



Before You Read

While growing up many of us may have experienced moments when we were weary of meeting a cousin or a relative for the first time. Did you also experience such a moment? What was the occasion? How did you overcome that sense of unease? Discuss with the class.

We knew already that there wasn't to be any proper Christmas, because Aunt Ellie had come home very ill from India. She was at a hotel in London and mother had to go to her, and father was away with his ship.

After we had said goodbye to mother, we were left to ourselves. Then mother came suddenly back in a cab and with her was Sidney, very thin and yellow. Mother didn't even come in. She just said, "Here's your Cousin Sidney. Be nice to him and give him a good time."

We said, "How do you do?" to Cousin Sidney, who replied, "Quite well, thank you." Then, curiously enough, no one could think of anything more to say.

I never felt such a duffer. With all the millions of interesting things that there are to say, I couldn't think of one. At last I, that is Rupert, said, "Do you like games?"

Cousin Sidney replied, "Some games I do," in a tone that made me sure that they weren't our kind of games.



duffer: a person who is incompetent or slow

Then Hilda said, "Hugh, let's go and make a lovely surprise for Rupert and Sidney."

Before I could think of any way of stopping them they had fled the scene. I was left alone with the stranger. I said, "Is there anything you'd like to do?"

And he said, "No, thank you."

Neither of us said anything for a bit—and I could hear the others shrieking with laughter in the hall.

"Do you like reading?" I asked, despairingly.

"Y's," said the cousin.

"Then take a book," I said hastily, for I really could not stand it another second. "I think I ought to go and help the others. I'm the eldest, you know."

Hilda's idea was Indians, and I thought a wigwam would be nice. So we made one with the hall table and the rugs off the floor. We dressed up in the striped blankets off our beds, put on mother's beads and war paint, and got inside the wigwam. Then we sent Eliza to tell Cousin Sidney that the surprise was ready.



shrieking: making a short, very loud cry, in a high pitch
wigwam: a dome-shaped tent used by Native Americans

When he got to the bottom of the stairs we burst forth in all our war-paint from the wigwam. The wild Indians did the finest war-dance I've ever seen in front of our cousin.

He gave one little scream, and then sat down suddenly on the bottom step. We thought he was admiring the war-dance till Eliza went up to him and shook him.

"Stop that noise," she said to us, "he's gone off into a dead faint."

Of course we were sorry, but we never thought he'd be such a muff as to be frightened of three Red Indians.

"I wish we hadn't," Hilda said.

And I said, "We could not have expected our cousin to be a chicken-hearted muff. It's bad enough to have a muff in the house at all, but a related muff!"

Next day being Christmas Day, I set aside my pride to tell Sidney we were sorry about the Indians.

Sidney said, "It doesn't matter. I'm sorry, too. Only I didn't expect it."

We suggested two or three games, but Sidney said he would rather read. So, we decided to go on with the Indian game.

While Sidney read *Treasure Island*, we played Red Indians and soldiers on the stairs with no casualties except a gas globe.

After lunch we thought of flying machines. Hilda and Hugh made wings of some sheets of yellow and pink paper and played at fairies up and down the stairs, while Sidney sat at the bottom of the stairs and went on reading. I was determined to have a flying machine with real wings. I fashioned wings with newspapers tied on with string. Then I got a tea-tray and fastened it on with belts. I slipped my arms in between the string of the wings, and going to the top of the stairs shouted, "Look out below there!" Then I sat down on the tray and tobogganed splendidly down the stairs.

It felt more like flying than anything I had ever played at. But Hilda was still fluttering about half-way down the stairs when the flying machine came rushing down the staircase. It banged against Hilda's legs, and she stumbled back against the wall. Unluckily this was the place where the gas was burning in a little recess. You remember we had broken the globe when we were playing Indians. Her pink paper wings went into the gas. They flamed up, her hair frizzled, and her lace collar caught fire. Hilda screamed.

I could not do anything being held fast in the flying machine and rolling painfully at the bottom of the stairs.

Next moment *Treasure Island* went spinning across the room. Sidney caught up the floor rug and as Hilda, screaming horribly, rushed down the staircase, he threw the rug over her and rolled her over and over on the floor.

Hilda fought and struggled while I tried to extricate myself from the wings and the tea-tray. Hugh slid down the banisters and sat there yelling. The servants came rushing in.

muff: clumsy, especially when it comes to sports or manual skills

casualties: victims

tobogganed: (here) rode as if on a sledge

frizzled: burnt with heat

extricate: free from a bondage

By that time the fire was out. Sidney gasped, "It's all right. You aren't burned, Hilda, are you?"

Hilda was much too frightened to know and Eliza looked her over. There was only a small scorch on her neck but a good deal of her hair was frizzled short.

