

4. The Conceited Python

Animals and Plants

Learning Outcomes

- ▶ read and comprehend the story
- ▶ learn different anagrams
- ▶ use prefixes and suffixes correctly
- ▶ use noun phrases and adjective phrases in sentences
- ▶ give a speech on a given topic
- ▶ write a notice



Digital Desk



Warm-up



In pairs, think about how people treat animals. We consider some animals to be pets and keep them in our homes. Meanwhile, some animals are kept in zoos, and others left in the wild. Some animals are food, and some animals are considered sacred. Why do we treat various animals differently?

What is the difference between a monkey and a snake? Monkey is a mammal and snake is a reptile.

Mammals are all vertebrates, because they have backbones. They also have hair on their bodies, breathe air with their lungs and have live births. Mammals regulate their own body temperature internally. This is exactly why they can live in different kinds of environments. There are almost 4000 species of mammals in the world.

Reptiles are the turtles, tortoises, lizards, snakes, crocodiles and alligators. Instead of hair, the reptiles are covered with scales.

They also lay eggs that their babies hatch out of and continue growing throughout their lives, even past adulthood.

Find out more differences between reptiles and mammals.



Cross-curricular Connection

Read this story about a proud python.

Grandfather never could resist buying unusual pets and once he paid a snake-charmer in the bazaar only four rupees for the young four-foot python that was on display to a crowd of eager boys and girls. Grandfather impressed the gathering by slinging the python over his shoulders and walking home with it.



The first to see them arrive was Toto, our pet monkey, swinging from a branch of the jackfruit tree. One look at the python and he fled into the house, **squealing** with fright. The noise brought Grandmother to the veranda, where she nearly fainted at the sight of the python curled a round Grandfather's throat.

'It will **strangle** you to death,' she cried. 'Get rid of it at once!'

'Nonsense!' said Grandfather. 'He's only a young fellow—he'll soon get used to us.'

'He might, indeed,' said Grandmother, 'but I have no intention of getting used to him. And you know your cousin Mabel is coming to stay with us tomorrow. She'll leave the

minute she knows there's a snake in the house.'

'Well, I can't let him loose in the garden. He might find his way into the poultry house and then where would we be?'

'Oh, how irritating you are!' grumbled Grandmother. 'Lock the thing in the bathroom, then go out and find the man you bought it from, and get him to come here and collect it.' And so, Grandfather took the python into the bathroom and placed him in the tub.

After closing the door on him, he gave me a sad look.

'Perhaps Grandmother is right this time,' he said. 'After all, we don't want the snake to get hold of Toto. And he's sure to be very hungry.'

slinging: casually throwing or flinging something

squealing: making a long, high sound

strangle: to kill somebody by squeezing or pressing on their throat and neck



He hurried off to the bazaar to look for the snake-charmer and was gone for about two hours. When Grandfather returned, looking crestfallen, we knew he had not been able to find the snake-charmer.

'Well, then, kindly take him away yourself,' said Grandmother. 'Leave him in the jungle across the river-bed.'

'All right, but let me feed him first,' said Grandfather.

He produced a plucked chicken and went into the bathroom, followed, in single file, by myself, Grandmother, the cook and the gardener.

Grandfather opened the door and stepped into the room. I peeped round his legs, while the others stayed well behind. We could not see the python anywhere.

'He's gone,' announced Grandfather.

'He couldn't have gone far,' said Grandmother. 'Look under the tub.'

We looked under the tub but the python was not there. Then Grandfather went to the window. 'We left it open,' he said. 'He must have gone this way.'

A careful search was made of the house, the kitchen, the garden, the stable and the poultry shed but the python could not be found anywhere.

Aunt Mabel arrived the next day for a three-week visit and for a couple of days, Grandfather and I were a little worried in case the python made a sudden

appearance. But on the third day, when he did not show up, we felt sure that he had gone for good.

And then, towards evening, we were startled by a scream from the garden.

Seconds later, Aunt Mabel came flying up the verandah steps. 'In the guava tree!' she gasped.

'I was reaching for a guava when I saw it staring at me. The look in its eyes! As though it would eat me alive...'

