

## Comprehension Passages

### Passage 1

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Mr. Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, was returning to his school late one night on the outskirts of the hill station of Shimla. The school was conducted on English public school lines and the boys – most of them from well-to-do Indian families – wore blazers, caps and ties. “Life” magazine, in a feature on India, had once called this school the Eton of the East.

Mr. Oliver had been teaching in this school for several years. He’s no longer there. The Shimla Bazaar, with its cinemas and restaurants, was about two miles from the school; and Mr. Oliver, a bachelor, usually strolled into the town in the evening returning after dark, when he would take short cut through a pine forest.

#### Question 1.

Who was Mr Oliver? Where was he working?

#### Answer:

Mr Oliver was an Anglo Indian teacher. He was a bachelor and worked in a English medium school located on the outskirts of Simla.

#### Question 2.

Why was the school where Mr Oliver worked called the Eton of the East?

#### Answer:

The school where Mr Oliver worked was run on the lines of an English public school. The students belonged mostly to elite families and were supposed to wear blazers, caps and ties. Eton is also a school meant for children of the British royalty and elite class. Hence the comparison.

#### Question 3.

What did Mr Oliver generally do in the evening?

#### Answer:

In the evening, Mr Oliver usually strolled into the town to visit the Simla Bazaar with its restaurants and cinemas. The Bazaar was only about three miles from the school.

#### Question 4.

When did Mr Oliver return from the town?

#### Answer:

Mr Oliver usually returned after dark.

#### Question 5.

Which route did Mr Oliver take on his way back?

#### Answer:

Mr Oliver took the shortcut through the pine forest.

### Passage 2

Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

When there was a strong wind, the pine trees made sad, eerie sounds that kept most people to the main road. But Mr. Oliver was not a nervous or imaginative man. He carried a torch – and on the night I write of, its pale gleam, the batteries were running down – moved fitfully over the narrow

forest path. When its flickering light fell on the figure of a boy, who was sitting alone on a rock, Mr. Oliver stopped.

Boys were not supposed to be out of school after seven P.M. and it was now well past nine. What are you doing out here, boy, asked Mr. Oliver sharply, moving closer so that he could recognize the miscreant.

**Question 1.**

Why did the people keep to the main road instead of taking the shortcut?

**Answer:**

The shortcut passed through the pine forest and at night the strong wind seemed to howl and the leaves rustled. All this created an eerie and frightening atmosphere so the people avoided taking the lonely shortcut and followed the main road.

**Question 2.**

Why did Mr Oliver take the shortcut? What did he carry with him?

**Answer:**

Mr Oliver took the shortcut because he was not a nervous or imaginative man who would think that the forest hid unnatural things. He was not frightened. He carried a torch with him.

**Question 3.**

Whom did Mr Oliver meet in the forest?

**Answer:**

Mr Oiver while walking along the shortcut in the forest saw in the flickering light of his torch a boy, crouched down sitting on a rock and weeping.

**Question 4.**

What thought ran through Mr Oliver's mind when he saw the boy?

**Answer:**

When Mr Oliver saw the boy he immediately thought the boy was a miscreant from his school. He was sure the boy was absconding from school as boys were not allowed to leave the premises after dark.

**Question 5.**

What was Mr Oliver's reaction?

**Answer:**

Mr Oliver questioned the boy as to what he was doing out so late and then he approached closer to the boy in order to recognise the miscreant.

**Passage 3**

**Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.**

But even as he approached the boy, Mr. Oliver sensed that something was wrong. The boy appeared to be crying. His head hung down, he held his face in his hands, and his body shook convulsively. It was a strange, soundless weeping, and Mr. Oliver felt distinctly uneasy.

Well, what's the matter, he asked, his anger giving way to concern. What are you crying for? The boy would not answer or look up. His body continued to be wracked with silent sobbing.

Oh, come on, boy. You shouldn't be out here at this hour. Tell me the trouble. Look up.

**Question 1.**

When did Mr Oliver sense that there was something wrong?

**Answer:**

As soon as Mr Oliver walked closer to the boy he sensed that there was something wrong.

**Question 2.**

What did the boy appear to be doing?

**Answer:**

The boy appeared to be crying.

**Question 3.**

Describe the posture of the boy.

**Answer:**

The boy was sitting with his head hung down, he was holding his face in his hands, and his body shook convulsively.

**Question 4.**

Why did Mr Oliver feel uneasy? What was strange?

**Answer:**

Mr Oliver felt uneasy because the boy was weeping strangely. He was crying silently without sound but his body was racked with silent sobbing.