Everyone stood, rather breathless and pale. I felt perfectly awful, ashamed and rather sick. "You're a regular hero, Sidney," I said, "and yesterday I said you were a muff. I'm jolly sorry I did. Shake hands, won't you?"

Sidney hesitated.

"Too proud?" I said, feeling hurt.

"It's—it's a little burnt, I think," said Sidney, "don't be angry." And he held out his left hand.

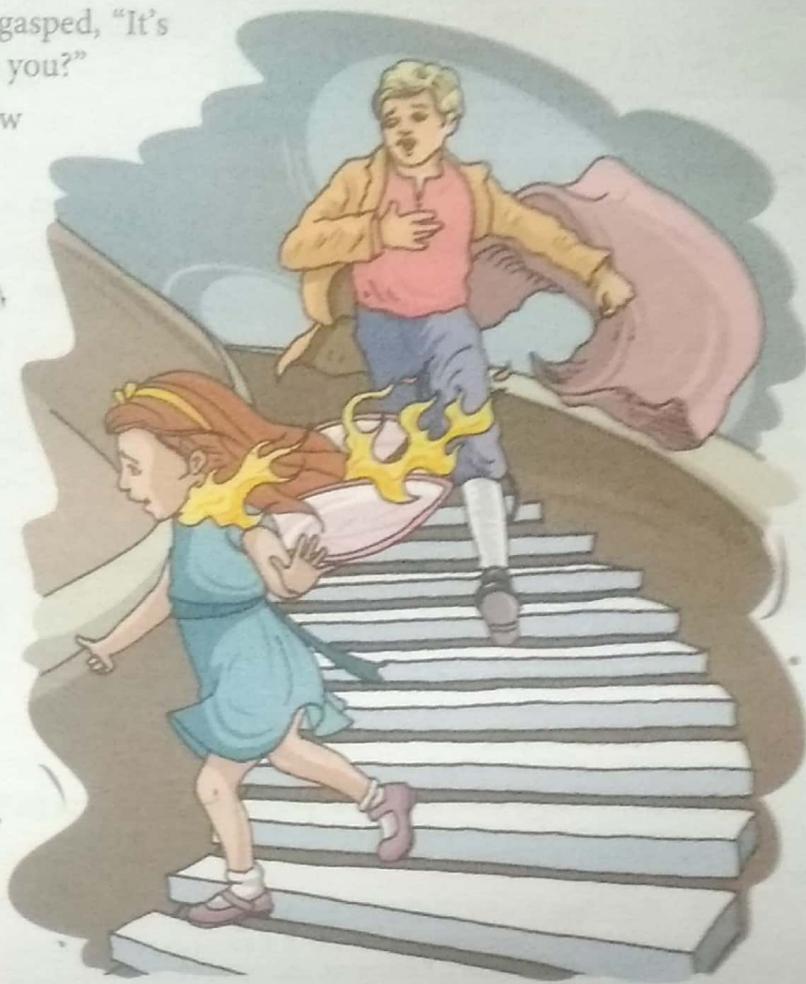
I grasped it. "I do beg your pardon, you are a hero!" When they'd done Sidney's hand up with a great, big, fat plaster I said to him. "I don't care if you don't like games. Let's be pals."

He said, "I do like games, but I couldn't care about anything with mother so ill."

I thumped him on the back, and told him exactly what a beast I knew I was, to comfort him.

And Sidney is not a muff. I see now that a person might well be frightened at finding Indians in the hall of a strange house, especially if the person knew Indians of quite a different sort, with no blankets and wigwams and war-dances, but only dusky features and university degrees.

— Edith Nesbit



About the Author

Edith Nesbit (1858–1924) is a well-known British author and poet. She has written around 60 books for children under the name of E. Nesbit. Her books were popular for their vivid characterisations, clever plots and their humorous narrative style.



scorch: damage caused by heat of fire

Read and Understand



A. Choose and tick (✓) the correct option.

1. What did Hilda suggest to Hugh?
 - a. That they plan a surprise for Rupert and Sidney.
 - b. That they go for a walk.
 - c. That they have dinner.
 - d. That they rest.

2. Sidney gave a little scream and then _____.
 - a. joined in the fun
 - b. sat down suddenly on the bottom step
 - c. fled from the room
 - d. started crying

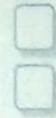
3. Why did Rupert set aside his pride and apologise to Sidney?
 - a. Because he was asked to.
 - b. Because it was Sidney's birthday the next day.
 - c. Because it was Christmas the next day.
 - d. Because Hilda wanted him to.

4. What happened to Hilda while they were playing flying machines?
 - a. She broke her leg.
 - b. She burnt herself in the fire.
 - c. She had a bout of coughs.
 - d. She had a bad fall.

