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Frogs in the Fountain



How would you feel if there are frogs and frogs all around your house? Will you be happy or scared? Here is a story of frogs written by Ruskin Bond who has the rare ability to see the humour in everyday situations. Read the story and enjoy how his aunt and the station master got rid of so many frogs.



Marigolds grow almost everywhere in our beautiful country and they are **constantly** in demand—at festivals, marriages, religious ceremonies, arrivals and departures, and functions of all kinds. If you happen to be a guest of honour on a public occasion, be prepared to be **smothered** in garlands of marigolds. I am a little wary of these welcoming garlands because on one occasion a sleeping bee, **nestling** between the petals, flew out and stung me under my chin. It made for a very short speech.

When I told young Gautam about this incident, he asked, 'Is that how you got your **double chin**?' Actually the double chin came from my grandmother, who was a large, **generously proportioned** lady with a number of chins. Gautam and his sister Shrishti like to play with my double chin, but I would never have dared touch my old Granny on her chin or anywhere else.

She was a stern, reserved woman who believed that little boys should speak only when spoken to. She fed us reasonably well—she kept a great *kbansama*— but she did not believe in second helpings, with the result that I have spent the rest of my life indulging in second helpings.

Two mutton *koftas* were all that I was allowed with my plate of rice. I liked *koftas*— still do—and it was painful for a small boy to have to stop at two. Now that I am a grown man with an independent source of income, I help myself to four! Who can stop me?

Dr Bhist, who drops in to see me once a year, remarked that I looked overweight and that I should cut down on my food intake.

'What did you have for lunch?' he asked.

'*Kofta* curry and rice.'

'How much rice?'

'Just two small helpings.'

'And how many *koftas*?'

'Only four.'

'Don't have more than two', he advised.

'Yes, Granny,' I said.

Dr Bhist gave me a puzzled look.

'Sorry,' I said, 'I thought you were my grandmother.' Now he thinks I've got [Alzheimer's](#).

Talking of marigolds, Granny surrounded her house with them, as she believed they kept snakes away. Apparently, snakes do not like their [pungent aroma](#).

I, too, believed in this folklore until I was told (by an expert on reptiles) that snakes do not have a strong sense of smell and would be [impervious](#) to the scent of flowers or other odours. Maybe so, but I don't recall ever seeing a snake in Granny's garden, although I did see them elsewhere. However, we did have plenty of frogs, thanks to the disused fountain installed by my grandfather, but neglected after his death.

The fountain hadn't functioned for a couple of years, but the little reservoir in which it stood had filled up with rainwater and was now covered with water lilies.

One day, after an expedition to the Canal Head Work, I brought home some small fish in a bucket and introduced them to the lily pond. I hadn't paid much attention to the tadpoles swimming around in the bucket.

Well, the fish died as they were used to fresh running water and not stagnant water; but the tadpoles did very well and, before long, we had frogs leaping all over the place. Very soon, the frogs multiplied.





They would come into the veranda at night and keep us awake with their **incessant** singing and **warbling**.

'I can't sleep a wink,' complained Aunt Mabel who was sensitive to noise and **allergic to** choirs made up entirely of bass **singers**.

'They're **serenading** you,' I said. It was a long time since anyone had serenaded Aunt Mabel, a confirmed spinster in her early forties.

'They'll go away once the rains finish,' said Gran hopefully. But they did not go away. One day, screams came from the bathroom—Aunt Mabel screaming for help! Granny, the *kbansama* and I ran to her aid and discovered that the cause of her distress was a large frog swimming around in the potty.

I pulled the flush chain. There was a loud gurgling sound, a combination of frog and flush, and out jumped the frog straight into Aunt Mabel's arms. She left for Lucknow that day, saying she would be safer in a zoo where her cousin was the superintendent.

Well, Granny hired some labourers to empty the lily pond and round up as many frogs as they could. They were put into baskets and taken to some mysterious destination.

'Perhaps they've been exported to China,' I mused, 'or even to France. They eat frogs there, don't they?'

'Only the legs/' said Granny.

But they hadn't been exported. The *kbansama* told me later that the baskets had been opened and dumped near a pond behind the railway station and, before long, they were all over the station waiting rooms and platforms until the stationmaster had a brilliant idea. He had the frogs rounded up by a number of street **urchins** who wanted to make a little pocket money; he then had them packed firmly into several well-ventilated boxes.



The crates were labeled, 'To Lucknow Zoo—Attn: Superintendent Sahib' and dispatched as a free gift.

'A zoo is the best place for creatures great and small,' opined our philosophical stationmaster, who had previously sent them a consignment of stray station dogs.

—Ruskin Bond

Word-Web

- **constantly** : again and again
- **nestling** : (here) hidden
- **double chin** : a fold of fat under a person's chin that looks like another chin
- **generously proportioned** : large and hefty
- **Alzheimer's** : a disease, especially affecting older people, that prevents the brain from functioning normally, causes loss of memory and the ability to speak clearly.
- **pungent aroma** : a strong smell
- **incessant** : never stopping
- **allergic to** : have a strong dislike for
- **serenading** : singing a song to somebody you love
- **consignment** : goods that are sent to somebody; (here) stray station dogs
- **urchins** : mischievous children
- **smothered** : covered with
- **khansama** : a cook
- **impervious** : not affected by
- **warbling** : singing with rapidly changing notes
- **bass singers** : (here) the frogs (pron. base)
- **opined** : expressed his opinion



Comprehension

» Multi-Menu

Multiple Choice Questions

A. Tick against the correct answers.

- The author's double chin came from his _____.
(a) grandfather (b) grandmother (c) sleeping bee
- The writer's granny surrounded her house with _____.
(a) marigolds (b) roses (c) lilies
- He could not see the tadpoles swimming in the _____.
(a) fountain (b) canal (c) bucket
- Aunt Mabel screamed because there was a large _____ in her bathroom.
(a) snake (b) frog (c) mouse
- The stationmaster took help of some _____ to collect the frogs.
(a) servants (b) labourers (c) urchins

