

The Thief's Story

Answers to NCERT Questions

READ AND FIND OUT

1. Who does 'I' refer to in this story?

Ans: In this story, 'I' refers to the thief.

2. What is he "a fairly successful hand" at?

Ans: He was "a fairly successful hand" at stealing and robbing people.

3. What does he get from Anil in return for his work?

Ans: When Hari asked Anil if he could work for him, Anil said that he could not pay him. Finally, the agreement was that if he would cook, then Anil would feed him. However, Anil soon found out that he did not know how to cook. Therefore, he taught him how to cook and later, how to write his name. He promised he would teach him how to write whole sentences and how to add numbers. Apart from this, when Hari went out to buy the day's supplies, he would make a profit of a rupee in a day.

4. How does the thief think Anil will react to the theft?

Ans: The thief thought that on discovering the theft, Anil's face would show a touch of sadness. The sadness would not be for the loss of money, but for the loss of trust.

5. What does he say about the different reactions of people when they are robbed?

Ans: In his short career as a thief, he had made a study of men's faces when they lost their goods. He said that the greedy men showed fear; the rich men showed anger and the poor men showed acceptance.

6. Does Anil realise that he has been robbed?

Ans: Yes, Anil had realised that he had been robbed. He knew this probably because all the notes were wet and damp from the rain. However, he did not say anything to the thief and behaved normally.

THINK ABOUT IT

1. What are Hari Singh's reactions to the prospect of receiving an education? Do they change over time? (Hint: Compare, for example, the thought: "I knew that once I could write like an educated man there would be no limit to what I could achieve" with these later thoughts: "Whole sentences, I knew, could one day

bring me more than a few hundred rupees. It was a simple matter to steal — and sometimes just as simple to be caught. But to be a really big man, a clever and respected man, was something else.”) What makes his return to Anil?

Ans: Hari Singh comes to Anil’s house as a servant. Anil offers to educate him. He is overjoyed, but his reactions to the prospect of receiving an education undergo a change with the passage of time. In the beginning, he thinks that if he wrote like an educated man he could achieve limitless success (or money). Later, there are some changes in this perception. He feels that if he wrote whole sentences, they could bring him more than a few hundred rupees. Then money loses attraction for him with reference to education. What he wants from education is to become a big, clever and respected man. This makes him return to Anil because only Anil could teach him as he wants.

2. Why does not Anil hand the thief over to the police? Do you think most people would have done so? In what ways is Anil different from such employers?

Ans: The next morning, Anil does not find the money missing. But he might have noticed that the notes were damp. It would have been clear to him that Hari Singh had tried to steal the money. But he does not show any emotion. Hari Singh studies his face. There is no sign of his having detected the theft. However, it is possible that he detected the truth. But he does not hand over Hari Singh to the police. He is a large-hearted person. Perhaps, Hari Singh’s coming back changed his mind. But most people do not behave like Anil. In Anil’s position, they could have handed over such persons to the police after beating them by themselves. Anil is different because he decides to reform the thief through kindness and sympathy.

TALK ABOUT IT

1. Do you think people like Anil and Hari Singh are found only in fiction, or are there such people in real life?

Ans: It is true that people are becoming materialistic and hard-hearted. But it is also true that people like Anil and Hari Singh are still found in real life also. But their number is very small.

2. Do you think it a significant detail in the story that Anil is a struggling writer? Does this explain his behaviour in any way?

Ans: It is a significant detail in the story that Anil is a struggling writer. He leads a hand to mouth existence. He earns money by fits and starts. So, he knows what it means to be without money. He can understand Hari Singh’s position. That is why, he takes him as a servant although he has no money to pay him a salary. He has a large heart. So although he may have detected the theft of his money, he does not report to the police.

3. Have you met anyone like Hari Singh? (You think and imagine the circumstances that can turn a fifteen-year-old boy into a thief?)

Ans: Yes, I have met a boy like Hari Singh. He used to commit petty crimes. I studied his life and came to the conclusion that the circumstances to make one a thief is poverty. It is the biggest factor. One is prepared to do anything to extinguish the fire burning in his belly. This can turn a young boy into a thief.

4. Where is the story set? (You can get clues from the names of the persons and places mentioned in it.) Which language or languages are spoken in these places? Do you think the characters in the story spoke to each other in English?

Ans: It appears that the story is set in Delhi. A number of clues point to this fact. These are: 'The Jumna Sweet Shop', 'railway station', 'The Lucknow Express was just moving out'. Hindi, English and other Indian languages are spoken in it. I do not think the characters in the story spoke to each other in English. However, they might have used some English words like 'time', 'train', 'clock tower', etc.

