



GOVERNMENT DEGREE COLLEGE, RAVULAPALEM

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY-I

- ▶ All of you listened to stories in your childhood. Who told you stories?
- ▶ Did you believe those stories?
- ▶ Below are a few words which give the same meaning as story. Find the words and their meanings.
 - ▶ T - - e
 - ▶ F - - l -
 - ▶ s - g -
 - ▶ L - - e - d
 - ▶ F - - k S - o - y
 - ▶ How do you usually begin story-telling?

PRE-READING ACTIVITY-II

- ▶ Usually, how do you begin a story?
- ▶ Do you remember reading any African Writer in your earlier semesters?
- ▶ Can you name him?
- ▶ Do you find any similarities between India and Africa? If so, list them.

Think a while

- ▶ What were the questions asked?
- ▶ Why were they asked?

After thought

- ▶ The first set of questions were asked to set the tone of the poem and also to introduce you to the title of the poem
- ▶ The second set of questions were asked to help you recollect the background of the our country and African Countries like Nigeria, Kenya etc.



ONCE UPON A TIME

by GABRIEL OKARA

About the poet

- ▶ Gabriel Okara's full name – Gabriel Imomotimi Gbaingbain Okara
- ▶ He was a Nigerian Poet and novelist
- ▶ Born on 21st April, 1921, Bumodi, Nigeria
- ▶ Was largely a self-educated man
- ▶ He is best known for his experimental novel "The Voice" published in 1964
- ▶ Considered the first "Modernist Poet of Anglophone Africa"
- ▶ Okara drew on African thought, religion, folklore and imagery
- ▶ He has been called the "Nigerian Negritudist"

Background of the poem

- ▶ Okara wrote this poem in the backdrop of Nigeria's gaining independence from Britain
- ▶ Laments about the past
- ▶ Changes that western culture brought about in the lives of his people
- ▶ Differences between the people of the past and the present
- ▶ Has got universal appeal because of changed times and changed life styles

POEM

- ▶ Once upon a time, son,
they used to laugh with their hearts
and laugh with their eyes:
but now they only laugh with their teeth,
while their ice-block-cold eyes
search behind my shadow.
- ▶ There was a time indeed
they used to shake hands with their hearts:
but that's gone, son.
Now they shake hands without hearts
while their left hands search
my empty pockets.
- ▶ 'Feel at home!' 'Come again':
they say, and when I come
again and feel
at home, once, twice,
there will be no thrice-
for then I find doors shut on me.
- ▶ So I have learned many things, son.
I have learned to wear many faces
like dresses – homeface,
officeface, streetface, hostface,
cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles
like a fixed portrait smile.

Contd..

- ▶ And I have learned too
to laugh with only my teeth
and shake hands without my heart.
I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye',
when I mean 'Good-riddance':
to say 'Glad to meet you',
without being glad; and to say 'It's been
nice talking to you', after being bored.
- ▶ But believe me, son.
I want to be what I used to be
when I was like you. I want
to unlearn all these muting things.
Most of all, I want to relearn
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
shows only my teeth like a snake's bare fangs!
- ▶ So show me, son,
how to laugh; show me how
I used to laugh and smile
once upon a time when I was like you.

Meanings of un-known words

- ▶ Ice-block cold eyes : (here) it means the person is laughing without any expression of his emotions. The emotionless expression of a person is compared with the coldness of an ice block
- ▶ Conforming : obeying unquestionably
- ▶ Muting : to quieten, suppressing one's feelings

Comprehension

1. Who is talking in the poem?
2. What assumptions can you make about the kind of life he has lived and his present circumstances?
3. What kind of person do you imagine him to be?
4. What has he learnt to do with his own feelings?
5. Who is the person addressing?
6. What does he hope to learn from him?
7. What does he mean by wanting 'to unlearn all these muting things'?
8. Why do you think the poet has given it the title, 'Once Upon a Time'?

VOABULARY ENRICHMENT

- ▶ Homeface, officeface, streetface, hostface, cocktailface

Do you find these words in a dictionary? No.

- ▶ They are not found in a dictionary. We understand their meaning in the context in which they are used.
- ▶ They are coinages by the writer for the specific purpose of the poem.
- ▶ Such words are called nonce words
- ▶ Try to coin a few such words on your own.
- ▶ Check the meaning of the idiom “to feel at home”

Grammar

- ▶ What are the two tenses mostly used in the poem?
- ▶ Write five sentences on those tenses
- ▶ When do you use 'used to'?