'Calm down, my dear,' urged Grandmother, 'Tell us, what did you see?'



crestfallen: sad and disappointed

gasped: breathed in noisily because one was surprised



'A snake!' sobbed Aunt Mabel. 'A great boa constrictor. It must have been twenty feet long! In the guava tree. Its eyes were terrible. And it looked at me in such a queer way...'

My grandparents exchanged glances and Grandfather said, 'I'll go out and kill it.'

Taking hold of an umbrella, he sallied forth into the garden. But when he got to the guava tree, the python had gone.

After this incident, the python began to make a number of appearances, always in the most unexpected places. Aunt Mabel had another fit when she saw him emerge from beneath a cushion. She packed her bags and left.

The hunt continued. One morning, I saw the python curled up on the dressing table, gazing at his own reflection in the mirror. I went for Grandfather but by the time we returned to the room, the python had moved on. He was seen in the garden and once the cook saw him crawling up the iron ladder to the roof.

Then we found him on the dressing table a second time, admiring himself in the mirror. Evidently, he was fascinated by his own reflection.

'All the attention he's getting has probably made him conceited,' said Grandfather.

'Anyway, now we know his weakness. The python is becoming vain, so it should be easier to catch him.'

Grandfather set about preparing a large cage, with a mirror at one end. In the cage, he left a juicy chicken and several other tasty things. The opening was fitted up with a trap door.

For a few days, nothing happened and then, as I was leaving for school one morning, I saw the python in the cage. He had eaten everything left out for him and was curled up in front of the mirror, with something that resembled a smile on his face—if you can imagine a python smiling. I lowered the trapdoor gently but the python took no notice of me.

Grandfather and the gardener put the cage in a tonga and took it across the river bed. Opening the trapdoor, they left the cage in the jungle. When they went away, the python had made no attempt to get out. 'I didn't have the heart to take the mirror away from him,' said Grandfather.

'It's the first time I've seen a snake fall in love.'

Ruskin Bond

sallied forth: confidently moved forward **conceited:** proud





About the Author

Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli, Punjab in 1934. As a child, he moved around to places like Jamnagar and Dehradun, and completed much of his education in Shimla. Bond started writing very early on—he wrote his first short story, 'Untouchable' at the age of 16, and had published his first novel, *The Room on the Roof* by the time he was 21! Bond is a prolific writer who has written in many genres—horror, romance, memoir, and more—but is perhaps best known for being one of India's pioneers of children's literature. In 2014, he was honoured with the Padma Bhushan award for his contributions to Indian literature.



Comprehension

A. Fill in the blanks with the correct words from the story.

1. The narrator's grandfather had bought the snake from a _____ at the bazaar.
2. Apart from the snake, the family already had a pet _____ named Toto.
3. The snake was initially locked in the _____ for safekeeping but escaped through an open _____.
4. After the snake escaped, it was discovered in unexpected places around the house such as in the _____ tree, under a _____, crawling up the _____ and sitting on the _____.
5. When they eventually caught the snake, Grandfather took it to the _____ and left it there.

B. Answer these questions.

1. Describe the scene when Grandfather brought home a python.
2. Why did Grandmother not want to keep the python at home?
3. What was Aunt Mabel's reaction when she saw the python? Where did she find it?
4. Why did Grandfather say that the python is conceited?
5. How did Grandfather catch the python?

C. Think and answer.

1. Describe Grandfather in your own words.
2. Do you think the practice of 'snake charming' is right? Give reasons for your answer.
3. 'Opening the trapdoor, they left the cage in the jungle.' Would you have done the same if you were in Grandfather's place? Do you think he did the right thing by letting the snake go? Give reasons for your answer.



Word Wonder

Read these pairs of words.

- ▶ shoe—hose
- ▶ listen—silent
- ▶ dusty—study
- ▶ waist—waits
- ▶ stressed—desserts
- ▶ bored—robed

These pairs of words are **anagrams**.

An **anagram** is a word or phrase formed by rearranging the letters of a different word or phrase, typically using all the original letters exactly once.

When we rearrange the letters of these words, we get the meanings of them.

