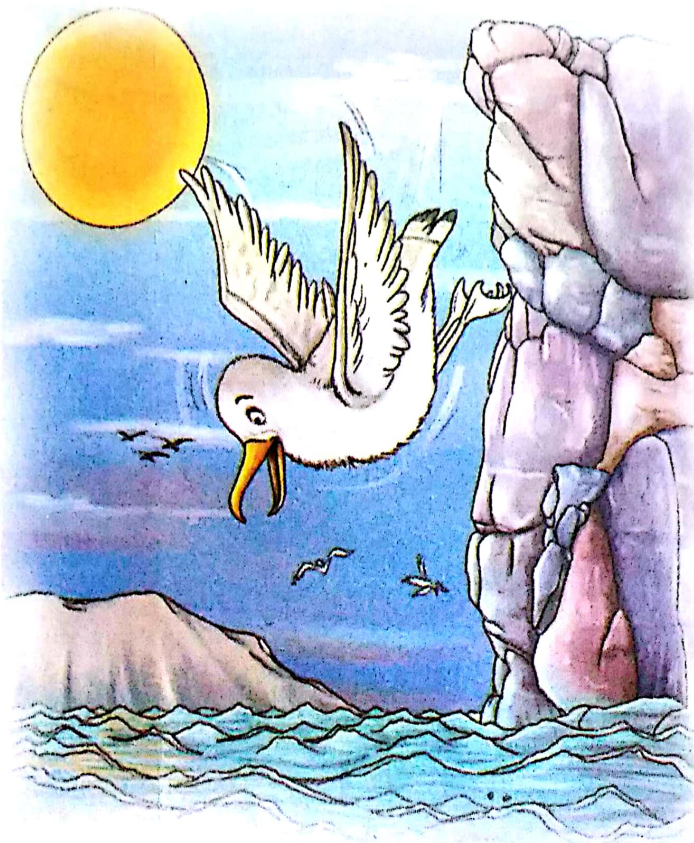
That was twenty-four hours ago. Since then nobody had come near him. The day before, all day long, he had watched his parents flying about with his brothers and sister, perfecting them in the art of flight, teaching them how to skim the waves and how to dive for fish. He had, in fact, seen his older brother catch his first herring and devour it, standing on a rock, while his parents circled around raising a proud cackle. And all the morning the whole family had walked about on the big plateau midway down the opposite cliff taunting him with his cowardice.

The sun was now ascending the sky, blazing on his ledge that faced the south. He felt the heat because he had not eaten since the previous nightfall.

ledge	a narrow flat piece of rock that sticks out from a cliff
expanse	large area
upbraiding	scolding angrily
cackle	pleasant noise
taunting	teasing or provoking

He stepped slowly out to the brink of the ledge, and standing on one leg with the other leg hidden under his wing, he closed one eye, then the other, and pretended to be falling asleep. Still they took no notice of him. He saw his two brothers and his sister lying on the plateau dozing with their heads sunk into their necks. His father was preening the feathers on his white back. Only his mother was looking at him. She was standing on a little high hump on the plateau, her white breast thrust forward. Now and again, she tore at a piece of fish that lay at her feet and then scrapped each side of her beak on the rock. The sight of the food maddened him. How he loved to tear food that way, scrapping his beak now and again to whet it.

'Ga, ga, ga,' he cried begging her to bring him some food. 'Gaw-col-ah,' she screamed back derisively. But he kept calling plaintively, and after a minute or so he uttered a joyful scream. His mother had picked up a piece of the fish and was flying across to him with it. He leaned out eagerly, tapping the rock with his feet, trying to get nearer to her as she flew across. But when she was just opposite to him, she halted, her wings motionless, the piece of fish in her beak almost within reach of his beak. He waited a moment in surprise, wondering why she did not come nearer, and then, maddened by hunger, he dived at the fish. With a loud scream he fell outwards and downwards into space. Then a monstrous terror seized him and his heart stood still. He could



preening grooming (with a beak)
plaintively sounding sad in a weak complaining way

hear nothing. But it only lasted a minute. The next moment he felt his wings spread outwards. The wind rushed against his breast feathers, then under his stomach, and against his wings. He could feel the tips of his wings cutting through the air. He was not falling headlong now. He was soaring gradually downwards and outwards. He was no longer afraid. He just felt a bit dizzy. Then he flapped his wings once and he soared upwards. 'Ga, ga, ga, Ga, ga, ga, Gaw-col-ah,' his mother swooped past him, her wings making a loud noise. He answered her with another scream. Then his father flew over him screaming. He saw his two brothers and his sister flying around him curvetting and banking and soaring and diving.

