

(A village. A few small cottages standing close by. They belong to Motiram, Sonabai, Hirabai and Rupabai. It's evening. They are chatting outside Motiram's house.)



Motiram : Your farm produce was really good this year, I'm told.

Sonabai : So was yours, I hear.

Motiram : I don't want to advertise it, though. It might attract guests.

(Traveller enters from a corner. The villagers don't see him.)

Hirabai : You are right. Guests can be a nuisance.

Sonabai : I agree. Especially uninvited guests.

Motiram : Uninvited guests are pests.

(Traveller becomes nervous. Doesn't come forward.)

Hirabai : True. I never waste good food and money on others.

Rupabai : Do you think that is right? How can we refuse them?

Hirabai : Just find some polite excuses. That's all.

Sonabai : You are right. I can always cook up some excuse.

Motiram : Me, too. For me, 'Charity begins at home' and stays at home. Anyway, I must attend to my work now. See you.

All neighbours : See you later.

(They enter their homes. Traveller comes forward.)

Traveller : What hard luck! I'm a poor, footsore traveller. And I'm so hungry! But this bunch of villagers looks tough. I don't think they'll offer me food or rest, but let me try.

(He knocks on Motiram's door. Motiram opens the door.)



Motiram : Yes? Who are you and what do you want?

Traveller : I am a traveller. I am very hungry and tired. Can I please have some food and a place to rest for the night?

Motiram : Dinner is over. There is nothing left. Try elsewhere.

(Shuts the door with a bang.)

Traveller : How rude! Hmm...! Let me try the next door.



(Knocks on Sonabai's door. She comes out.)

Good evening, kind lady. I am a traveller. Can I have some food and a corner to rest for tonight?

Sonabai : *(putting her hand behind her ear)* What did you say?

Traveller : *(aloud)* Can I have some food?

Sonabai : Wood? Why, there is plenty in the forest. Find a fallen tree and chop all the wood that you need.

Traveller : I said 'food'. I'm hungry.

Sonabai : You agree! Fine, then go and chop the wood! *(Goes back into the house.)*

Traveller : Well, well, that was a clever excuse. She pretended to be hard of hearing. Let me try elsewhere.

(Knocks on Hirabai's door.)

Anyone at home? Any food for a hungry traveller?



(Hirabai comes out.)

Good evening. Ma'm! I wonder if I could get something to eat and a place to rest for the night?

Hirabai : *(pretending not to understand his language)* Og yawa. On doof dna on tser rof enoyna ereh.

Traveller : I don't understand you.

Hirabai : *(shaking her hand)* Doog. I od ton tnaw uoy ot. Og erehwesle.

(Goes back inside leaving the traveller bewildered.)

Traveller : So that was her trick. Talking gibberish. I'm not defeated.

(Knocks on Rupabai's door. She comes out.)

Rupabai : Yes? Who are you, young man? I have not seen you around.

Traveller : I am a traveller and I wondered if I could get some food as well as a corner to rest for this night.

Rupabai : *(thinks)* Alas. My larder is empty. I am so hungry myself but I have nothing left in the house.

Traveller : I am sorry to hear that.

Rupabai : I'm sorry too. But I can't help it. Sorry! *(Turns to leave.)*

Traveller : *(aloud)* Wait, Madam. If you are also hungry, I can make us both some soup.

Rupabai : But I told you my larder's empty. I can't offer you anything.

Traveller : All I need is a cooking pot, a spoon and some water. I have a magic stone in my bag. When you boil it in water, it makes a delicious, nourishing soup.

Rupabai : Really? A magic stone? And all you need is a pot of water? I think I can manage that much.

Traveller : Yes. Just a pot of water. Only, a big one.

(Rupabai goes back to her cottage. Traveller collects wood and makes a fire in one corner. Other neighbours peep out from their door/windows and watch quietly but curiously. Rupabai comes out with a very big pot.)

Rupabai : Here's your pot of water.

Traveller : Thank you. Now just wait and watch.

(Puts the pot on the fire. Takes out a stone from his pocket and drops it in the pot.)



Rupabai : A magic stone that makes soup? I can hardly believe this. *(Sits down to watch.)*

Traveller : *(sniffing and pretending to enjoy the aroma)* Aah! Lovely! It's going to be really delicious. *(To Rupabai)* If only we had one or two potatoes to add! It tastes heavenly with potatoes. But alas! We don't have any.

