

# Composition in the Primary School— 2

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This subject on the time-table seems to pose a great problem to the teachers of English in the upper primary classes. Pupils seem to do quite good work when they are given exercises in English based on the current work, but are unable to write a short composition using the various structures and language items they have learnt. Very often the language exercises are merely filling in the blanks and these do not really gauge the ability of the pupils' spoken or written English. Another reason which is more relevant to the problem of writing compositions is that the pupils have not been given sufficient practice in using the language in a variety of situations. This hampers the flow of ideas as well as the correct use of the language. For example, the pupils learn the use of the past tense and write unrelated sentences in the past tense, but have difficulty narrating an incident or a story in the past tense. Regular practice in the form of short discussions, relating incidents and news items and narrating stories using pictures, preferably those in a series, will help to improve the pupils' use of the language. This will also help them to understand how and when certain structures are used.

Throughout the upper primary school, pictures and situations should be used widely so that the problem of 'searching' for ideas can be reduced to a minimum and the pupils can concentrate on the sequence of events and



the language to be used. Using pictures in a series, the teacher will be able to take the pupils step by step through the various stages of the story.

Show all the pictures together, arranged in the right order. Pupils are not required to say anything, but to look at the pictures to get an overall idea of what the pictures are about and what took place.

The teacher could ask a question or two which would focus attention on a particular point. Then concentrate on each of the pictures in turn. Begin by asking the pupils to give names for the three boys. Then continue with questions which will guide the pupils in bringing out the points of the story in sequence and prevent them from making too many grammatical errors, as they will be guided by the tense and structure of the questions. When the pupils are left to talk about the pictures without any help from the teacher, they tend to use the present tense or the present continuous tense and make statements which have no sequence or correlation.

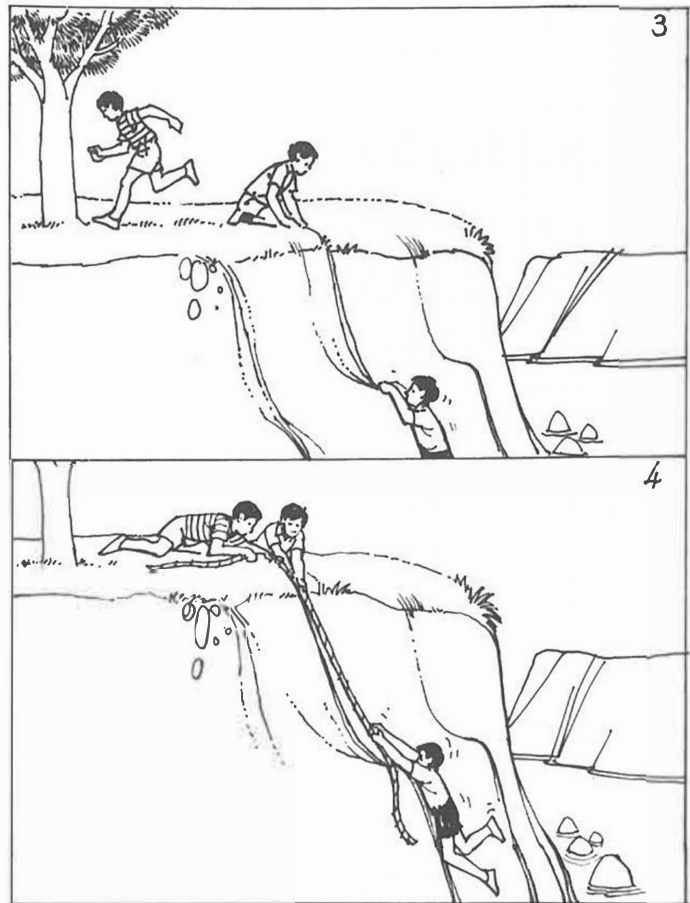
Below are some questions that could be asked in connection with the pictures on the *previous* page.

1. Where were Ah Chong, Hamid and Ravi walking?
2. Can you think of a reason why they were there? (camping nearby and looking for wood, on a picnic, looking for birds' eggs, etc.)
3. What was there at the bottom of the cliff?
4. Who was at the edge of the cliff?
5. What was he doing?
6. What were Ah Chong and Hamid doing?
7. Why did Ravi shout for help?
8. Did he fall to the bottom of the cliff?
9. What prevented him from falling to the bottom?
10. Where did Ah Chong run to? (hut nearby, camp site, etc.)
11. What did he bring back?
12. How long was it before he came back?
13. How did they get Ravi up?
14. Was Ravi badly hurt?

The questions need not be confined entirely to the pictures. Other points of interest could be brought in as required in questions 2 and 10.

Sufficient practice should be given in answering the questions, followed by the pupils narrating the story without the help of the questions. Pupils could be asked to volunteer to continue the story at different stages. Having gone over the story a number of times, the pupils would now be in a better position to suggest suitable titles for the composition.

Pupils could also tell the story in the first person,



taking the part of one of the three boys. Written work should be carried out while the discussion and oral practice are still fresh in their minds. The questions used for oral practice should not be put up on the board for the pupils to answer as this may result in lack of continuity. If necessary, helping phrases like the following may be given:

One day, Ah Chong, Hamid and I .....  
 ..... After lunch, we  
 .....  
 Ah Chong and Hamid went .....  
 I stopped ..... Suddenly,  
 my foot ..... Fortunately,  
 there was ..... I held on to  
 ..... while Ah Chong  
 .....  
 My arms were ..... About  
 ..... Ah Chong returned  
 with ..... He threw  
 ..... Both Ah  
 Chong and Hamid .....  
 I was lucky .....

Regular and systematic practice in oral composition and discussion will enable the pupils to use the language structures and items they have learnt and write better compositions.