

1 The Boy Who Broke the Bank

Read the given story and do the activities given below.

Thoughtless and careless statements can do a lot of harm. Sometimes these statements are made without much thought or bad intention but they can still create havoc. Let us read one such story.

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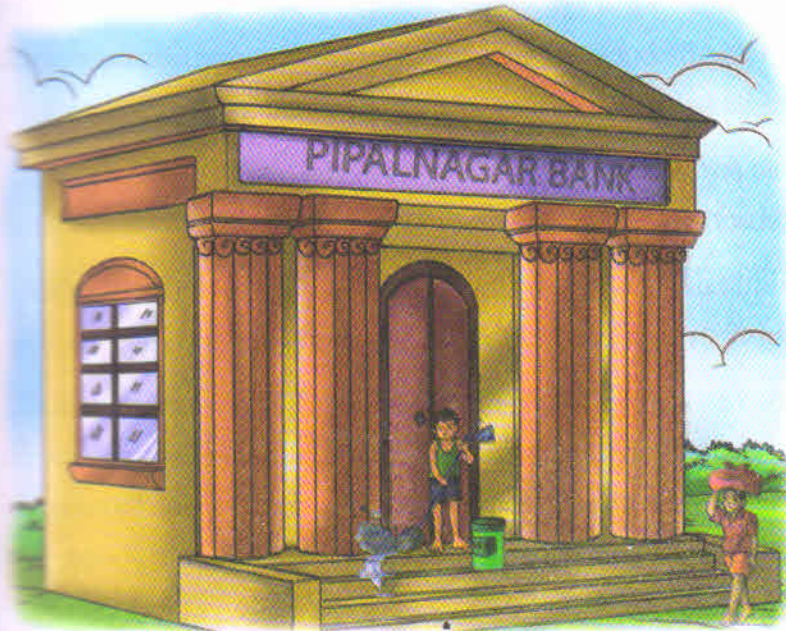
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Nathu grumbled to himself as he swept the steps of the Pipalnagar Bank, owned by Seth Govind Ram. He used the small broom hurriedly and carelessly, and the dust after rising in a cloud above his head settled down again on the steps. As Nathu was banging his pan against a dustbin, Sitaram, the washerman's son, passed by.

Sitaram was on his delivery round. He had a bundle of freshly pressed clothes balanced on his head.



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“Don’t raise such dust!” he called out to Nathu. “Are you annoyed because they are still refusing to pay you an extra two rupees a month?”

“I don’t wish to talk about it,” complained the sweeper boy.

“I haven’t even received my regular pay. And this is the twentieth day of the month. Who would think a bank would hold up a poor man’s salary? As soon as I get my money, I’m off! Not another week in this place,” and Nathu banged the pan against the dustbin several times, just to **emphasise** his point and give himself **confidence**.

“Well, I wish you luck,” said Sitaram. “I’ll keep a lookout for any opportunity that might suit you.” And he **plodded** barefoot along the road with a big bundle of clothes hiding most of his head and shoulders.

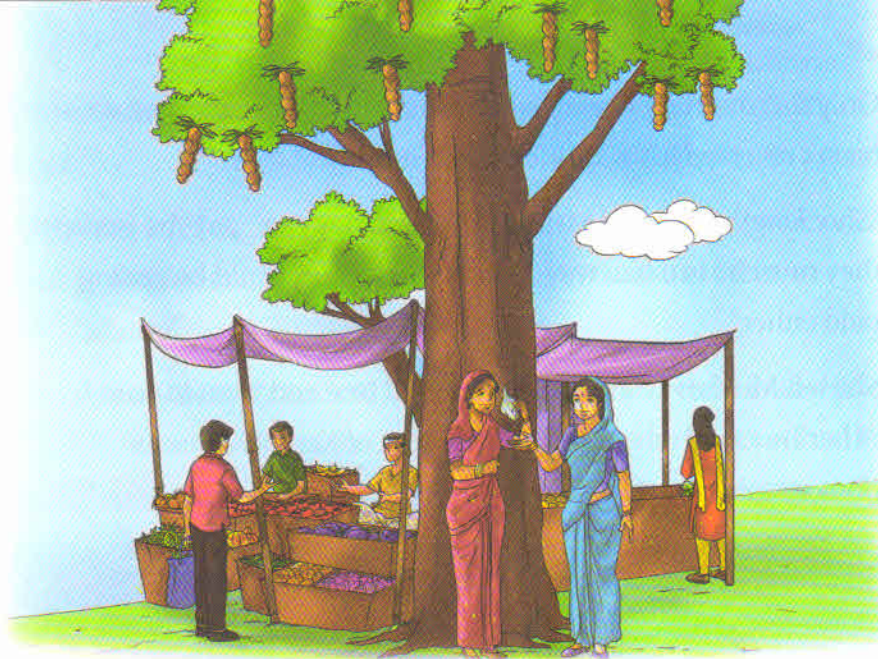
At the fourth home he visited, Sitaram heard the lady of the house mention that she was in need of a sweeper. Tying his bundle together, he said—“I know of a sweeper boy who’s looking for work. He can start from next month.”