**Question 5.**

Why did Mr Oliver's anger change to concern?

**Answer:**

Seeing the boy crying so strangely in the dark all alone in the forest made Mr Oliver concerned and he asked him to tell him what was troubling him and to look up.

**Passage 4**

**Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.**

The boy looked up. He took his hands from his face and looked up at his teacher. The light from Mr. Oliver's torch fell on the boy's face, if you could call it a face. He had no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It was just a round smooth head with a school cap on top of it.

And that's where the story should end, as indeed it has for several people who have had similar experiences and dropped dead of inexplicable heart attacks. But for Mr. Oliver, it did not end there. The torch fell from his trembling hand. He turned and scrambled down the path, running blindly through the trees and calling for help. He was still running towards the school buildings when he saw a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. Mr. Oliver had never before been so pleased to see the night watchman. He stumbled up to the watchman, gasping for breath and speaking incoherently.

What is it, Sahib? Asked the watchman, has there been an accident? Why are you running?

I saw something, something horrible, a boy weeping in the forest and he had no face.

No face, Sahib?

No eyes, no nose, mouth, nothing.

Do you mean it was like this, Sahib? asked the watchman, and raised the lamp to his own face. The watchman had no eyes, no ears, no features at all, not even an eyebrow. The wind blew the lamp out and Mr. Oliver had his heart attack.

### Question 1.

Why did the torch fall from Mr Oliver's hand? Why was his hand trembling?

#### Answer:

The torch fell from Mr Oliver's hand when he saw that the boy had no face, ears, eyes or nose. He was horrified and frightened and the torch fell from his hand.

### Question 2.

Why did Mr Oliver tell the boy that he should not be out at that hour?

#### Answer:

Mr Oliver told the boy that he should not be out at that hour because he thought the boy was a student from the school where he taught and the boys were not allowed out after dark.

### Question 3.

What was Mr Oliver's reaction when he saw the faceless boy? Whom did he stumble into?

#### Answer:

When Mr Oliver saw the faceless boy he ran in fear towards the school crying for help. It was then that he stumbled into the watchman.

### Question 4.

What did the watchman ask Mr Oliver? '

#### Answer:

The watchman asked him the reason why he was running and if there had been an accident.

### Question 5.

What was strange about the watchman? What happened to Mr Oliver when the watchman raised the lantern to show his face?

#### Answer:

When the watchman raised the lantern to his face, Mr Oliver saw that the watchman had no face, just like the boy. He had no face, no ears, no eyes and no nose. He had no features, not even an eyebrow. Seeing this strange and weird thing Mr Oliver fainted in fear.

## Assignment

### Question 1.

Discuss the art of Ruskin Bond as depicted in the story 'A face in the Dark.'

#### Answer:

A Face in the Dark is a short story by Ruskin Bond. It's the story set on a windy night when Mr Oliver, an Anglo-Indian teacher, dares to walk through the pine forest on his way back to the school after an evening at Simla Bazaar. He comes across a weeping boy who lifts his face, which is not a face but a flat something without eyes, nose or mouth. Mr Oliver runs only to bump into a watchman who again had a face like that of the faceless boy.

In this story Ruskin Bond yet again proves he is a master story teller. He draws on his travels, interactions with people, and his bonding with them gives them the confidence to share their stories with him which then he presents in the same tone and style bringing his silent listener's great talent in it. His writing skill lies in the way he graphically uses his language and imagination to transport us to the hills and watching the sun setting beautifully and the dark night enveloping the forest with the wind howling in the trees to create an eerie and strange atmosphere. The imagery abounds in supernaturalism and paranormal scenes. The image of a lonely boy in the night in a dark forest amidst the howling wind and rustling leaves, sitting on a rock 'racked by silent weeping' not only evokes a feeling of strangeness, of impending horror but also of sympathy for a weeping child. Thus a mastery of language helps him to achieve this effect. Ruskin Bond stories are not horror they are like haunting experiences. The experience is not dangerous, life threatening or altering -it is just different. It is honest and believable.

The story is eerie, leaving one haunted in a melancholy sort of way, and is beautifully written. In his stories, ghosts, jinns, witches—and the occasional monster—are as real as the people he writes about. He makes the supernatural appear entirely natural, and therefore harder to ignore.

He adroitly uses language to create his mysterious and strange atmosphere. He opens the story with a everyday, normal occurrence and through the use of words and phrases like 'sad,' 'eerie sounds,' 'racked with silent sobbing,' 'shook convulsively' succeeds in creating an atmosphere replete with supernatural and fearful connotations. Thus we can rightly say that he is a story teller par excellence and a master of his craft.

