

1. Attila

Self, Home, Family, Friends and Pets

Learning Outcomes

- ▶ read and comprehend the story
- ▶ use various homophones, homonyms and homographs correctly
- ▶ revise the parts of speech and learn the types of prepositions
- ▶ learn syllable stress
- ▶ listen to and share an anecdote
- ▶ write a character sketch



Digital Desk



Warm-up



Are you an animal lover? Do you have a pet? If not, think of an imaginary pet. Describe some qualities of your pet that makes it special to you and your family. What are the things that you would like to change about your pet? Then, form two groups and read out the list of qualities.



The Scourge of Europe, frequently called **Attila the Hun**, was the ruler of the Huns from 434 CE until his death in March 453 CE. Scourge means someone who causes trouble. He was also the leader of a tribal empire consisting of Huns, Ostrogoths and Alans among others, in Central and Eastern Europe. Attila and his elder brother, Bleda, received instructions in archery, sword fighting and horse riding. They also spoke—and perhaps read—both Gothic and Latin, and learnt military and diplomatic tactics.

He was one of the most fearsome enemies the Romans ever faced. Attila claimed the Romans had violated the treaty and led a devastating series of attacks through Eastern Roman cities in 441 CE.



Cross-curricular Connection

The family wanted a strong and formidable dog who could prevent break-ins and theft in their house. A two-month-old black-and-white puppy was brought home. He was named 'Attila' after the *Scourge of Europe*. He had square jaws, red eyes, a pug nose and a massive head. He gave no hope that he would do credit to his name.

The puppy, as I have already indicated, did not have a very **prepossessing** appearance and was none too playful, but this did not prevent his owners from sitting in a circle around him and admiring him. There was a **prolonged** debate as to what he should be named. The youngest suggested, 'Why not call him Tiger?'

'Every other street-mongrel is named Tiger,' came the reply.

'Why not Caesar?'

'Caesar! If a census was taken of dogs you would find at least fifteen thousand Caesars in South India alone...'

'Why not Fire?'

'It is fantastic.'

'Why not Thunder?'

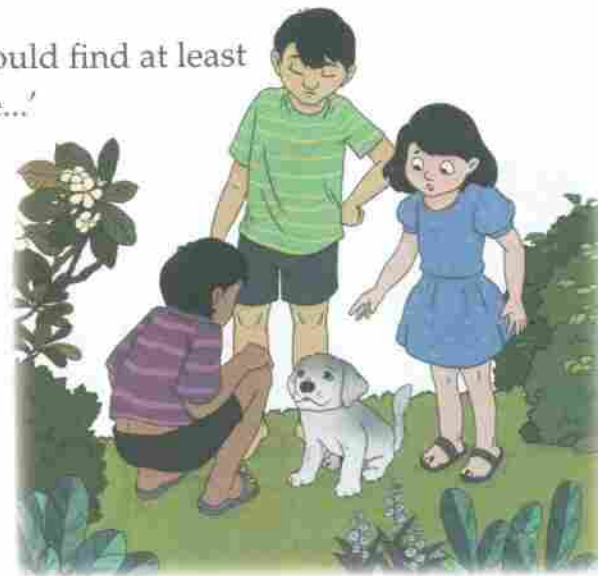
'It is too obvious.'

'Grip?'

'Still obvious, and childish.' There was a deadlock. Someone suggested Attila, and a shout of joy went up to the skies. No more satisfying name was thought of for man or animal.

But as time passed our Attila exhibited a love of humanity which was sometimes disconcerting. The Scourge of Europe—could he ever have been like this?

They put it down to his age. What child could help loving all creatures? In their zeal to establish this fact, they went to the extent of **delving** into ancient history to find out what the Scourge of Europe was like when he was a child. It was rumoured that as a child he clung to his friends and to his parents' friends so fast that often he had to be beaten and separated from them. But when he was fourteen he showed the first sign of his future: he knocked down a fellow who tried to touch his marbles. Ah, this was encouraging. Let our dog reach the parallel of fourteen years and people would get to know his real nature.



prepossessing: charming

prolonged: continued for a long time

delving: trying hard to find out more information about something

But this was a vain promise. He stood up twenty inches high, had a large frame and a forbidding appearance on the whole—but that was all. A variety of people entered the gates of the house every day: **mendicants**, bill-collectors, postmen, trades-men and family friends. All of them were warmly received by Attila. The moment the gate clicked he became alert and stood up looking towards the gate. By the time anyone entered the gate Attila went blindly charging forward. But that was all. The person had only to stop and smile, and Attila would melt. He would behave as if he apologised for even giving an impression of violence. He would lower his head, curve his body, tuck his tail between his legs, roll his eyes and moan as if to say, 'How sad that you should have mistaken my gesture! I only hurried down to greet you.' Till he was patted on the head, stroked and told that he was forgiven, he would be in extreme misery.

