

## 3.2 A Lesson in Life from A Beggar

### Warming up!

#### Chit-Chat

##### Make small groups and share :

- A piece of advice that stopped a bad habit in you.
- A quote/proverb that you love to use often.
- An experience that taught you a lifelong lesson.
- A story/news/episode/movie/play that has impressed and changed you.

1. Many slang expressions/terms are used for people having positive or negative traits.

Match the expressions in Column A with type of persons in Column B.

	A	B
1.	Couch Potato	(a) brilliant/genius
2.	Worry Wart	(b) very energetic/active
3.	Fuddy-duddy	(c) shameful person
4.	Wet blanket	(d) lazy/good for nothing
5.	Whiz	(e) spoils other peoples fun/mood
6.	Black sheep	(f) always nervous/worried
7.	Live wire	(g) old-fashioned/refuses change

2. Discuss in your group and write the difference in reactions of an Optimist and Pessimist in the given situations.

	Optimist	Pessimist
Failure in exams/tests		
Lose a good amount of cash		
Unexpected rainfall/bad weather		
Illness		
Extra classes in school		

## A Lesson in Life from A Beggar

Meena is a good friend of mine. She is an LIC officer earning a good salary. But there was always something strange about her. She was forever unhappy. Whenever I met her, I would start to feel depressed. It was as though her **gloom** and **cynicism** had a way of spreading to others. She never had anything positive to say on any subject or about any person.

For instance, I might say to her, ‘Meena, did you know Rakesh has come first in his school?’

Meena’s immediate response would be to belittle the achievement. ‘Naturally, his father is a school teacher’, she would say.

If I said, ‘Meena, Shwetha is a very beautiful girl, isn’t she?’ Meena would be **pessimistic**. ‘When a pony is young, he looks handsome. It is age that matters. Wait for some time. Shwetha will be uglier than anyone you know.’

‘Meena, it’s a beautiful day. Let’s go for a walk’.

‘No, the sun is too hot and I get tired if I walk too much. Besides, who says walking is good for health? There’s no proof.’

That was Meena. She stayed alone in an apartment as her parents lived in Delhi. She was an only child and had the habit of complaining about anything and everything. Naturally, she wasn’t a very pleasant company and nobody wanted to visit her. Then one day, Meena was transferred to Bombay and soon we all forgot about her.

Many years later, I found myself caught in the rain at Bombay’s Flora Fountain. It was pouring and I didn’t have an umbrella. I was standing near Akbarallys, a popular department store, waiting for the rain to **subside**. Suddenly, I spotted Meena. My first reaction was to run, even in that pouring rain. I was anxious to avoid being seen by her, having to listen to her never-ending complaints. However, I couldn’t escape. She had already seen me and caught

- **gloom** : feeling of sadness

- **cynicism** : a distrustful attitude

- ◆ Who is Meena?

- ◆ What was Meena’s nature like?

- **pessimistic** : expecting the worst, having a negative attitude

- ◆ What is meant by ‘she never had anything positive to say’ ?

- ◆ Describe the location in Mumbai, where the writer spotted Meena.

**Note** : Bombay was the official name of Mumbai until 1995.

- **subside** : to settle down or stop

♦ What is the difference between an optimistic person and a pessimistic person?

♦ Find out more about Sudha Murthy and her writings from the Internet.

♦ What surprised the writer?

hold of my hand warmly. What's more, she was very cheerful.

'Hey! I am really excited. It's nice to meet old friends. What are you doing here?'

I explained that I was in Bombay on an official work.

'Then stay with me tonight,' she said. 'Let's chat. Do you know that, old friends and memories are precious and rare?'

I couldn't believe it. Was this really Meena? I pinched myself hard to be sure it wasn't a dream. But Meena was really standing there, right in front of me, squeezing my hand, smiling, and yes, she did look happy. In the three years she had been in Bangalore, I had never once seen her smiling like that. A few strands of grey in her hair reminded me that years had passed. There were a few wrinkles in her face, but the truth was that she looked more attractive than ever before.

Finally, I managed to say, 'No Meena, I can't stay with you tonight. I have to attend a dinner. Give me your card and I'll keep in touch with you, I promise.'

For a moment, Meena looked disappointed, 'Let's go and have tea at least', she insisted.

'But Meena, it's pouring.'

'So what? We'll buy an umbrella and then go to the Grand Hotel,' she said.

'We won't get a taxi in this rain', I grumbled.

'So what? We'll walk'.

I was very surprised. This wasn't the same Meena I had known. Today, she seemed ready to make any number of adjustments.

