

The Thief's Story

Introduction

This story has been written by Ruskin Bond. It is the story of a fifteen-year-old thief, who himself is the narrator of the story. He tells about his transformation from a thief to an honest person.

Summary

Hari Singh was an experienced and fairly successful thief. He meets a man named Anil at a wrestling match. He offers to work for Anil only for food as he thought him to be gullible and trusting. He starts living with Anil at his house. His main purpose was to rob Anil.

Anil shows full trust in the boy. He even gives him the key to his house. He knows that the boy makes money in his daily purchases, but Anil does not mind it. He teaches the boy how to read and write.

One day, Anil brings home a small bundle of notes after delivering a book to a publisher. While sleeping, Anil tucks the money under the mattress. The boy sees all this. Late in the night, he steals the money and runs with it. He wants to catch the Lucknow Express, but he hesitates to jump onto the train for some reason.

The boy leaves the platform. He does not know where to spend the night. He knows no other man than Anil. He also knows that on discovering about the theft, Anil would be sad, but it will not be because of loss of money but due to loss of trust. He realises his mistake. He also realises that now he would not be able to continue his studies. The realisation dawns on him that if he becomes a learned man then he could be able to earn more than a few hundred rupees that he had stolen. He starts heading back to Anil's house. On his way, he is drenched to skin by heavy rain. The notes also become damp. He hurries back to Anil's room. He opens the door and finds Anil still asleep. He puts the notes under Anil's mattress.

Next morning, the boy awakes late. Anil has already made the tea. Anil gives the boy a fifty rupee note, saying he made some money yesterday and the boy will be paid regularly.

Anil is aware about the boy's stealing of money, as the notes are still damp, but he does not say anything about the theft. Instead, he starts teaching the boy how to write sentences.

The kind actions of Anil changes the heart of the boy.



Message

This story conveys the message that good deeds are never wasted. They have the power to transform even the wickedest of the people.

Extract Based Questions

Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. Later, he patted me on the head and said never mind, he'd teach me to cook. He also taught me to write my name and said he would soon teach me to write whole sentences and to add numbers. I was grateful. I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve.

- (a) Who is 'he' here?
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
The narrator was a highly educated person.
- (c) Why was the narrator grateful?
- (d) Give a word that can correctly substitute 'patted', in the given sentence from the extract.
..... he patted me on the head and said never mind.

Answers

- (a) Anil is 'he' here.
 - (b) False
 - (c) The narrator was grateful because Anil taught him to write his name and said that he would soon teach him to write whole sentences and to add numbers.
 - (d) Tapped
2. When I reached the station I did not stop at the ticket office (I had never bought a ticket in my life) but dashed straight to the platform. The Lucknow Express was just moving out. The train had still to pick up speed and I should have been able to jump into one of the carriages, but I hesitated – for some reason I can't explain – and I lost the chance to get away.
- (a) The narrator ran quickly to the:
 - (i) train
 - (ii) station
 - (iii) platform
 - (iv) house
 - (d) Why did the narrator not stop at the ticket office?
 - (c) The narrator's made him hesitate.
 - (i) fear
 - (ii) inner voice
 - (iii) principles
 - (iv) promise
 - (d) How did the narrator lose the chance to get away?

Answers

- (a) (iii) platform
- (b) The narrator did not stop at the ticket office because he had never bought a ticket in his life.
- (c) (ii) inner voice
- (d) The narrator reached the station and dashed straight to the platform. The Lucknow Express had still to pick up speed and he should have been able to jump into one of the carriages, but his inner voice made him hesitate and stopped him. Thus, the narrator lost the chance to get away.

3. There was a fifty-rupee note between his fingers. My heart sank. I thought I had been discovered.
"I made some money yesterday," he explained. "Now you'll be paid regularly."
My spirits rose. But when I took the note, I saw it was still wet from the night's rain.

- "Today we'll start writing sentences," he said. He knew. But neither his lips nor his eyes showed anything.
- (a) Who will be paid regularly and by whom?
- (b) State whether the given statement is True or False.
The note was wet from the night's rain.
- (c) "He knew." How did he know?
- (d) Complete the analogy with a word from the text:
yesterday : tomorrow : : occasionally :