Gradually he realised that his bouncing advances caused much unhappy misunderstanding. And so when he heard the gate click he hardly stirred. He merely looked in that direction and wagged his tail. The people at home did not like this attitude very much. They thought it rather a shame.

'Why not change his name to Blind Worm?' somebody asked.

'He eats like an elephant,' said the mother of the family. 'You can employ two watchmen for the price of the rice and meat he consumes. Somebody comes every morning and steals all the flowers in the garden and Attila won't do anything about it.'

'He has better business to do than catch flower thieves,' replied the youngest, always the defender of the dog.

'What is the better business?'

'Well, if somebody comes in at dawn and takes away the flowers, do you expect Attila to be looking out for him even at that hour?'

'Why not? It's what a well-fed dog ought to be doing instead of sleeping. You ought to be ashamed of your dog.'

'He does not sleep all night, Mother. I have often seen him going round the house and watching all night.'

'Really! Does he prowl about all night?'

'Of course he does,' said the defender.

mendicants: beggars

'I am quite alarmed to hear it,' said the mother. 'Please lock him up in a room at night, otherwise he may call in a burglar and show him round. Left alone, a burglar might after all be less successful. It wouldn't be so bad if he at least barked. He is the most noiseless dog I have ever seen in my life.'

The young man was extremely irritated at this. He considered it to be the most uncharitable **cynicism**, but the dog justified it that very night.

Ranga lived in a hut, three miles from the town. He was a 'gang coolie'—often employed in road-mending. Occasionally at nights he enjoyed the thrill and profit of breaking into houses. At one o'clock that night Ranga removed the bars of a window on the eastern side of the house and slipped in. He edged along the wall, searched all the trunks and almirahs in the house and made a neat bundle of all the jewellery and other valuables he could pick up.

He was just starting to go out. He had just put one foot out of the gap he had made in the window when he saw Attila standing below, looking up expectantly. Ranga thought his end had come. He expected the dog to bark. But not Attila. He waited for a moment, grew tired of waiting, stood up and put his forepaws on the lap of the burglar. He put back his ears, licked Ranga's hands and rolled his eyes. Ranga whispered, 'I hope you aren't going to bark...'

'Don't you worry. I am not the sort,' the dog tried to say.

'Just a moment. Let me get down from here,' said the burglar.

The dog **obligingly** took away his paws and lowered himself.

'See there,' said Ranga, pointing to the backyard, 'there is a cat.' Attila put up his ears at the mention of the cat and dashed in the direction indicated. One might easily have thought he was going to tear up a cat, but actually he didn't want to miss the pleasure of the company of a cat if there was one.

As soon as the dog left him Ranga made a dash for the gate. Given a second more he would have hopped over it. But the dog turned and saw what was about to happen and in one spring was at the gate. He looked hurt. 'Is this proper?' he seemed to ask. 'Do you want to shake me off?'

He hung his heavy tail down so loosely and looked so miserable that the burglar stroked his head, at which he revived. The burglar opened the gate and went out, and the dog followed him. Attila's greatest ambition in life was to wander in the streets freely. Now things seemed to be shaping up ideally.

