

Tom Whitewashes the Fence

Warm-up Session

Tom was a little boy who lived with his aunt. As like all other boys of his age, he was often involved in innocent mischief. Though his aunt loved him very much but she was very strict and sometimes punished him for his mischief.

It was Saturday morning and the school was closed. The weather was sunny and the nature looked bright. Tom had been thinking of going for a swim in the river with his friends. But how could he? He was found stealing sweets from the cupboard last night. Hence, Aunt Polly had ordered him to whitewash the fence as punishment.



Sadly, Tom appeared out of the gate with a bucket of whitewash and a long-handled brush. As he surveyed the fence, all gladness left him and a deep melancholy settled down upon his spirit. Thirty yards of board fence nine feet high! To him, life seemed hollow and existence nothing but a burden. Sighing, he dipped his brush and passed it along the topmost plank. He repeated the task and looked at the insignificant whitewashed streak it had made on the fence. He felt discouraged and sat down on a tree-box.

Suddenly, he saw Aunt Polly, with a stick in her hand returning after finishing her morning stroll. Tom started whitewashing again with vigour, but his energy did not last. He began to think of the fun he had planned for this day, and his sorrows multiplied. Soon the free boys would come tripping along on all sorts of delicious expeditions, and they would make a world of fun of him for having to work the very thought of it burnt him like fire.

He got out his worldly wealth and examined it, bits of toys, marbles, and trash; enough to buy an exchange of work, maybe, but not half enough to buy so much as half an hour of pure freedom. So he returned his straitened means to his pocket, and gave up the idea of trying to buy the boys. At this dark and hopeless moment an inspiration burst upon him!



He took up his brush and went tranquilly to work. Soon Ben Rogers came in sight. The very boy of all boys, whose ridicule he had been dreading. Ben's gait was the hop-skip-and-jump, proof enough that his heart was light and his anticipations high. He was eating an apple, and at the same time, moving his hand as if he were steering a ship. Seeing Tom, he stopped for a while and then came near. Tom went on whitewashing without paying any attention to him.

Ben stared a moment and then said, "Hi! *You're* busy with your work, aren't you?"

No answer. Tom surveyed his last touch with the eye of an artist. Then he gave his brush another gentle sweep and surveyed the result, as before. Ben came nearer. Tom's mouth watered for the apple, but he stuck to his work.

Ben said, "I'm going for a swim in the river. Don't you wish you could? But of course, you'd rather work wouldn't you?"

Tom moved suddenly and said, "Why, it's you, Ben! I wasn't noticing."

"Ben said again, I'm going for a swim, and I think you are too busy with your work to join me!"

Tom contemplated the boy a bit, and said, "What do you call work?"

"Why, isn't that work you have been doing?"

Tom resumed to his whitewashing, and answered carelessly, "Well, maybe it is, and maybe it isn't. All I know is I like it."

"Oh come, now. You don't mean to say you really like it."

The brush continued to move.

“Like it? Well, I don’t see why I shouldn’t. Does a boy get a chance to whitewash a fence every day?”

That put the thing in a new light. Ben stopped nibbling his apple. Tom swept his brush daintily back and forth stepped back to note the effect added a touch here and there criticized the effect again while Ben watching every move and getting more and more interested, more and more absorbed.

At last, he said: “Tom, let me whitewash a little.”

Tom considered, was about to consent; but he altered his mind.

“No, no. I can’t, Ben. You see Aunt Polly’s awfully particular about this fence, right here on the street, you know but if it were the back fence, I wouldn’t mind and she wouldn’t either. Yes, she’s awfully particular about this fence; it’s got to be done very carefully and I think there isn’t one boy in a thousand, maybe two thousand, who can do it the way it’s got to be done.”