Answers

- (a) Hari Singh will be paid regularly by Anil.
 - (b) True
 - (c) Hari Singh returned and kept the money from where he had stolen it. But it was raining and notes had become wet. So, when on waking, Anil found the wet and damp notes, he would have understood that Hari had stolen them.
 - (d) regularly
4. I followed casually.
"Hello again," he said.
I gave him my most appealing smile. "I want to work for you," I said.
"But I can't pay you."
I thought that over for a minute. Perhaps I had misjudged my man. I asked, "Can you feed me?"
"Can you cook?"
"I can cook," I lied again.
"If you can cook, then may be I can feed you."
He took me to his room over the Jumna Sweet Shop and told me I could sleep on the balcony. But the meal I cooked that night must have been terrible because Anil gave it to a stray dog and told me to be off. But I just hung around, smiling in my most appealing way, and he couldn't help laughing.
- (a) From the following options, identify Hari Singh's intention behind the appealing smile.
 - (i) Deceit
 - (ii) Harm
 - (iii) Hatred
 - (iv) Jealousy
 - (b) Why did Anil agree to take Hari with him?
 - (c) The phrase 'hung around' suggests that Hari Singh continued to
 - (i) smile
 - (ii) cook
 - (iii) appeal
 - (iv) linger
 - (d) "Anil gave it to a stray dog." What can we infer from it.

Answers

- (a) (i) Deceit
(b) When Hari told Anil that he wanted to work for him. Anil said that he couldn't pay him. He further said if Hari could cook then he can feed him. Hari lied that he could cook. So, Anil agreed to take Hari with him.
(c) (iv) linger
(d) We can infer from it that Hari Singh did not know how to cook and the food he cooked that night must have been terrible.

Short Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. Why did the thief change his name every month? How did he rob people? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. The thief, who has assumed the name of Hari Singh in the present story, changes his name every month to avoid being caught by the police and his former employees. The thief sought employment in the houses of easy-going, kind and simple persons. When they started trusting him, he would rob them and run away from there.

Q 2. What does the thief say about the different reactions of the people when they are robbed?

(CBSE 2023)

Ans. In his short career as a thief, he has made a study of men's faces when they lose their goods. He says that the greedy men show fear; the rich men show anger and the poor men show acceptance.

Q 3. What conditions did Anil put to employ Hari as his servant? (CBSE 2018)

Ans. When Hari met Anil, he told him that he wanted to work for him. But Anil replied that he couldn't pay him. Then he said if Hari could cook then he can take him as his servant and feed him. This was the condition that was put forth by Anil to employ Hari as his servant.

Q 4. How did Anil react when Hari cooked a bad meal? What was Hari's response to this? (CBSE 2020)

Ans. Hari told a lie that he could cook well. But the truth was that he could not cook at all. He cooked a very bad meal the first night, no one could eat it. So, Anil gave it to a stray dog. He told Hari to leave. But Hari just hung around, smiling in his most appealing way. Anil laughed and let Hari stay with him. Thus, Hari's smile helped him to win Anil's heart.

Q 5. Why did Hari Singh smile in his most appealing way towards the end of the story? (CBSE 2023)

Ans. Hari regretted that he had robbed Anil. He went back to Anil. In the morning, he realised that Anil knew that he had been robbed. But Anil decided to ignore what had happened and said that he would pay Hari regularly and teach him to write sentences. Hari was relieved and happy. He smiled at Anil in his most appealing way to ask forgiveness for what he had done.

Q 6. Why, according to Hari Singh, is it easier to rob a greedy man than a careless person like Anil?

OR

Why does the thief say that it is difficult to rob a careless man? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. According to Hari Singh, it is easier to rob a greedy man because he can afford to be robbed but still he grieves a lot over the lost money. But a careless person like Anil, does not even notice that he has been robbed, and that takes the pleasure out of the work.

Q 7. How did Hari Singh justify to himself his stealing Anil's money? (CBSE 2023)

Ans. Hari Singh justified his action of robbing Anil by telling himself that stealing was his habit and regular practice of stealing made him rob Anil. He also thought if he didn't take the money, Anil would only waste it on his friends. He explained to himself that as Anil had not paid him, therefore he had robbed Anil.

Q 8. Why does Anil not hand the thief over to the police? Do you think most people would have done so? In what ways is Anil different from such employers?

OR

Why does Anil not hand Hari Singh over to the police? (CBSE 2019)

Ans. I feel that Anil is a large-hearted person. He realises that he has been robbed, but, he reviews the whole situation. He thinks that if he hands the thief over to the police, he may become a criminal. He decides to reform the thief by showing grace, kindness and sympathy.

Most people would have handed the thief over to the police.

Anil is different because he decides to reform the thief through his kindness and sympathy.

Long Answer Type Questions ↘

Q 1. Who was Anil? How did he treat Hari Singh and how did it influence Hari's life? (CBSE 2012)

Ans. Anil was about twenty-five years old. He was a tall and lean man who was easy-going, kind and simple. He agreed to keep Hari with him even though he was of no help to him. He taught Hari to cook and also started giving him lessons to teach him to read and write. He used to write for magazines and made money in fits and starts. He had a generous nature and whenever he received a cheque, he celebrated with his friends.