cynicism: distrust

obligingly: helpfully

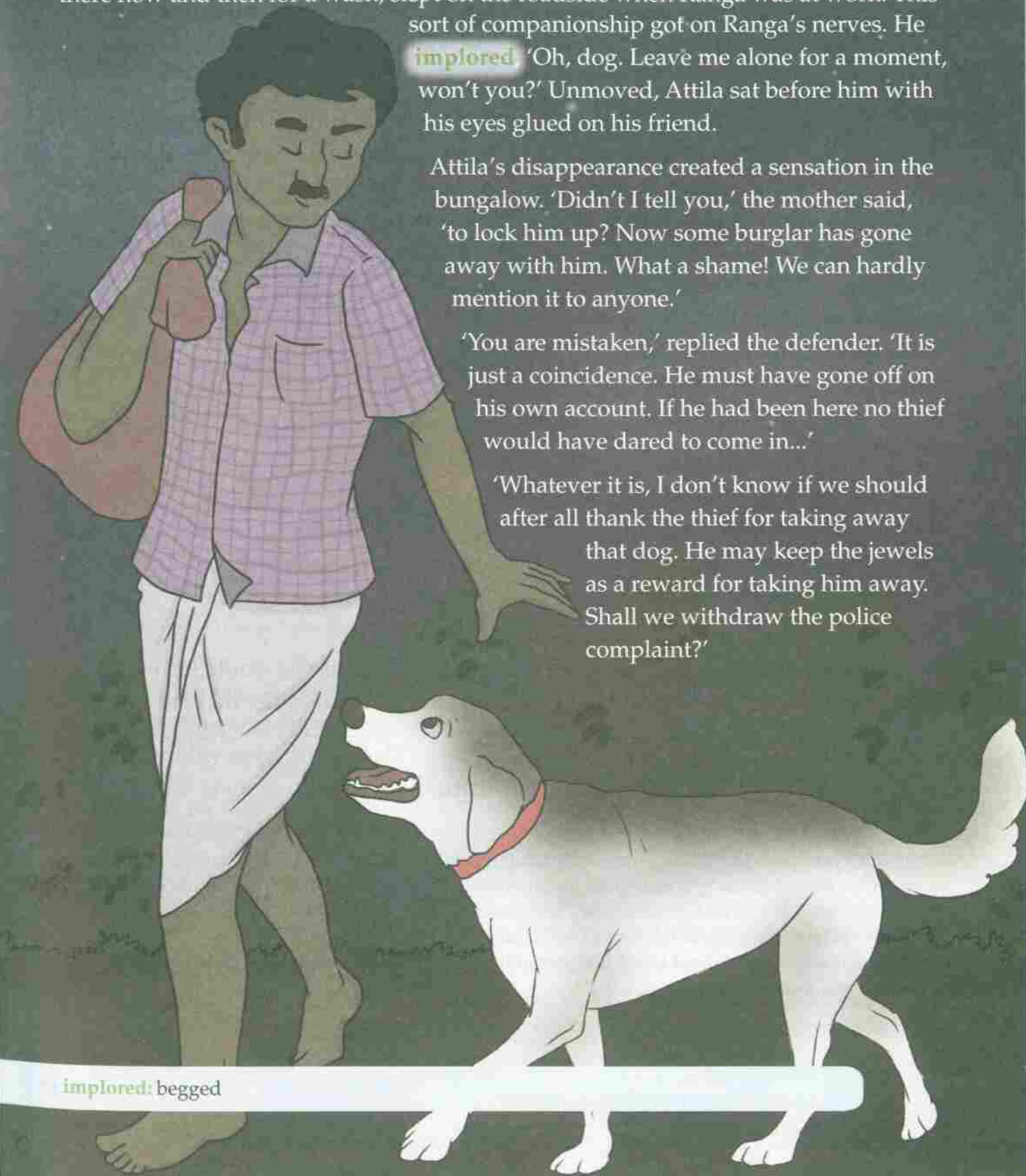
Attila liked his new friend so much that he wouldn't leave him alone even for a moment. He lay before Ranga when he sat down to eat, sat on the edge of his mat when he slept in his hut, waited patiently on the edge of the pond when Ranga went there now and then for a wash, slept on the roadside when Ranga was at work. This sort of companionship got on Ranga's nerves. He

implored 'Oh, dog. Leave me alone for a moment, won't you?' Unmoved, Attila sat before him with his eyes glued on his friend.

Attila's disappearance created a sensation in the bungalow. 'Didn't I tell you,' the mother said, 'to lock him up? Now some burglar has gone away with him. What a shame! We can hardly mention it to anyone.'

'You are mistaken,' replied the defender. 'It is just a coincidence. He must have gone off on his own account. If he had been here no thief would have dared to come in...'

'Whatever it is, I don't know if we should after all thank the thief for taking away that dog. He may keep the jewels as a reward for taking him away. Shall we withdraw the police complaint?'



implored: begged



This **facetiousness** ceased a week later, and Attila rose to the ranks of a hero. The eldest son of the house was going towards the market one day. He saw Attila trotting behind someone on the road.

'Hey,' shouted the young man, at which Ranga turned and broke into a run. Attila, who always suspected that his new friend was waiting for the slightest chance to desert him, galloped behind Ranga.