- Astronomer – Moon starrer
- The Eyes – They see
- The Morse Code – Here comes dots
- Eleven plus two – Twelve plus one



A. Write the anagrams using the hints.

1. a. a short sleep during the day	b. something to cook with
2. a. a cat's feet	b. an insect that stings
3. a. things you hammer	b. a mollusk with shell
4. a. the opposite of far	b. receive money for working
5. a. things that babies wear	b. synonym of complimented
6. a. past tense of learn	b. a deer's horn

B. Add suitable prefixes or suffixes to these words. Then, use the words in sentences of your own.

1. important
2. insight
3. natural
4. destined
5. knowledge
6. culture



Learn About Language

Which of these groups of words are complete sentences?

- ▶ The boy in the blue coat is the captain of the team.
- ▶ I hit the ball.
- ▶ to one and all
- ▶ The children are playing in the backyard.
- ▶ in the backyard
- ▶ In a flash, the frog caught the insect.
- ▶ in a flash

Did you notice that the groups of words which sound incomplete do not have a verb?

A **phrase** is a group of words that does not have a subject or a verb, but when used together gives some information, but not complete information.

Read these sentences.

- ▶ **To win the competition** is my dearest wish.
- ▶ I tried **to get it right**.
- ▶ **Your warning him** was necessary.

Sometimes, we need a group of words to speak or write about a person or a thing.

When a group of words does the work of a noun in a sentence, we call it the **noun phrase**.

A noun phrase can act as the subject or the object of a verb. For example,

- ▶ **The frightened girl** pointed to the door. (subject of the verb)
- ▶ About that time, somebody else lost **his ancestral property**. (object of the verb)

Now, read these sentences. Note that the highlighted groups of words qualify the nouns.

- ▶ The boy **with blue eyes** is the most intelligent boy in this class.
- ▶ Dr Kapoor is a doctor **of great fame**.

When a group of words does the work of an adjective in a sentence, we call it the **adjective phrase**.



It is sometimes possible to replace an adjective phrase in a sentence with an adjective without altering the meaning of the sentence. For example,

- ▶ He admires men **without fear**.
He admires **fearless** men.
- ▶ She was wearing a necklace **with many diamonds**.
She was wearing a **diamond-studded** necklace.

A. Fill in the blanks with suitable noun phrases of your choice. Also mention if the noun phrase acts as the subject or object of the verb in each case.

1. The children like _____.
2. _____ is not easy.
3. I prefer _____.
4. _____ is not impossible any more.
5. We enjoy _____.

B. Underline the adjective phrases in these sentences. Then replace the adjective phrase in each sentence with an adjective, without changing the meaning.

1. An airhostess with a smiling face greeted us.
2. Rahim is a cricketer with promise.
3. Deeds of heroism deserve praise.
4. It was a night full of horror.
5. We walked down a path full of mud.

Language Lab

A. Listen to the valedictory speech given by a school student. Then, answer these questions.



1. What happened eleven years ago?
2. Why did the speaker say that change is constant?
3. What did the speaker say about his junior school days?
4. What did the speaker say about the future?
5. Explain the quote that the speaker said in the end.

B. Based upon the above outline in the audio script, give a speech on any one of these topics.



1. Performance animals have a risk of death.



2. Are circus animals respected and appreciated?
3. Campaigns banning animal sports are not affective enough.

Composition

You have learnt that a **notice** conveys information to a group of people and is usually displayed in a public place.

Look at the template of notice writing.

Name of the issuing agency/authority

NOTICE

Date of issue/Release of the notice

Title/Subject of the Event

Body

(Date/Time/Duration/Place/Venue)

Authorised signatory

(Name, Designation and Signature)

- a. You are collecting relief materials for people affected by an earthquake. Write a notice to be put up in your neighbourhood.

or

- b. Write a notice about an upcoming quiz programme that is to be conducted in your school.

Activity



Take an early morning or evening walk to a nearby park. Observe the variety of plants and trees and click pictures of the same. Also, identify their distinct characteristics. Get into groups of five and make a presentation on the variation among the plants and some interesting facts about them.



Further Reading: 'The Parrot Who Wouldn't Talk' by Ruskin Bond