We reached the Grand Hotel drenched. By then the only thought in my mind was to find out who or what had brought about such a change in the pessimistic Meena I had known. I was quite curious.

'Tell me Meena, is there a Prince Charming who has managed to change you so?'



Meena was surprised by my question. ‘No, there isn’t anyone like that’, she said.

‘Then what’s the secret of your energy?’ I asked, like Tendulkar does in the advertisement.

She smiled, ‘A beggar changed my life.’

I was absolutely dumbfounded and she could see it.

‘Yes, a beggar,’ she repeated, as if to reassure me. ‘He was old and used to stay in front of my house with his five-year old granddaughter. As you know, I was a **chronic** pessimist. I used to give my leftovers to this beggar every day. I never spoke to him. Nor did he speak to me. One monsoon day, I looked out of my bedroom window and started cursing the rain. I don’t know why I did that because I wasn’t even getting wet. That day I couldn’t give the beggar and his granddaughter their daily quota of leftovers. They went hungry, I am sure.

‘However, what I saw from my window surprised me. The beggar and the young girl were playing on the road because there was no traffic. They were laughing, clapping and screaming joyously, as if they were in **paradise**. Hunger and rain did not matter.

- ◆ What lesson did Meena learn from her *guru* - the beggar?

- **chronic** : continual, lasting for a long time
- ◆ Describe an experience, where somebody has changed your way of looking at life.
- ◆ How did the beggar and his granddaughter enjoy the rain?
- **paradise** : heaven, an ideal or perfect place

- **zest** : great enjoyment or enthusiasm

✦ What did Meena do to show gratitude to her *guru*?

- **sponsor** : provide funds for a good purpose.

- **asset** : a useful and valuable thing

- **realization dawned** : began to realize

They were totally drenched and totally happy. I envied their **zest** for life.

‘That scene forced me to look at my own life. I realized I had so many comforts, none of which they had. But they had the most important of all **assets**, one which I lacked. They knew how to be happy with life as it was. I felt ashamed of myself. I even started to make a list of what I had and what I did not have. I found I had more to be grateful for than most people could imagine. That day, I decided to change my attitude towards life, using the beggar as my role model.’

After a long pause, I asked Meena how long it had taken her to change.

‘Once this **realization dawned**’, she said, ‘it took me almost two years to put the change into effect. Now nothing matters. I am always happy. I find happiness in every small thing, in every situation and in every person.’

‘Did you give any *gurudakshina* to your *guru*?’ I asked.

‘No. Unfortunately, by the time I understood things, he was dead. But I **sponsored** his granddaughter to a boarding school as a mark of respect to him.’

– Sudha Murthy

## ENGLISH WORKSHOP

### 1. Complete the following table.

Utterance	Who said	To whom
“Shwetha is a very beautiful girl, isn’t she?”		
“When a pony is young, he looks handsome?”		
“It’s a beautiful day.”		
“No, the sun is too hot.”		
“I’m all excited, it’s nice to meet old friends.”		
“Let’s chat.”		

“We won’t get a taxi in this rain.”		
“Then, what’s the secret of your energy?”		
“A beggar changed my life.”		

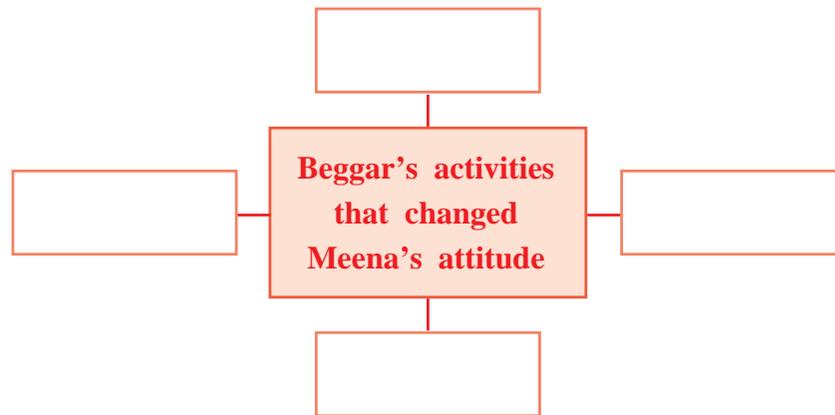
**2. State whether the following statements are right (✓) or wrong (×). Correct the wrong ones.**

- (a) The author and Meena were great enemies.
- (b) Meena was a very cheerful person initially.
- (c) Meena stayed alone in an apartment in Delhi.
- (d) Meena was the second child of her parents.
- (e) The author spotted Meena at Bombay’s Flora Fountain.
- (f) The beggar and the young girl were playing on the road because there was a lot of traffic.
- (g) The scene of the beggar and the girl made Meena peep into her own life.
- (h) The beggar became Meena’s role model.
- (i) It took Meena almost two years to put the change into effect.
- (j) Meena was able to give *Gurudakshina* directly to her *Guru*, the beggar.