Anil treated Hari Singh nicely. Hari found it pleasant working for Anil and was quite grateful to him. Anil influenced Hari Singh's life very positively. Because of this, Hari found it difficult to rob Anil. He could not bring himself to lose Anil's trust. So, when Hari Singh had the opportunity to run away with the money stolen from Anil, he decided to return it back.

Anil also understands that Hari had robbed him but he decides to forgive him. He also offered to pay ₹ 50 as salary every month to Hari and continues teaching him. This shows that he was of a forgiving nature.

Q 2. How did Hari Singh know that Anil had forgiven him?

Ans. Hari Singh was a thief who worked for Anil. He was always on a look out of an opportunity to steal money from Anil. One day he got such an opportunity and stole six hundred rupees and ran away. However, he felt guilty on breaking the trust of a simple and trustworthy person like Anil. He returned and kept the money from where he had stolen it. But since it was raining, the notes had become wet. So, when on waking, Anil found the wet and damp notes, he would have understood that Hari had stolen them and then kept them back. However, he forgives him. Hari Singh comes to know that Anil had forgiven him when Anil gave him a fifty-rupee note the next morning and added that he would pay him regularly henceforth. Then, Anil also told Hari Singh that from that day he would teach him writing sentences. It confirmed his belief that Anil had forgiven him.

Q 3. A character arc is the transformation or development of a character throughout a story and refers to the changes a character undergoes as a result of their experiences, challenges, and interactions with other characters.

In the light of the above information, trace the character arc of the thief in Ruskin Bond's *The Thief's Story*. (CBSE SQP 2023-24)

Ans. The thief's character arc in the story shows a transformation from a career criminal to a person who learns to trust and work hard for a living. It can be observed that the thief struggles with his own moral compass throughout the narrative. At first, he is solely focused on his own personal gain and uses his skills as a thief to achieve this. However, as he begins working for Anil and starts to develop a relationship with him, he becomes conflicted about his intentions to steal from him. Ultimately, he succumbs to his desire for money and steals from Anil. But he feels guilt and remorse afterwards. He chooses to resist the temptation and considers the consequences of his actions. This internal conflict highlights the thief's character growth and change throughout the story. The story implies that the thief has realised that a life of crime is not fulfilling and that he is now open to exploring new opportunities for a better life.

Q 4. 'Trust and compassion can reform a person.' Justify this statement in the light of the lesson 'The Thief's Story'. (CBSE 2023)

Ans. Trust and compassion can definitely reform a person. Hari Singh, the thief, came to live in Anil's house with the sole intention of robbing him. But gradually, he began to realise that Anil was one of the most trusting people he had ever met. Hari felt a sense of empathy and compassion from Anil that he had never experienced before and it became difficult for him to rob Anil. Even when Hari had robbed Anil, he could not run away with that money. He knew that Anil would be heart broken when he would learn about the theft. However, it would not be over the lost money, but rather over the lost trust. He also realised that he would never be able to learn to read and write if he left Anil because no one would teach him with love and patience as Anil was teaching him. So, he decided that he should go back to Anil and return his money. Thus, Anil's trust and compassion reform the thief, Hari, to such an extent that he was willing to give up stealing altogether only to remain with Anil.

Q 5. Fiction writers prefer creating grey characters rather than black and white. Analyse this in detail, with reference to both the characters of *The Thief's Story*. (CBSE SQP 2022-23)

Ans. Generally, it is found that the characters created by fiction writers, have grey shade instead of pure black (negative) or white (ideal). The same case is with both the characters of 'The Thief's Story'. A grey character is the one that has redeeming qualities as well as those which require improvement. In the story, the thief, who took the name of Hari Singh, is too smart for his age. He is apt in fooling his victims and the police. He lies frequently and cheats for the sake of money. He steals money and tries to disappear with it to another city so that no one would know about him. But understanding the value of writing and reading, remembering the faith of Anil and his caring nature, he prefers Anil's company to money and puts the stolen money back. Thus, his character is neither black nor white. On the other hand, Anil who is a simple and trusting person, wins our admiration. His character, though, has mostly white shade, carries some shortcomings like being ignorant about his money and the thief Hari Singh. He is also in the habit of spending his hard earned money on his friends rather than saving. Thus, Anil's character is also neither black nor white instead has grey shade. The writers of fictions generally prefer grey characters because they present a challenge to the readers, allow a sense of unpredictability. In short, characters with grey shades, retain the interest of readers in the story.