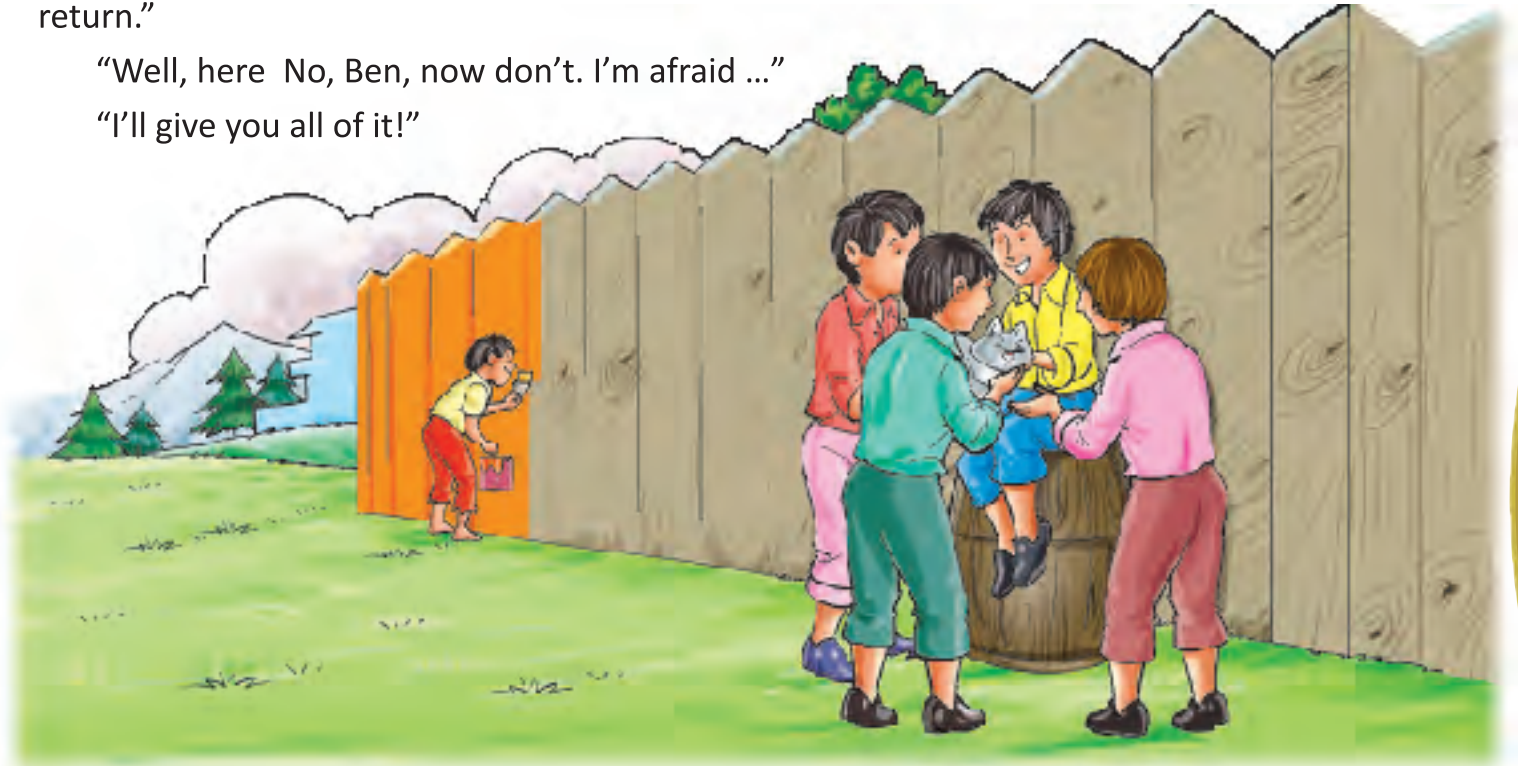
“Oh come, now let me just try. Only, just a little.”

“Ben, I’d like to, honestly. But as I have told, Aunt Polly; well, Jim wanted to do it, but she wouldn’t let him; Sid wanted to do it, and she wouldn’t let Sid. Now don’t you see how I’m fixed? If you was to tackle this fence and anything was to happen to it ...”