“He’s with the bank just now but they aren’t giving him his pay. He wants to leave.”

“Is that so?” said Mrs Srivastava. “Well, tell him to come and see me tomorrow.”

And Sitaram, glad that he had been of service to both a customer and his friend, hoisted his bag on his shoulders and went his way.

Mrs Srivastava had to do some shopping. She gave instructions to the *ayah* about looking after the baby, and told the cook not to be late with the midday meal. Then she set out for the Pipalgaon market place, to make her **customary** tour of the cloth shops.



A large shady tamarind tree grew at one end of the bazaar, and it was here that Mrs Srivastava found her friend Mrs Bhushan sheltering from the heat.

Mrs Bhushan was fanning herself with a large handkerchief. She complained of the summer, which she **affirmed**, was definitely the hottest in the history of Pipalnagar. She then showed Mrs Srivastava a sample of the cloth she was going to buy, and for five minutes they discussed its shade, texture and design.

Having **exhausted** this topic, Mrs Srivastava said, "Do you know, my dear, that Seth Govind Ram's bank can't even pay its employees.

emphasise	<i>give attention to; lay stress on</i>
confidence	<i>the quality of being certain of one's abilities</i>
plodded	<i>walked by taking slow steps</i>
customary	<i>routine; usual</i>
affirmed	<i>stated something as true</i>
exhausted	<i>(here) used something completely</i>

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Only this morning I heard a complaint from their sweeper, who hasn't received his wages for over a month!"

"Shocking!" remarked Mrs Bhushan. "If they can't pay the sweeper, they must be in a bad way. None of the others could be getting paid either."

She left Mrs Srivastava at the tamarind tree and went in search of her husband who was sitting in front of Kamal Kishore's photograph shop, talking with the owner.



"So there you are!" cried Mrs Bhushan. "I've been looking in for almost an hour. Where did you disappear?"

"Nowhere," replied Mr Bhushan. "Had you remained stationary in one shop I might have found you. But you go from one shop to another, like a bee in a flower garden."

"Don't start grumbling. The heat is trying enough. I don't know what's happening to Pipalnagar. Even the bank's about to go bankrupt."

"What's that?" asked Kamal Kishore, sitting up suddenly. "Which bank?"

"Why the Pipalnagar bank of course. I hear they have stopped paying employees. Don't tell me you have an account there, Mr Kishore?"

"No, but my neighbour has!" he exclaimed and he called, "Deep Chand, have you heard the latest? The Pipalnagar Bank is about to **collapse**. You'd better get your money out as soon as you can!"

Deep Chand, who was cutting the hair of an elderly gentleman, was so startled that his hand shook and he **nicked** his customer's right ear. The customer **yelped** with pain and distress: pain, because of the cut and distress because of the awful news he had just heard. With one side of his neck still unshaven, he sped across the road to the general merchant's store where there was a telephone. He dialled Seth Govind Ram's number. The Seth was not at home. Where was he then? The Seth was holidaying in Kashmir. Oh, was that so? The elderly gentleman did not believe it. He hurried back to the barber's shop and told Deep Chand.