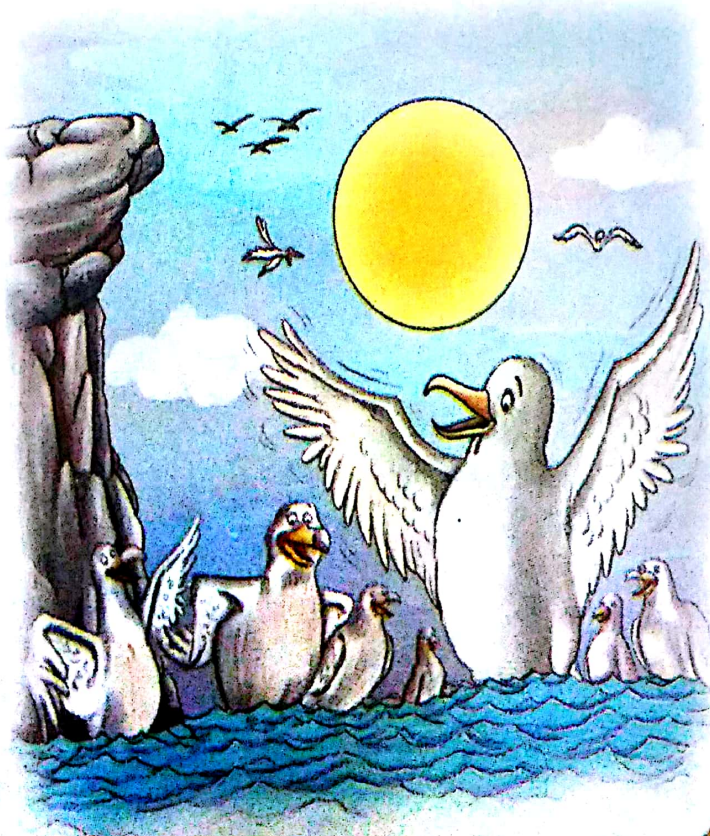
Then he completely forgot that he had not always been able to fly, and commended himself to dive and soar and curve, shrieking shrilly.

He was near the sea now, flying straight over it, facing straight out over the ocean. He saw a vast green sea beneath him, with little ridges moving over it and he turned his beak sideways and cawed amusedly.

His parents and his brothers and sister had landed on this green flooring ahead of him. They were beckoning to him, calling shrilly.

He dropped his legs to stand on the green sea. His legs sank into it. He screamed with fright and attempted to rise again flapping his wings. But he was tired and weak with hunger and he could not rise, exhausted by the strange exercise. His feet sank into the green sea, and then his belly touched it

curvetting leaping gracefully
beckoning calling out



and he sank no farther. He was floating on it, and around him his family was screaming, praising him and their beaks were offering him scraps of dog-fish.

He had made his first flight.

Liam O'Flaherty (1896–1984) was an Irish novelist and a distinguished short story writer. He was a major figure in the Irish literary renaissance. His novels *The Informer*, *Return of the Brute* were immediate success. He is best known for 'His First Flight' and 'The Sniper'.

Exercises

A. Answer these questions.

1. What was the young seagull afraid of?
2. How cooperative were his family members?
3. What did the young seagull do to draw the attention of members of his family? How far did he succeed?
4. How did the seagull react to the sight of food?
5. Why do you think his mother did not come to him with food? What did she do?
6. How did the young seagull realise that he had learnt to fly?
7. How did the seagull initially react to the task of landing on the sea?

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *That was twenty-four hours ago.*
 - a. What happened twenty-four hours ago?
 - b. What was the situation on that day?
 - c. What kinds of discomforts were being experienced by the seagull?
 - d. Mention two adjectives that would describe the seagull's personality.
2. *He waited a moment in surprise.*
 - a. Who waited and why?
 - b. What surprised him?
 - c. What happened immediately after this?
 - d. Why would we consider this to be a turning point in the seagull's life?
3. *They were beckoning to him and calling shrilly.*
 - a. Who are 'they' here?
 - b. Why were they behaving in this manner?
 - c. What does it tell us about them?
 - d. Why is their behaviour important for the protagonist of this extract?

C. Find six words from the passage that are associated with the act of flying.

D. Fill in the blanks with words of your own in the passage given below.

The seagull's left him alone on a ledge because it was necessary that he learnt the of flying. They had no wish to be Soon the seagull grew and impatient. At a he could see his mother standing on plateau. She had a of fish in her beak. The of food only increased his of hunger. He out loud and his mother started to fly towards him. The seagull's heart leapt with

E. Give the noun forms of these words.

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. desperate | 2. starve |
| 3. failed | 4. ascending |
| 5. monstrous | 6. amusedly |
| 7. certain | 8. flying |

F. Fill in the blanks with suitable prepositions.

The lonely seagull was sitting alone a cliff. The sea lay him. He could not dive the water because he was afraid to fly. He was hungry and there was plenty of fish the vast expanse of the sea. He watched his brothers flying his head. He hopped about with one leg his wing. When his mother came near with a piece of fish he lunged it and consequently fell the ledge. He began to fall the high ledge and fear gripped his heart. Soon however he was no longer afraid flying.

G. Think and write.

1. Describe the fears and anxieties of the young seagull.
2. Justify the behaviour of the members of the seagull's family.
3. Would you agree that taking the first step is the most difficult step in one's life? Write a page in your diary describing one such moment in your life.

13 The Road Not Taken

Have you ever come across a situation where you had to choose one from the two choices? Was it easy for you to choose? Discuss.