'Hey, Attila!' shouted the young man, and he also started running. Attila wanted to answer the call after making sure of his friend, and so he turned his head for a second and galloped faster. Ranga desperately doubled his pace. Attila determined to stick to him at any cost. As a result, he ran so fast that he overtook Ranga and clumsily blocked his way, and Ranga stumbled over him and fell. As he rolled on the ground a piece of jewellery (which he was taking to a receiver of stolen property) flew from his hand. The young man recognised it as belonging to his sister and sat down on Ranga. A crowd collected and the police appeared on the scene.

Attila was the hero of the day. Even the lady of the house softened towards him. She said, 'Whatever one might say of Attila, one has to admit that he is a very cunning detective. He is too deep for words.'

It was as well that Attila had no powers of speech. Otherwise he would have burst into a **lamentation** which would have shattered the **pedestal** under his feet.

R K Narayan



About the Author

R K Narayan was born in Chennai, South India. He was an Indian writer known for his works set in the fictional South Indian town of Malgudi. His first novel *Swami and Friends* (1935) and its successor *The Bachelor of Arts* (1937) are both set in the enchanting fictional territory of Malgudi. His novel *The Guide* (1958), which was later adapted into a film, won him the National Prize of the Indian Literary Academy.



facetiousness: not being serious about a serious subject

lamentation: an expression of great sadness

pedestal: the base that a statue rests on

Comprehension

A. Answer these questions.

1. What kind of a dog did the speaker's family want?
2. At the beginning of the narrative, was Attila able to measure up to their expectations? Give reasons for your answer.
3. Why were the family members satisfied with the name Attila?
4. Why did the family research about the 'Scourge of Europe'? What were the findings?
5. How did Attila respond to the entry of strangers?
6. What issues did the speaker's mother have with the dog?
7. How did Attila react when Ranga entered the premises?
8. How did Attila prove to be a hero?

B. Answer these questions with reference to the context.

1. *He gave no hope that he would do credit to his name.*
 - a. Who is 'he' in this sentence?
 - b. What is the significance of his name?
 - c. How do you know that he would do no credit to the name?
2. *The people at home did not like this attitude very much. They thought it rather a shame.*
 - a. Whose attitude is the speaker talking about?
 - b. What was wrong with the attitude?
 - c. What were their expectations?
3. *The young man was extremely irritated at this. He considered it to be the most uncharitable cynicism.*
 - a. Who was the young man?
 - b. Why was he irritated?
 - c. Explain the phrase 'uncharitable cynicism'.

C. Think and answer.

1. The bond between Ranga and Attila was of mutual respect. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Dogs make good household pets as they are good companions. In what other ways are dogs helpful to humans? Discuss.
3. Very often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile or the smallest act of kindness, all of which have the potential to turn a life around. Comment on the statement with reference to the story.



Word Wonder

Read these pairs of words and note the difference between them.

- ▶ **gait:** a way of walking
- gate:** a barrier like a door that is used to close an opening in a fence or a wall outside a building
- ▶ **meat:** the flesh of an animal or a bird eaten as food
- meet:** to be in the same place as somebody by chance and talk to them

These words are called **homophones**.

Words that have the same pronunciation, but different meanings and spellings are known as **homophones**.

Now, read these sentences and note the highlighted words.

- ▶ She was **content** with the job offer.
The **content** in the book did not match with what she required.
- The word **content** has different meanings and pronunciation in the pair of sentences. Such words are called **homographs**.

Such words that are spelt the same but have different meanings and pronunciation are called **homographs**.

Now, read these words and read their meanings.

- ▶ **address:** to speak to
- address:** location
- ▶ **current:** up to date
- current:** flow of water

These words are called **homonyms**.

Words that have the same spelling and pronunciation but different meanings are called **homonyms**.

A homograph that is also pronounced differently is called a **heteronym**.
Read on until you have **read** it all!



A. Fill in the blanks in these sentences using appropriate words from the box.

rose—rows stares—stairs wring—ring
hire—higher sail—sale

1. He took us for a _____ up the river.
2. The boss said that he wanted to _____ someone who is qualified.



3. The teacher asked them to stand in _____.
4. He tried to _____ the clothes dry.
5. We chose to take the _____ instead of the elevator.