"The bird has flown! Seth Govind Ram has left town. Definitely, it means a collapse." And then he dashed out of the shop, making a beeline for his office and cheque book.

stationary	<i>not moving</i>
trying	<i>(here) annoying and difficult</i>
bankrupt	<i>inability to pay debts</i>
collapse	<i>suddenly be unable to work correctly</i>
nicked	<i>made a small cut</i>
yelped	<i>made a sudden short sound in pain</i>

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- **Writing** tasks to improve
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- Short **biographical**

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Lata Nallur, an English teacher in Chandigarh and Kochi, and coaching students in examinations.

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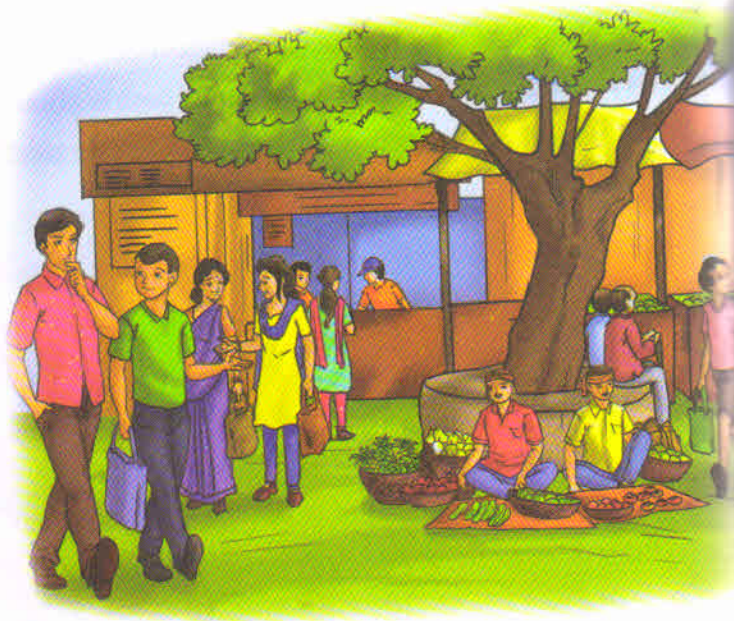
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The news spread through the bazaar with the rapidity of fire. From the general merchants it travelled to the shop; circulating amongst the customers, and then spread with them in various directions—to the betel seller, the tailor, the free vendor, the jeweller, the beggar sitting on the pavement.



Old Ganpat, the beggar, had a **crooked** leg. He had been sitting on the pavement for years, calling for alms. In the evening, someone would come with a barrow and take him away. He had never been known to walk. But now, on learning that the bazaar was about to collapse, Ganpat astonished everyone leaping on his feet and actually running at top speed in the direction of the bank. It soon became known that he had a thousand rupees in savings!

Men stood in groups at street corners discussing the situation. Pipalnagar seldom had a crisis, seldom or never had floods.

e. earthquakes or drought; and the **imminent** crash of the Pipalnagar Bank set everyone talking and **speculating** and rushing about in a **frenzy**. Some boasted of their farsightedness, congratulating themselves on having already taken out their money, or on never having put any in; others speculated on the reasons for the crash, putting it all down to excesses **indulged in** by Seth Govind Ram. The Seth had fled the state, said one. He had fled the country, said a third. He had hanged himself from the tamarind tree, said a fourth, and had been found that morning by the sweeper boy.

By noon, the small bank had gone through all its ready cash and the harassed manager was in a **dilemma**. Emergency funds could only be obtained from another bank, some thirty miles distant; and he wasn't sure he could persuade the crowd to wait until then. And there was no way of contacting Seth Govind Ram on his houseboat in Kashmir.

People were turned back from the counters and told to return the following day. They did not like the sound of that. And so they gathered outside on the steps of the bank shouting, "Give us our money or we'll break in!" and "Fetch the Seth. We know he's hiding in a safe deposit locker!"

crooked	<i>not straight; having multiple bends</i>
imminent	<i>about to happen</i>
speculating	<i>making guesses</i>
frenzy	<i>uncontrolled craziness; insanity</i>
indulged in	<i>gave in to</i>
dilemma	<i>difficult situation or choice</i>

Mischief makers who didn't have a paisa in the bank joined the crowd and **aggravated** their mood. The manager stood at the door and tried to **placate** them.

He declared that the bank had plenty of money but no immediate means of collecting it; he urged them to go home and come back the next day.

"We want it now!" chanted some of the crowd. "Now, now, now!"

