

An Inconsiderate Act

By Ms Natasha, Primary English Tutor

The last few stragglers of Class 6B **barreled** through the classroom door as **the last notes of the recess bell hung in the air, then died away**. It was a Wednesday, which meant that Mrs Shanmugam, the school's discipline mistress and 6B's Mathematics teacher, would be in the classroom **on the dot**, and anyone unfortunate enough to appear after her arrival would be **subject to a tongue-lashing** that would make them **rue** their **tardiness**.

Gordon slid into his seat, **winded** from his sprint. His seatmate, Cherie, chuckled under her breath. "Really, Gordon, The canteen's only a hundred metres away. You're terribly out of shape." Gordon's only response was a grunt as he **maniacally** searched through his bag for his things. He managed to flick his textbook onto the desk milliseconds before Mrs Shanmugam **sailed** through the doorway, the tail of her sari **aloft**. Chairs slid noiselessly backwards as students stood at attention and greeted her in chorus.

"Excellent. Take your seats; let's begin."

About fifteen minutes into the lesson, a loud shriek pierced the air. Emily, usually **self-possessed** and reserved, leapt onto her table in fright. Mrs Shanmugam eyed her from behind her **bifocals**. "Heavens, child. What's gotten into you?"

With a shaking finger Emily pointed at the floor. **Decorum having been abandoned**, students across the class stood up and craned their necks for a better view of the culprit – or, in this case, culprits. A pair of cockroaches had emerged from the overflowing waste basket and had paused an arm's length away from Emily's table. Feelers waving, they seemed to be **taking stock of** their surroundings. Perhaps satisfied that a class of twelve-year-olds would produce a considerable amount of **mayhem**, they fled across the floor towards the students.

SHOW, NOT TELL

Habits:

Mrs Shanmugam is always punctual, and speaks in formal English -- this shows she is strict

Clothing:

Pick items that say something about your character: a sari might suggest someone traditional, wearing bifocals suggests someone old

PERSONIFICATION

The cockroaches are given human personalities, like judging their surroundings.

barreled: moved so quickly it was almost out of control

subject to: under the power of

rue: regret

tardiness: lateness

winded: struggling to breathe

maniacally: wildly

sailed: moved smoothly

aloft: in the air

self-possessed: calm and confident

bifocals: glasses with special lens

decorum: proper behaviour

taking stock of: assessing (a situation)

mayhem: chaos

SIGHT AND SOUND

Heighten a situation by alternating the sights and the sounds, such as the mayhem of the classroom, and the discovery of the culprit.

IDIOMATIC LANGUAGE

Use idioms when appropriate, in this case “knights in shining armor” and “leave no stone unturned”.

Pandemonium **ensued**. Girls hopped onto any piece of furniture that would bear their weight, while their male counterparts were all too eager to play the knights in shining armour, dashing around the class with cries of, “Don't worry! We'll get them!” and **the like**. Above the noise, Mrs Shanmugam tried in vain to restore order, even uncharacteristically raising her voice. The uproar continued until both the cockroaches met their **demises**, one under the shoe of Terry, the class monitor, and the other by the **blunt force** of the class dustpan **wielded** by Rahim, the class clown.

As everyone heaved a **collective** sigh of relief and resumed their pre-cockroach positions, it seemed that the ordeal was over. But the discipline mistress never left any stone unturned. She strode over to the waste basket and began sifting through the trash until her fingers finally came upon a used food wrapper. Pinching it **gingerly**, she lifted it into the air for the class to see.

“Ladies and gentlemen, there is a reason why we have rules. There is a reason why food is not allowed to be disposed of in the classroom bins. Someone among you seems to have forgotten this. Who is it?”

There were soft murmurs as everyone scanned one another's faces, searching for signs of guilt. The creeping flush of red across his face gave the offending student away. “Oh, Gordon!” Cherie cried.

“Never mind that,” Mrs Shanmugam interrupted, clearly out of patience. “Throw this wrapper away—properly this time – and see me after class today.”

Shamefacedly, Gordon scuttled out of the class holding the wrapper. Upon his return, he apologized to the class for his inconsiderate act. He had certainly learnt a lesson that day, and it was reinforced by staying back after school to clean the canteen. Those last-minute chicken nuggets did not seem worth it after all!

ensued: occurred

the like: similar things

demises: deaths

blunt: straightforward

wielded: held and used

collective: done as a group

gingerly: carefully