“Oh, don’t worry; I’ll be just as careful. Now let me try. I’ll give you the core of my apple in return.”

“Well, here No, Ben, now don’t. I’m afraid ...”

“I’ll give you all of it!”



Tom gave up the brush with reluctance in his face, but alacrity in his heart. And while Ben worked and sweated in the sun, Tom sat on a barrel in the shade close by, dangling his legs and munching the apple at the same time, planning for the slaughter of more innocents. There was no lack of material.

Boys happened along every little while; they came to jeer, but remained to whitewash. By the time Ben was tired, Tom had traded the next chance to Billy Fisher for a kite, in good repair; and when he played out, Johnny Miller bought in for a dead rat and a string to swing it with and so on, and so on, hour after hour. And when the middle of the afternoon came, from being a poor poverty-stricken boy in the morning, Tom was literally rolling in wealth. He had, besides the things before mentioned, twelve marbles, part of a jews-harp, a piece of blue bottle-glass to look through, a spool cannon, a key that wouldn't unlock anything, a fragment of chalk, a glass stopper of a decanter, a tin soldier, a couple of tadpoles, six fire-crackers, a kitten with only one eye, a brass door-knob, a dog-collar but no dog, the handle of a knife and four pieces of orange-peel.

He had had a nice, good, idle time all the while plenty of company and the fence had three coats of whitewash on it! If he hadn't run out of whitewash he would have bankrupted every boy in the village.

When all the boys had gone, he went in and asked Aunt Polly to inspect the work.

Aunt Polly came and admired him for his nice whitewashing. She also promised to give him the sweets of his choice in supper for his excellent work.

—Mark Twain

Words to know

appeared = emerged, came out; **surveyed** = examined; **fence** = barrier, boundary wall; **melancholy** = sadness, depression; **hollow** = empty; **existence** = life; **insignificant** = unimportant, meaningless; **streaked** = lined; **discouraged** = disheartened, dejected; **stroll** = walk; **expeditions** = trips, outings; **inspiration** = idea; **tranquilly** = quietly; **ridicule** = mock; **dreading** = fearing; **gait** = walk, step; **anticipations** = expectations, hopes; **contemplated** = considered; **nibbling** = chewing; **daintily** = delicately; **absorbed** = engrossed; **awfully** = terribly; **reluctance** = unwillingness; **alacrity** = eagerness, readiness.

EXERCISE ZONE

Lesson Insight

Test Your Comprehension Skill

A. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. What did Tom want to do on Saturday morning?
2. Why had Aunt Polly Punished Tom to whitewash the fence?
3. Why did Ben Rogers request Tom to give him a chance to whitewash?

B. Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ'S)

Tick (✓) the correct options:

1. Sighing, Tom dipped his _____ and passed it along the topmost plank.

(a) hand

(b) foot

(c) brush

2. Tom started _____ again with vigour, but his energy did not last.
 (a) whitewashing (b) looking (c) working
3. Tom's mouth watered for the _____, but he stuck to his work.
 (a) sweets (b) apple (c) dish
4. Tom swept his brush _____ back and forth.
 (a) happily (b) swiftly (c) daintily
5. Tom gave up the brush with _____ in his face, but alacrity in his heart.
 (a) reluctance (b) sadness (c) anxiety

C. Answer the following questions:

1. Who was Tom? What punishment had Aunt Polly given him?
2. Who was Ben Rogers? Where was he going?
3. What was Tom doing when Ben Rogers was whitewashing the fence?
4. Why did the boys offer something or the other to Tom?
5. What did Tom do after all the boys had gone? Did Aunt Polly appreciate his work?

D. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements:

1. Tom had requested Aunt Polly to allow him to whitewash the fence.
2. Tom liked the work very much.
3. Billy Fisher gave Tom a kite to get a chance to whitewash.
4. Tom was a very clever boy.
5. Aunt Polly promised to give Tom the sweets of his choice in supper for his excellent work.

