

4.5 From The Selfish Giant



Oscar Wilde was an Irish playwright, novelist, essayist and a poet.

‘The Selfish Giant’ is a short fantasy story for children which revolves around a giant who builds a wall to keep children out of his garden, but learns compassion from the innocence of the children.



Form pairs. Make a list of things that you usually share with others and another of things which you do not usually share. Now write how you feel when –

- You share your tiffin with others.

You eat all by yourself.

- You play in a team.

You practise alone.

- You hear a piece of news.

You tell the news to others.



- You read something nice but don't tell others about it.

You tell others about the interesting things you've read.

- You learn to make something new.

You teach it to others.



Warming
up!



FROM THE SELFISH GIANT

Every afternoon, as they were coming from school, the children used to go and play in the giant's garden.

It was a large lovely garden with soft green grass. Here and there over the grass stood beautiful flowers like stars, and there were twelve peach trees that in the springtime broke out into delicate blossoms of pink and pearl, and in the autumn bore rich fruit. The birds sat on the trees and sang so sweetly that the children used to stop their games in order to listen to them. "How happy we are!" they cried to each other.

One day the giant came back. He had been to visit his friend the Cornish Ogre, and had stayed with him for seven years. After the seven years he determined to return to his own castle. When he arrived he saw the children playing in the garden.

"What are you doing here?" he cried in a very gruff voice, and the children ran away.

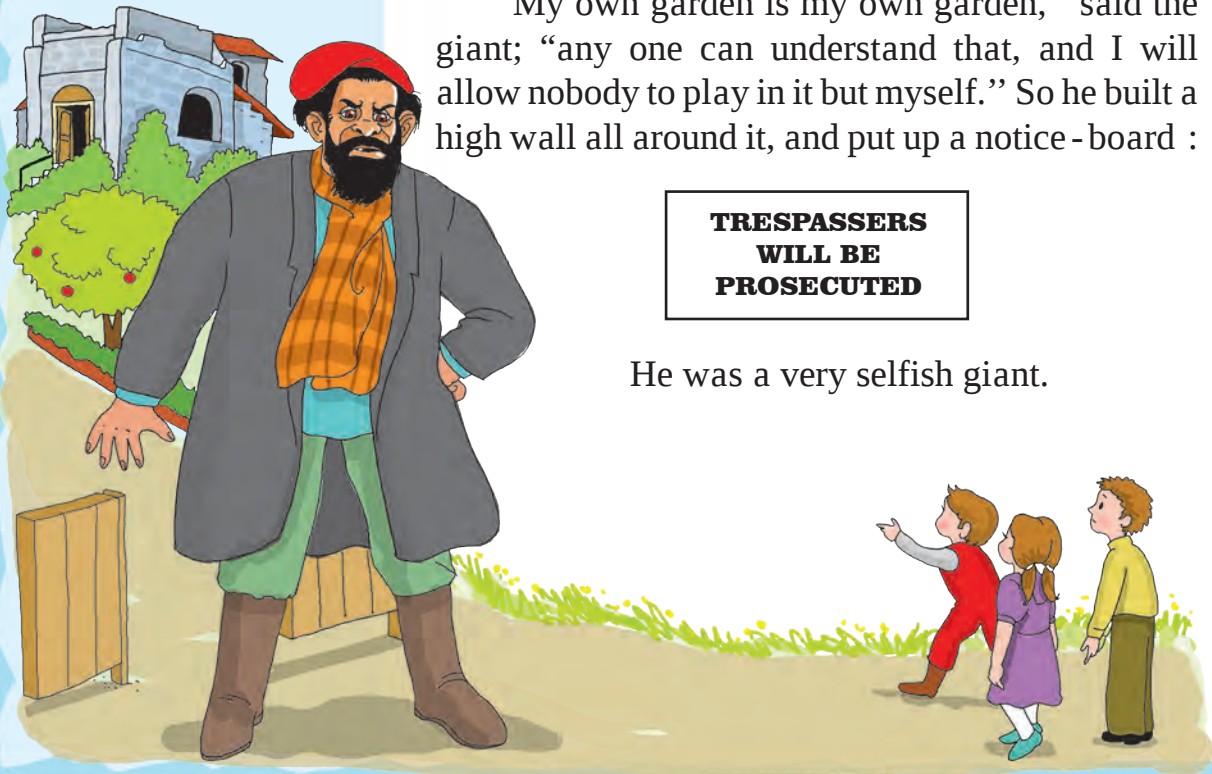
"My own garden is my own garden," said the giant; "any one can understand that, and I will allow nobody to play in it but myself." So he built a high wall all around it, and put up a notice-board :

**TRESPASSERS
WILL BE
PROSECUTED**

He was a very selfish giant.