B. Read these sentences carefully and choose the correct meaning of the highlighted words.

1. While doing her calculations, she made a **minute** mistake.
a. 60 seconds b. small
2. The thief jumped into the **compound** with the help of a rope.
a. to mix or combine b. an enclosed area
3. My mother asked the shopkeeper to give a decent **discount**.
a. a reduction in price b. to underestimate the significance of
4. She had to pay a **fine** for jumping the signal.
a. good b. a sum of money paid to settle a matter

C. Write the meanings of these homonyms. Then, use them in sentences of your own.

1. letter 2. sink 3. ring 4. right 5. ship

Learn About Language

A. Read these sentences. Identify the part of speech of the highlighted words.

1. We should respect our **elders**.
2. The dog went out of the kennel **itself**.
3. Mr Rawat delayed **telling** the truth to his family.
4. **Oh no**, I can't believe it is raining again!
5. This is something we need to decide **on**.
6. It was a hot day, **nevertheless** the kids had fun in the water park.
7. My friend forgot to bring the book from **his** house.
8. Is my singing **too** loud?



Now, read these sentences.

- ▶ The book was lying **on** the table.
 - ▶ The coin fell **into** the well.
- The highlighted words have been placed before the nouns in these sentences. These are **prepositions**.



A **preposition** is a word that is placed before a noun or a pronoun to show its relationship to some other word in the sentence.

The types of prepositions are:

- ▶ preposition of place or position
- ▶ preposition of time
- ▶ preposition of direction

Study this table to see some commonly used prepositions.

Type	Examples	Usage
1. preposition of place	in, at, among, behind, between, in front of, next to, over, under, above, opposite, below, beside, near, near to, close to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The dictionary is on the table. ▶ Monisha is standing beside her father. ▶ I was closer to the stage than Laxman.
2. preposition of time	during, for, from...to, at in, on, till, from...until, within, since, after, before	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ She arrived at four o'clock. ▶ I have been studying since morning. ▶ Let us have dinner together on Monday.
3. preposition of direction	through, across, around, up, to the left, to the right, along, against, from, off, towards, into	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ The children threw stones into the pond. ▶ We were sailing against the wind. ▶ He swam across the river.

Sometimes **double prepositions** are also used. They are made by combining two simple prepositions.

For example,

- ▶ The baby climbed **onto** the table.
- ▶ Once **upon** a time there lived a king.

Read these sentences. The highlighted words are **compound prepositions**.

- ▶ He attended a meeting **on behalf of** his company.
- ▶ He was standing **in the middle of** the road.

B. Read these sentences. Choose the correct option to fill in the blanks.

1. I will get to the conference _____.
a. within time b. on time c. of time



2. The boy liked the gifts _____.
a. to his friend b. upon his friend c. from his friend
3. We need to discuss the proposal _____.
a. for the meeting b. at the meeting c. within the meeting
4. We were _____ the storm.
a. at the middle of b. on the middle of c. in the middle of
5. My car is parked _____ the main building.
a. in front of b. at the front of c. in between the

Language Lab

Every word is made up of **syllables**. Each word has one stressed syllable. When a word has more than one syllable, one of the syllables within the word is uttered with more breath force than the other syllables. That syllable is said to be the stressed syllable.

For example,

- ▶ de-li-cious ▶ ed-u-ca-tion

A. Read these words aloud. Identify the stressed syllables in these words.

1. in-cre-di-ble 2. a-maz-ing 3. com-mu-ni-ty
4. so-ci-e-ty 5. pre-tend 6. per-haps

B. An anecdote is a short, interesting or amusing story about a real person or event.

Now, listen to the anecdote and answer these questions.

1. From where did the speaker get the dog?
2. What did they name him? Why was he named so?
3. What was a success? Describe the event.

C. Now, share an anecdote with the class.

Firstly, choose an interesting event or theme to make up a story. You can make your story interesting, amusing, inspirational or thought-provoking. Put forward interesting questions to make the audience interested and attentive as they listen to your story.



Composition



Write a character sketch of Attila.

You may use these points.

- ▶ Why was he given that name?
- ▶ How did he behave with other people?
- ▶ What was his job?
- ▶ How did he feel when he went out of the house?
- ▶ What happened to him finally?
- ▶ Why did people love him?

Activity



Get into groups of four and conduct a survey of pet lovers in your neighbourhood. The survey should cover these questions.

1. What kind of pet do you have?
2. Do you take your pet out for a walk?
3. On a scale of one to ten, how do you rate your level of happiness when you are with your pet?
4. Did you feel lonely before you had a pet?
5. Do you feel safe in the company of your pet?

You can add more questions to your survey. You will be surprised by the outcome of the activity. Share your findings in the class.



Further Reading: 'The Blind Dog' by R K Narayan