### **Question 2.**

Discuss the theme of supernatural and paranormal as presented in the story?

#### **Answer:**

Ruskin Bond graphically uses his language and imagination to transport us to the hills and watching the sun setting beautifully and the dark night enveloping the forest with the wind howling in the trees to create an eerie and strange atmosphere. The imagery abounds in super naturalism and paranormal scenes. The image of a lonely boy in the night in a dark forest amidst the howling wind and rustling leaves, sitting on a rock 'racked by silent weeping' not only evokes a feeling of strangeness, of impending horror but also of sympathy for a weeping child. Thus a mastery of language helps him to achieve this effect. Ruskin Bond stories are not horror they are like haunting experiences. The experience is not dangerous, life threatening or altering -it is just different. It is honest and believable.

The story a Face in the Dark exhibits Bond's interest in the supernatural. It deals with the paranormal depicting the story of a school teacher who while returning from the Simla Bazaar takes a shortcut through the forest and encounters a faceless weeping boy. The boy has no nose, ears or eyes. Mr Oliver runs in fear but to his horror meets the watchman who is also without a face.

Ruskin Bond employs words and phrases like 'sad,' 'eerie sounds,' 'racked with silent sobbing,' 'shook convulsively' to create an atmosphere replete with supernatural and fearful connotations. He opens the story with a everyday, normal occurrence and then gradually builds an atmosphere of strangeness and supernatural events through the use of appropriate imagery and language. The very title suggests that something is not right, its suggestive of eeriness. The use of the word dark connotes the paranormal, the supernatural, the weird.

One is transported into the world of paranormal activities without realising but the story is in no way macabre. Bond builds the atmosphere from the ordinary to the surreal. He opens with the description of the ordinary school teacher's routine, then introduces the eerie atmosphere of the dark forest with the howling wind, then a surprise element of sympathy and anger at the boy out after dark leading to the horror of the faceless entity, a surreal and weird encounter. The narrator writes, 'He carried a torch -on the night I write of, its pale gleam, the batteries were running down – moved fitfully over the narrow forest path. When its flickering light fell on the figure of a boy, who was sitting alone on a rock, Mr. Oliver stopped. Boys were not supposed to be out of school after 7 p.m. and it was now well past nine.' This detail about the torch suggests that something is not right and makes us wait expectantly for the unusual. And such an effect speaks of the superior writing and storytelling skills of Ruskin Bond.

"Raise the possibility of another layer of life outside our material selves – something of the soul-force, the aura of a person that lingers on after the body is no more." And so lingers on long after it has been read.

### **Question 3.**

What are the techniques used by Ruskin Bond to create an atmosphere of strangeness, mystery and super naturalism in the story? Can Ruskin Bond be called a visual writer? Why?

**Answer:**

Ruskin Bond is a “visual writer” because for short stories, he first imagines it like a film and then notes it down. The story *A Face in the Dark* is eerie, leaving one haunted in a melancholy sort of way, and is beautifully written. In his stories, ghosts, jinns, witches— and the occasional monster—are as real as the people he writes about. He makes the supernatural appear entirely natural, and therefore harder to ignore.

The story opens with the description of the ordinary school teacher’s routine, then introduces the eerie atmosphere of the dark forest with the howling wind, then a surprise element of sympathy and anger at the boy out after dark leading to the horror of the faceless entity, a surreal and weird encounter. The narrator writes, ‘He carried a torch -on the night I write of, its pale gleam, the batteries were running down – moved fitfully over the narrow forest path. When its flickering light fell on the figure of a boy, who was sitting alone on a rock, Mr. Oliver stopped. Boys were not supposed to be out of school after seven p.m. and it was now well past nine.’ This detail about the torch suggests that something is not right and makes us wait expectantly for the unusual. And such an effect speaks of the superior writing and storytelling skills of Ruskin Bond.

Ruskin Bond employs words and phrases like ‘sad,’ ‘eerie sounds,’ ‘racked with silent sobbing,’ ‘shook convulsively’ to create an atmosphere replete with supernatural and fearful connotations. He opens the story with a everyday, normal occurrence and then gradually builds an atmosphere of strangeness and supernatural events through the use of appropriate imagery and language. The very title suggests that something is not right, it’s suggestive of eeriness. The use of the word dark connotes the paranormal, the supernatural, the weird.