Guess the meaning of:

'Trespassers will be prosecuted.'



The poor children had now nowhere to play. They tried to play on the road, but the road was very dusty and full of hard stones, and they did not like it. They used to wander round the high walls when their lessons were over, and talk about the beautiful garden inside. "How happy we were there!" they said to each other.

Then the Spring came, and all over the country there were little blossoms and little birds. Only in the garden of the selfish giant it was still winter. The birds did not care to sing in it as there were no children, and the trees forgot to blossom. Once a beautiful flower put its head out from the grass, but when it saw the notice-board it was so sorry for the children that it slipped back into the ground again, and went off to sleep.

The only people who were pleased were the Snow and the Frost. "Spring has forgotten this-garden," they cried, "so we will live here all the year round." The Snow covered up the grass with her great white cloak, and the Frost painted all the trees silver. Then they invited the North Wind to stay with them, and he came. He was wrapped in furs, and he roared all day about the garden, and blew the chimney-pots down. "This is a delightful spot," he said, "we must ask the Hail to visit." So the Hail came. Every day for three hours he rattled on the roof of the castle till he broke most of the slates, and then he ran round and round the garden as fast as he could go. He was dressed in grey, and his breath was like ice.

"I cannot understand why the Spring is so late in coming," said the selfish giant, as he sat at the window and looked out at his cold, white garden; "I hope there will be a change in the weather."

But the Spring never came, nor the Summer. The Autumn gave golden fruit to every garden, but to the giant's garden she gave none. "He is too selfish," she said. So it was always winter there,

Think and answer :

The author describes the Seasons and Natural elements as though they were persons. This is known as personification.

Name the elements which are personified here and tell whether each is shown as a good or bad person.

- linnet : bird
- perfume : pleasant smell

Discuss :

What do you prefer
summer or winter?
Why?

What do the characters
in the story prefer?

What could be the
reason behind their
choice?

and the North Wind and the Hail and the Snow danced about through the trees.

One morning the giant was lying awake in bed when he heard some lovely music. It sounded so sweet to his ears that he thought it must be the king's musicians passing by. It was really only a little linnet singing outside his window, but it was so long since he had heard a bird sing in his garden that it seemed to him to be the most beautiful music in the world. Then the Hail stopped dancing over his head, and the North Wind ceased roaring and a delicious perfume came to him through the open casement. "I believe the Spring has come at last," said the giant; and he jumped out of bed and looked out.

What did he see?

He saw a most wonderful sight. Through a little hole in the wall the children had crept in, and they were sitting in the branches of the trees. In every tree that he could see there was a little child. And the trees were so glad to have the children back again that they had covered themselves with blossoms, and were waving their arms gently above the children's heads. The birds were flying about and twittering with delight, and the flowers were looking up through the green grass and laughing. It was a lovely scene, only in one corner it was still winter. It was the farthest corner of the garden, and in it was standing a little boy. He was so small that he could not reach up to the branches of the tree, and he was wandering all around it, crying bitterly. The poor tree was still covered with frost and snow and the North Wind was blowing and roaring above it. "Climb up! little boy," said the tree, and it bent its branches down as low as it could; but the boy was too tiny.

And the giant's heart melted as he looked out, "How selfish I have been!" he said; "now I know why the Spring would not come here. I will put



that poor little boy on the top of the tree, and then I will knock down the wall, and my garden shall be the children's playground for ever." He was really very sorry for what he had done.

So he crept downstairs and opened the front door quite softly, and went out into the garden. But when the children saw him they were so frightened that they all ran away, and the garden became winter again. Only the little boy did not run for his eyes were so full of tears that he did not see the giant coming. And the giant stole up behind him and took him gently in his hand, and put him up into the tree. And the tree broke at once into blossom, and the birds came and sang on it, and the little boy stretched out his two arms and flung them round the giant's neck, and kissed him. And the other children, when they saw that the giant was not wicked any longer, came running back, and with them came the Spring. "It is your garden now, little children," said the giant, and he took a great axe and knocked down the wall. And when the people were going to market at twelve o'clock they found the giant playing with the children in the most beautiful garden they had ever seen.

From 'The Selfish Giant' by Oscar Wilde

Things to do:

- Find and read the rest of the story.



ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. List all the words related to weather and seasons from the story.
2. Form groups of 5. Turn the story into a play as an activity. Use the following scenes and characters. Write appropriate speeches / dialogues for them. Also write stage directions in brackets. Each group can write one or two scenes. Then put the scenes together to make a whole play. Read your play aloud.

Scene 1 : In the giant's garden

Characters : Narrator, children, birds, etc.