5. Sidney _____ the moment Hilda screamed.
 - a. got into action
 - b. threw the rug over her
 - c. rolled her over and over on the floor
 - d. all of the above

6. Sidney hesitated to offer his hand to Rupert because _____.
 - a. he was too proud
 - b. his right hand was slightly burned

- c. he was naturally shy
- d. he felt superior to everyone else



B. Answer the following questions.

1. Why wouldn't the children have a proper Christmas?
2. What was the children's first impression of Sidney?
3. Why did Rupert feel like a duffer?
4. Describe Sidney's reaction to the Red Indians.
5. How did Hilda's wings catch fire?
6. Why did Rupert say that Sidney was a 'hero'?

C. Think and answer.

1. What made Rupert feel uncomfortable when he first met Sidney?
2. Is Rupert a good story teller in your opinion? Support your answer with an evidence from the story.

Vocabulary



Quantifiers

Read the following sentences from the story.

- He gave one little scream, and then sat down suddenly on the bottom step.
- "It's – it's a little burnt, I think," said Sidney, "don't be angry."

We see that the highlighted words, *little* and *a little* are used with **uncountable nouns** in these sentences.

Now, read this sentence.

- We dressed up in the striped blankets off our beds, put on a few of mother's beads.

The highlighted part *a few* is used with a **countable noun** here. It is a **quantifier** and means 'some'. However, *little* and *few* have a negative meaning and we use them to mean not as much as may be expected or wished for.

Fill in the blanks with *few*, *a few*, *little* or *a little*.

1. I got _____ tired after the journey.
2. Very _____ people showed up for the birthday party.
3. Ruby gave us _____ apples from her garden.
4. She has _____ knowledge about this project.
5. There's _____ sugar left. It should be enough for one cup of tea.

Dictionary Skills



Look at the dictionary entry of 'fled the scene', an expression from the story.

Flee: verb

BrE /fli:/ ; NAmE /fli:/

[intransitive, transitive, no passive] Verb Forms

to leave a person or place very quickly, especially because you are afraid of possible danger

She burst into tears and fled.

flee from somebody/something *A camp for refugees fleeing from the war.*

flee to.../into... *He fled to London after an argument with his family.*

flee something *He was caught trying to flee the country.*

The driver had already fled the scene of the accident.

Now, look up the meaning of the expressions from the story and use them in sentences of your own.

1. played at
2. spinning across the room
3. a good time
4. fluttering about
5. held fast

Grammar



Types of Sentences

There are four types of sentences.

Declarative	Interrogative	Imperative	Exclamatory
gives information	asks information	is a command or a request	expresses strong and sudden feelings
always ends with a full stop	always ends with a question mark	always ends with a full stop	always ends with an exclamation mark
Example: I think I ought to go and help the others.	Example: How do you do?	Example: Stop that noise.	Example: Look out below there!

A. Choose the suitable words from the box to classify the following sentences according to their types.

D = declarative IN = interrogative E = exclamatory IM = imperative

1. Why have you opened the window?
2. We will watch a movie in the evening.
3. Keep quiet and do your work.
4. What a great film it was!
5. When are the visitors expected to arrive?
6. Please visit the dentist today.

B. Rewrite the following sentences according to the instructions in brackets.

1. You will come for the interview tomorrow. (interrogative)

2. Have the police been informed of the theft? (declarative)

3. She is a wonderful singer. (exclamatory)

4. They are our family friends. (interrogative)

5. Can you buy some ice cream? (imperative)

Listening



Listen to the story being read by your teacher and renumber the following sentences in the correct sequence.

1. Rahul was so happy that the alien turned out to be so good and so identical to the one in the cartoon.
2. Rahul went down the memory lane while gazing at his birthday cake.
3. His mother asked him which his favourite character in the new cartoon series was.
4. Recalling all these memories made Rahul realise that he has changed so much since his early childhood but still there are a few things which never change like the love of parents for their child, the bond between them and Rahul's love for aliens.
5. He recalled a scene where his mother was helping him to divert his mind from the pain caused by his fractured leg.



Speaking

Form groups of five. Think of some of the most memorable moments that you shared with your father when you were much younger. What are some of the moments that you share with your father now? Discuss these moments with your group.

Writing

Message

A **message** is a communication left by a person for someone who cannot be contacted at that moment. It serves to:

- give important information
- request for a favour
- explain something
- apologise

A message should always be brief, to the point and precise. The language should be simple and direct. It can be verbal, written or recorded.

Given below are the elements of a message.

- Time and date
- Body of the message
- Name of the receiver
- Name of the person who takes the message

Here is an example.

MESSAGE

Uncle Rohit,

Grandmother called this morning to remind you that you have to pick her up from the airport this evening.

Seema

Imagine you are Sudha. You receive a call from your sister's friend, Anandi, who wants her to know that the special classes for English will now be in the evening at 5.30 p.m. Since you have to go for your tuitions, you will not meet your sister. Leave a message for her telling her what Anandi said. The word limit should not exceed 50 words.