» Pick and Fill

B. Fill in the blanks of these sentences with correct words from the box.

firmly marbel's mutton koftas constantly strong smell

- Marigold is _____ in demand—at festivals, marriages, religious ceremonies etc.
- The writer was allowed to eat only two _____.
- It is a folklore that snakes do not like _____ of marigold.
- The frog jumped straight into Aunt _____ arms.
- The station master packed them _____ into well-ventilated boxes

C. Write 'T' for true and 'F' for false statements.

- A bee in the garland stung the writer under his stomach.
- The writer's grandmother was a reserved woman.
- Granny hired some labourers to look after the lily pond.
- Their khansama dumped the frogs straight on the railway station.
- A zoo is the best place for creatures great or small.

» Matching-Mania

D. Match the adjectives in Column A with correct nouns in Column B.

Column A

1. beautiful •
2. old •
3. reserved •
4. independent •
5. stagnant •

Column B

- (a) woman
- (b) source of income
- (c) water
- (d) country
- (e) granny

» Question-Queue (Short)

E. Answer each question in a few words or a sentence.

1. What type of a chin does the writer have?
2. What did the writer's Granny believe about little boys?
3. Who advised the writer not to have more than two mutton koftas?
4. Who told the writer that snakes do not have strong sense of smell?
5. Who was sensitive to noise and allergic to choirs of bass singers?
6. Where were the frogs sent by the stationmaster duly packed in boxes?

» Question-Queue (Long)

F. Answer each of the following questions in detail.

1. Why did Granny surround her house with marigold plants?
2. What is the reason of the writer having a double chin?
3. Was the writer fond of food? How can you tell this?
4. Describe how the frogs entered the fountain and the house?
5. Where were the frogs finally sent and why?
6. When Aunt Mabel saw the frog in the potty, how did she react? Do you think she was just being silly?



Vocabulary

▶ **Smells can be pleasant or unpleasant:**

- stink, stench, odour, pong are all words that are used for unpleasant smells
- aroma, fragrance, perfume and scent refer to pleasant smells

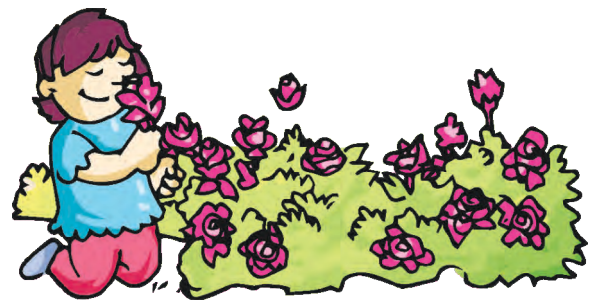
A. Complete the following sentences with an appropriate smell word from the list above.

1. I could get the rich _____ of fresh coffee from the kitchen.
2. The residents complained to the municipal authorities about the _____ of the garbage dump in their locality.
3. In summer, my garden is filled with the _____ of jasmine.
4. We use room fresheners to drive away the bad _____ from the bathroom.
5. As she walked past, I could smell the _____ she was wearing.

B. Which of the adjectives given in the box best describe the smell of the items below? You can use more than one adjective to describe a smell.

stinking aromatic fragrant smelly scented perfumed sweet-smelling

1. herbs in a garden _____.
2. old socks _____.
3. rotten eggs _____.
4. a hairdressing salon _____.
5. a rose garden _____.



Think-n-Thrive

- All types of animals small or big, wild or domestic, insects or birds have their own usefulness for balancing the environment. How are frogs and fish useful in this process?



Grammar-Grip

» **Expressing frequency using once/twice/three times etc**

Look at these sentence from the story.

- Dr Bhist, who drops in to see me **once** a year, remarked that I looked overweight.
- Ajja passed his hand **twice** or **thrice** over my bruised and bleeding knee.
- The words **once/twice/three times**, etc are used to say how often something happens.

A. Now answer the following questions using the above words.

Example : How often do you go to the market?

I go to the market twice a week.

1. How often do you visit your grandparents?

2. How many times do you brush your teeth every day?

3. How often do you go to the movies?

4. How many times did you go on a trip last year?

5. How often do you go to the library?

B. Expressing reasons using 'because'

Read this example from the story:

- 'I am a little wary of these welcoming garlands **because** on one occasion a sleeping bee, nestling between the petals, flew out and stung me under my chin.'

Give reasons for the following using the word 'because'.

1. Climbing Mt Everest is difficult.

2. Inuits live in igloos.

3. Early people lived in caves.

4. We plant trees.

5. Some people wear spectacles.

» Reading Skills

▶ Read the following passage and answer the questions that follow.

Helen Adams Keller was born on June 27, 1880 in Tuscumbia, Alabama. She was the first of two daughters born to Arthur H. Keller and Katherine Adams Keller. She was born with her senses of sight and hearing. She started speaking when she was just six months old. She started walking at the age of one.

In 1882, however, Keller contracted an illness called 'brain fever' that produced a high body temperature. Within a few days after the fever broke, Keller's mother noticed that her daughter didn't show any reaction when the dinner bell was rung or when a hand was waved in front of her face. Keller had lost both her sight and hearing. She was just 19 months old then.

1. When and where was Helen Keller born?

2. When did Helen Keller start speaking?

3. What did her mother notice after a few days of Helen's illness?

4. How was Helen Keller affected by 'brain fever'?

5. How old was she when she lost her sight and hearing?

6. Find out opposite words of the following from the passage.

(i) low _____ (ii) before _____