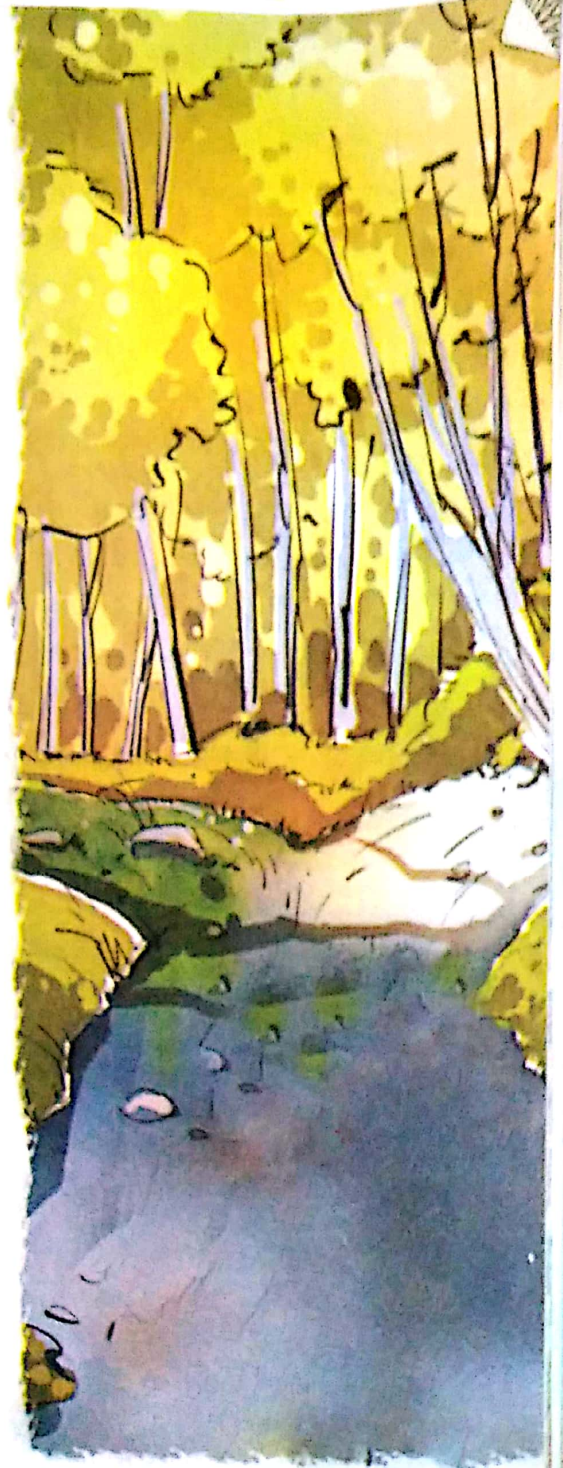
Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less travelled by
And that has made all the difference.

fair impartial
trodden trampled



Robert Frost (1874–1963) is one of the most popular poets of the twentieth century. His work was initially published in England before it was published in America. He is highly regarded for his realistic depictions of rural life using them to examine complex social and philosophical themes. Frost was honoured frequently during his lifetime, receiving four Pulitzer Prizes for Poetry.

Exercises

A. Answer these questions.

1. Why was the poet 'sorry'?
2. In what manner does the poet look down a road and why do you think he does so?

3. What was it that made him decide on a particular road?
4. Explain the expression 'wanted wear'. Did this fact influence the poet?
5. What season do you think is being depicted here and why?
6. Why is the word 'ages' repeated?
7. Did the poet choose with confidence? What is suggested by the poem?
8. Does the poem end on a clearly optimistic tone? Give reasons.

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *And then took the other just as fair
And having perhaps the better claim*
 - a. What is suggested by 'and then'?
 - b. What better claim has been referred to in this stanza?
 - c. How has this been contradicted later?
2. *Oh, I kept the first for another day!*
 - a. What is the poet referring to here?
 - b. What does the poet say immediately after this?
 - c. Comment on the use of the opening word and the exclamation mark in this line.
3. *I shall be telling this with a sigh*
 - a. What will the poet say?
 - b. When will the poet be 'saying this with a sigh'?
 - c. What does the word sigh suggest to you?

C. Unscramble these words from the poem.

- | | | |
|------------|------------|------------|
| 1. obtdude | 2. onmrgin | 3. rhpepas |
| 4. mcali | 5. hsig | 6. vterla |

D. Find antonyms of these words from the poem.

- | | | |
|-----------------|---------|----------|
| 1. straightened | 2. met | 3. worse |
| 4. difference | 5. more | |

E. Comment on the rhyme scheme of the poem.

F. The road is a metaphor. Explain how and why? Is the road a symbol as well? Has the poet used any other poetic devices? Mention them.

G. Think and write.

1. Bring out the poet's indecisiveness with close reference to the poem. Do you think the emotions that surface in this poem are universal in nature? Comment on your views.
2. Do we have absolute control over our actions and our lives? What is suggested in this poem?