Rupabai : Ummm, one or two, you said? Let me see if I have just one or two left somewhere. *(Brings a few peeled potatoes.)* Here! Luckily, I had just a few left. I've even peeled them for you.

Traveller : Wonderful!

(Puts the potatoes in the pot, stirs for some time and sinffs again.)

What with the potatoes you've given, the soup will now be terrific. *(Sniffs)* Carrots and tomatoes would give it a tempting colour, wouldn't they? But that would be too much to hope for ...

Rupabai : Um ... I don't know ...

(Sonabai comes out with some tomatoes.)

Sonabai : Hello, hello, maybe I can be of some help. I had reserved these tomatoes for tomorrow. But I'm always willing to help, you know. And I know that Hirabai has plenty of carrots, but I'm not sure if she'll share a few with us.

Hirabai : *(enters with a few carrots)* I don't have plenty. In fact, I, too, was reserving these for tomorrow. But never mind, if Sonabai can spare her tomatoes, I, too, can spare these. After all, you don't get to see a magic stone making a magic soup every day.



Traveller : *(bows to the women)* I'm really speechless, you noble ladies. This is going to be a famous soup. *(Adds the vegetables, stirs, and sniffs.)*

It reminds me of the soup I had made some time ago. I had added just a few beans, onions ... and I think a little piece of ginger, and what flavour it had! Those are the only little things missing now, but what we have is also good enough. You can't always have the best! *(Enter Motiram.)*

Motiram : Why not? If you can have the best, why miss the golden chance? Here. Take these. When help is needed, old Motiram doesn't lag behind.

(Offers vegetables.)

Traveller : *(bows)* How can I ever forget your generosity? *(Adds all the*



vegetables, stirs and sniffs.) ... Aha! ... Absolutely mouthwatering ... what flavour ... what aroma ... what taste ... *(takes a sip)* ... marvellous ... if only I could add a pinch of salt, it would be perfect!

Rupabai : I'll get some salt and bowls for all of us.

Traveller : Thank you. I was about to suggest that. *(Exit Rupabai.)* You are all being so kind and helpful. It's an unforgettable experience.

(Rupabai returns with the salt, pepper and bowls. Traveller adds the salt, stirs and serves the soup to everyone.)

Rupabai : Ah! Wonderful! You can taste the goodness of fresh vegetables!

Sonabai : Yes. Unbelievable. No one would think that this soup was made with a stone!

Motiram : You've said it. Such delicious vegetable soup and made with a stone!

Hirabai : I wonder what happens to the stone? Does it melt away?

Traveller : Oh, no! It remains the same. *(Takes out the stone from the pot.)* Take a look. This was the stone that made the soup. *(Aside, to the audience)* Have you guessed the secret of the stone soup? *(Smiles)* You can make it even without the stone!

(Curtain as everyone enjoys the soup.)

1. Answer the following questions :
 - (a) Where does the story take place?
 - (b) List the characters in the play and write one or two lines about each.
 - (c) How do the following avoid giving anything to the traveller?
 - Motiram • Sonabai • Hirabai • Rupabai
 (Answer in one or two lines each.)
 - (d) Find what Hirabai tells the traveller by reading her words from right to left.
 - (e) Apart from the stone, how many things go into the soup?
 - (f) Does the traveller really have a magic stone?
2. On any one page, note against the speech of every character, what feelings it should show to bring out the meaning best. For example, joy, fear, anger, nervousness, friendliness, dislike, surprise, wonder, excitement, politeness, rudeness, cunning, curiosity.
3. Read aloud / Enact the play.
4. Write a recipe for the stone soup.
5. Form pairs. Write at least one short dialogue for each of the following expressions.
 - (a) I agree. (b) True! (c) You are right.
 - (d) Why not? (To mean that something can be done.) (e) Thank you.

For example :

Amit : I think all schools should have big playgrounds.

Sumit : I agree!
6. Find the meaning of 'Charity begins at home'. Find other sayings which have a similar meaning.
7. List five questions from the play which can be answered with 'yes' or 'no'.
8. 'Smart Answers' : Form a large group. Each person asks the next one a question to get him to say 'yes' or 'no'. He/She can use appropriate statements, requests or even other questions as a response. But if he/she says 'yes' or 'no', he/she is out. Otherwise he/she continues the game. Questions cannot be repeated.
9. Visit a library : Find stories about hosts and guests. Share them with the class. Classify the stories into funny and serious stories.