And a brick **hurtled** through the air and crashed through the plate glass window of the Pipalnagar Bank.

Nathu arrived next morning to sweep the steps of the bank. He saw the refuse and the broken glass and the stones clattering the steps. Raising his hands in a gesture of horror and disgust he cried, "Hooligans! Sons of donkeys! As though it isn't bad enough to be paid late, it seems my work has also to be increased!" He smote the steps with his broom scattering the refuse.

"Good morning, Nathu," said the washerman's boy getting down from his bicycle. "Are you ready to take up a new job from the first of next month? You'll have to I suppose, now that the bank is going out of business."

"How's that?" said Nathu.

"Haven't you heard? Well, you'd better wait here until half the population of Pipalnagar arrives to claim their money." And he waved cheerfully—he did not have a bank account—and sped away on his cycle.

aggravated	<i>made worse</i>
placate	<i>calm someone down; pacify someone</i>
hurtled	<i>moved very fast in a dangerous way</i>

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Nathu went back to sweeping the steps, muttering to him
When he had finished his work, he sat down on the high
await the arrival of the manager. He was determined to g
“Who would have thought the bank would collapse!” he
himself, and looked thoughtfully into the distance. I won
could have happened...

About the Author

Ruskin Bond (1934) has written over five hundred sh
stories, essays and more than forty books for children
first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, written when he wa
seventeen, received the John Llewellyn Rhys Memora
in 1957. He received the Sahitya Akademi Award for B
writing in India in 1993, the Padma Shri in 1999 and
government's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2012.
He was awarded the Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Pa
2013 and was honoured with the Padma Bhushan in 2
lives in Landour, Mussoorie, with his extended family



Think and Answer

1. How did Deep Chand's customer react to the news?
2. Based on the events in the story, who do you think was responsible for spreading the news about the bank? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Describe the scene in front of the bank.



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Using Words

Multiple-meaning words

In the English language, several words have more than one meaning. Such words are called **words with multiple meanings**.

Look at the highlighted word in each of these sentences.

- The guard has the right to **refuse** entrance.
- Nathu smote the steps with his broom scattering the **refuse**.

In the first sentence, **refuse** means 'to not do' or 'to not accept something'. In the second example, it refers to 'unwanted waste material'.

Choose the word whose meanings fit both sentences.

1. Please _____ your hand to answer the question.
The government plans to _____ taxes.
a. show b. increase
c. raise d. reduce
2. Ganpat deposited the cheque in his _____.
Naina gave a factual _____ of the attack.
a. account b. chronicle
c. bank d. behalf
3. The whole town _____ when the river burst its banks.
Smartphones have _____ the market.
a. drowned b. flooded
c. captured d. vanished

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4. Harman did not _____ goodbye.
- A huge _____ capsized the boat.
- a. show b. ripple
c. say d. wave
5. He was _____ as the villain of the play.
- The tree _____ a shadow on his face.
- a. playing b. threw
c. chosen d. cast



Appreciation

The Boy Who Broke the Bank is a story about how rumours and miscommunication can cause problems and be destructive. The story throws light on the realities of life. Ruskin Bond writes in a humorous style and manages to bring out the subtleties of human psychology through the story. The story highlights the gullibility of human nature and the impact of rumour mongering. The distortions created by people's tendency to exaggerate things lead to an unexpected result, revealing how the smallest things can have a big impact on human life.

Ruskin Bond's style is lucid and conversational. The use of imagery appeals to the senses—*He used the broom hurriedly and carelessly, and the dust after a cloud above his head settled down again on the*

The dust rising and settling not only evokes a strong visual image but also a sense of action. The literary device in this sentence is called **antithesis**, a juxtaposition of opposites.



Writing

A rumour spreads like wildfire.

Let us try this out practically in class. Sit in a circle. Let one person complete the following sentence:

- You know what! In our class, there is... (The sentence should sound like a rumour.)

Then that person whispers the message in the ear of another person. That person in turn passes on the message to the third person and the chain continues till the message reaches the last person in the circle.

How does the message read? Is it the same as the original message?



Discussion

Actions reveal the character traits of a person.

What can we say about someone who spreads rumours? What makes them do so? Write a short character sketch of such a person.

You could begin this way.

Rumours are mostly the projection of the individual who started them...