Scene 2 : In the giant's garden (The giant returns.)

Characters : Narrator, giant, children

Scene 3 : On the dusty road

Characters : Children

Discuss with the children, the advantage of having a narrator in the play, and of turning the natural elements into persons.

Scene 4 : In the giant's garden

Characters : Spring, winter, beautiful flowers, snow, frost, North Wind, Hail

Scene 5 : The giant sitting at the window

Characters : Giant, autumn, winter, North wind, Hail, snow, narrator

Scene 6 : The giant in his bed

Characters : Giant, Linnet, Hail, North Wind

Scene 7 : The giant at the window

Characters : Children, trees, birds, flowers, winter, little boy

Scene 8 : The giant in his garden

Characters : Giant, children, tree, birds, little boy, Spring, Narrator

3. Write a note of thanks from the children to the Giant who is now their friend.
4. The story given here is a part of a longer story. Read the entire story of the Selfish Giant.



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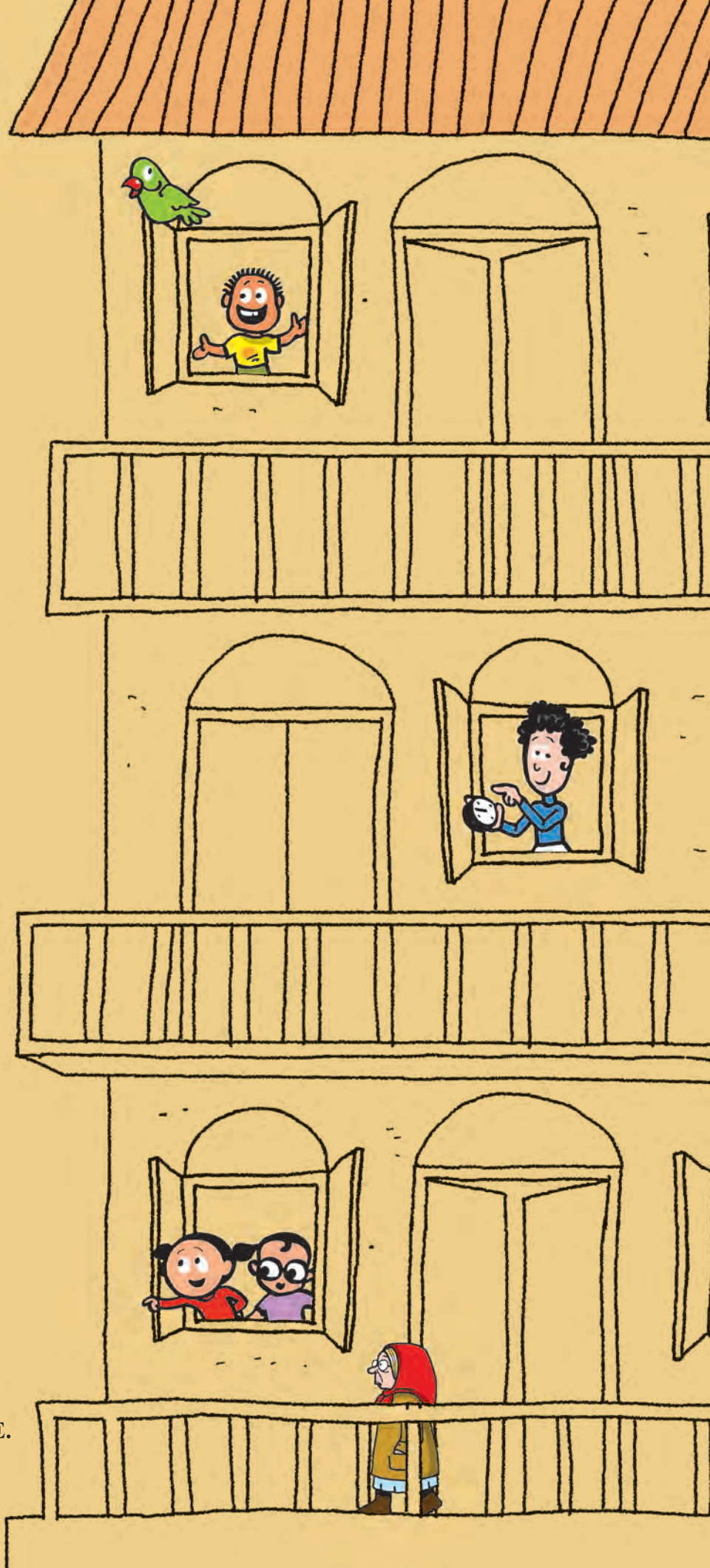
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