E. Fill in the blanks choosing suitable words from the lesson:

1. The weather was sunny and the _____ looked bright.
2. Tom felt _____ and sat on a tree-box.
3. He took up his brush and went _____ to work.
4. Tom considered, was about to consent; but he _____ his mind.
5. The fence had three _____ of whitewash on it.

F. Who said the following statements and to whom:

Statement	Said by	Said to
1. "Don't you wish you could?"	_____	_____
2. "Why, isn't that work you have been doing?"	_____	_____
3. "All I know is I like it."	_____	_____
4. "Now don't you see how I'm fixed?"	_____	_____
5. "I'll give you all of it!"	_____	_____

G. HOTS Questions (Think and Answer):

1. Why did a deep melancholy settled down upon Tom's spirit? Elaborate.

2. 'Tom was a very clever boy who knew how to entice people to do something.' Give an example in support of the statement.

Sharpen Your Vocabulary

A. Find one word from the lesson for each of the following expressions. Follow the example:

- | | |
|---|-----------------|
| a piece of furniture with a door and shelves: | <i>cupboard</i> |
| 1. barrier, railing etc. enclosing a field or garden: | _____ |
| 2. journey or voyage particularly for exploration: | _____ |
| 3. manner of walking or forward motion: | _____ |
| 4. a cylindrical container for holding water or liquid: | _____ |
| 5. larva especially of a frog, toad etc.: | _____ |

B. Write the opposites for each of the following words:

- | Column 'A' | Column 'B' |
|---------------|------------|
| 1. punishment | _____ |
| 2. hollow | _____ |
| 3. worldly | _____ |
| 4. reluctance | _____ |
| 5. innocence | _____ |

C. Use the following words and make meaningful sentences of your own:

1. burden : _____.
2. stared : _____.
3. discouraged : _____.
4. inspiration : _____.
5. munching : _____.

Improve Your Speaking Skills

❖ Read the following conversation between Ashok and his friend Raju.

Ashok : What will do the next Sunday?

Raju : I've to help the painter in whitewashing the walls of our house.

Ashok : What! You yourself will help him?

Raju : Yes, I've to.

Ashok : But why? Didn't you hire any other person for the job?

Raju : Actually, two painters were already hired for whitewashing our house.

Ashok : Then! Didn't they come?

Raju : See, the painter's assistant is a poor boy. He is laid down with fever and unable to come.

Ashok : But it's a tedious job, you know.

Raju : I know it very well. But I have only to help the painter. I don't think it would be so difficult. Moreover, it would be a help to the poor boy.

Ashok : Right you are.

Raju : Thanks.

Now work with your partner and discuss about the ways by which you can help others.

Listening Skills

❖ *Your teacher will read out a small paragraph in the class. Listen to him/her carefully and answer the questions set below:*

1. Who was Aunt Polly? What type of person was she?
2. Why was Aunt Polly worried? What did she try to do?
3. What was the new treatment that she tried upon Tom?
4. What was the affect of her treatment on Tom?
5. Give synonyms of the following words:
 - (i) remedies _____
 - (ii) melancholy _____

Improve Your Writing Skills

❖ *What plan had Tom made to do on Saturday morning? How was it disrupted? Describe in your own words.*

Improve Your Grammar

❖ *Rewrite the following sentences after changing them into Active Voice:*

1. The bus was damaged by an angry mob.

2. All the miscreants were arrested.

3. The patient was taken to the hospital.

4. Her purse has been stolen.

5. He was declared innocent.

6. The patient was thoroughly examined by the doctor.

7. The rose plants are watered everyday by the gardener.

8. A right decision was taken by them.

9. The house has been ransacked by the thieves.

10. The letter will be posted by my brother.

Time for Activities

A. How do you help your parents in household works? Give examples.

B. How do you like to spend your holidays? Discuss with your partner.