**3. Choose the correct alternative to complete the sentences.**

- (a) Meena, who is an LIC officer, is .....
  - (i) a pessimistic person    (ii) an optimistic person    (iii) a disabled person
- (b) The writer was standing near Akbarallys, a popular department store because .....
  - (i) she was waiting for her friend Meena.
  - (ii) she was waiting for rain to stop.
  - (iii) she wanted to buy something in Akbarally.
- (c) The only thought in the writer’s mind till they reached the Grand Hotel was .....
  - (i) why the rain was not stopping.
  - (ii) what had brought about such a change in Meena.
  - (iii) how the beggar had changed the entire life of Meena.
- (d) Meena sponsored the granddaughter of the beggar because .....
  - (i) she was alone in her life after his death.
  - (ii) it was a token of respect for the beggar.
  - (iii) she was rich and so she wanted to help.

4. How did the beggar change Meena's attitude? Discuss with your partner and complete the following web.



5. (A) Write in your own words :

How did Meena show her gratitude to her *guru*?

(B) Why would Meena be sad initially? Give reasons. Pick out sentences from the story which prove that Meena was a pessimist.

- (a) She was forever unhappy.
- (b) .....
- (c) .....
- (d) .....
- (e) .....
- (f) .....

6. (A) Find antonyms of the following words from the story.

- optimistic    × .....
- drizzle        × .....
- new            × .....
- lie             × .....
- ugly            × .....
- frowned       × .....
- hell            × .....
- unhappy      × .....
- disrespect    × .....
- unimportant   × .....

(B) Go through the points below showing Meena's encounter with the beggar that transformed her completely. The sequence of events are jumbled up below. Arrange the events according to the occurrence. Fill in the number as per sequence.

(1)	(.....)	(.....)
I saw from the window the beggar and the young girl playing on the road.	It took two years to put the change into effect.	I decided to change using the beggar as role model.
	(.....)	(.....)
	They enjoyed playing in the rain as if they were in paradise.	On seeing them so very happy, I felt ashamed of myself.

7. How did the beggar change Meena's attitude towards life? Write it down in 5 to 6 lines. One is done for you.

- The incident made Meena to look at her own life.
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....
- .....

8. Summarise the story with the help of the points given below.

- (a) Meena's initial attitude    (b) Meena's meeting with Sudha Murthy in Mumbai  
 (c) Beggar's incident    (d) Change in attitude

**Summary Maker**

Dos	Don'ts
● Use important/relevant points/incidents/events short forms of the text.	● Select irrelevant/less important points/incidents/events
● Make a paragraph containing the message, theme etc.	● exceed the word limit
● Use your own language taking help of the sentences in a topic and key words.	● reproduce/copy the text

9. Write the above summary making Meena the narrator. Begin with 'I worked in Bangalore in LIC. Sudha was my friend .....

10. Project :

Divide the class in four groups. Collect four different stories written by Sudha Murthy. Select a story for every group and write it in the form of a play. Enact it in front of the class.

## Language Study

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### 1. Punctuate the following sentences.

- (a) did you give any gurudakshina to your guru i asked.  
(b) no there isnt anyone like that she said.

### 2. (a) Add a suffix to the following words and make nouns.

- (i) kind                      (ii) happy                      (iii) ignore                      (iv) assure  
(v) imagine                      (vi) depute                      (vii) manage                      (viii) assess

### (b) Make 4 meaningful words by using letters from "Pessimistic".

- (1) .....                      (2) .....                      (3) .....                      (4) .....

### 3. Change into Indirect speech :

- (a) "Meena, it's a beautiful day," I said. ....  
.....
- (b) "Hey! I am really excited. It's nice to meet old friends. What are you doing here?" said Meena. ....  
.....
- (c) "We won't get a taxi in this rain", I grumbled. ....  
.....
- (d) "So what? We'll buy an umbrella and then go to the Grand Hotel", she said. ....  
.....
- (e) "Did you give any *gurudakshina* to your *Guru*?" I asked. ....  
.....