Additional Questions

Short Answer Questions (30-40 words)

1. Why did Hari Singh not make many friends?

Ans: Hari Singh did not have many friends as he believed that friends were more trouble than help. Moreover, he did not want to make anyone curious.

2. Why did Hari Singh decide to come back to Anil?

Ans: Hari Singh decided to come back to Anil because he felt that when Anil would come to know about the theft, he would feel sad, not for the loss of money but for the loss of trust. He did not want to lose his trust.

3. Why did Hari Singh choose Anil to be his next victim?

Ans: Hari Singh was an experienced thief. He found Anil, an easy-going, kind and simple man, the correct person for his purpose. He found him an easy target to win confidence.

4. Why did Hari Singh not go to his friend's house or a hotel just after he missed the train?

Ans: Hari Singh did not have any friend and he did not want to make anyone curious about staying at one of the small hotels near the station.

5. Why was it difficult for Hari Singh to rob Anil?

Ans: It was difficult for Hari Singh to rob Anil because he was the most trusting person Hari Singh had ever met. According to Hari Singh, it's easy to rob a greedy man because he can afford to be robbed, but it's difficult to rob a careless man because he

doesn't even notice that he's been robbed and that takes all the pleasure out of the work.

6. Why did Hari Singh tell a lie about cooking?

Ans: Hari Singh said that he could cook but when he cooked the meal at night, it was so terrible that Anil gave it to a stray dog and told him to be off. But then Anil patted him and said that he would teach him to cook.

7. Why was the thief able to steal from Anil easily?

Ans: Anil was a person who trusted Hari Singh easily. Also, he seemed to be a slightly careless person. Thus, his gullibility and trusting nature made it easy for Hari to rob him.

8. Why did Hari Singh tell a lie about cooking?

Ans: Hari Singh knew that Anil would hire him only if he could cook. However, Hari did not know how to cook. Still, as he wanted to somehow rob Anil, he told the lie to gain entry into Anil's house.

9. Why did Hari Singh feel bad after stealing the money?

Ans: Anil had trusted Hari Singh completely and also taught him how to cook. Anil also started teaching him how to read and write. Thus, when Hari stole money from Anil, his conscience pricked him as he had broken Anil's trust.

10. What are the different reactions of the people when they are robbed?

Ans: According to Hari Singh, different people reacted differently upon being robbed. The greedy man displays fear, the rich man shows anger, and the poor man shows acceptance. However, a trusting man like Anil would be sad due to the loss of trust.

11. Why did Anil decide to pay Hari Singh regularly?

Ans: Anil handed Hari Singh, a fifty-rupee note as payment for his services. He went on to that since he had started making money, he would pay Hari regularly. However, I knew about Hari and did not want him to be tempted again for the want of money.

12. Describe Hari Singh, the young and successful thief.

Ans: Hari Singh was a fifteen-year-old boy who had already gained much expertise in the field of thievery. He knew how to find prospective victims, and used his intelligence to get close to them. Even when he was being taught how to read and write, his first thought was how he could use it to his benefit while thieving.

13. Why did Anil hire Hari Singh?

Ans: Anil hired Hari Singh because Hari Singh himself expressed his desire to work for him. When Anil told him that he could not pay him, Hari Singh asked him if he could feed him. Anil replied that if he knew how to cook, then he may work for him.

14. How did Hari Singh realise that Anil knew about his theft?

Ans: Anil gave him a fifty-rupee note in the morning, which was still damp from the night's rain. Anil told him that he would start teaching him, how to write full sentences and smiled at him. This made Hari Singh realise that Anil knew everything.

15. What was Anil's job? What did he usually do with the money he earned?

Ans: Anil was a writer. He wrote articles for magazines. He had no regular source of income. He earned by fits and starts. When he earned some money, he would go out to celebrate.

16. What does the thief say about the reactions of different types of people when they were robbed?

Ans: Hari Singh had found that a greedy man's face showed panic. The rich man showed anger and the poor man showed a sense of resignation.

17. How did he think Anil would react when he discovered the theft? Why did he think so?

Ans: Hari Singh thought that when Anil would come to know of the theft, his face would show a touch of sadness. It would not be for the loss of money but for the loss of trust.

18. What made him come back to Anil?

Ans: Anil had been teaching Hari Singh to read and write. He thought that without education, he would remain only a thief. But with education, he would become a big, clever and respected man. This made him come back to Anil.

19. What did Anil give him in the morning? In what condition was it?

Ans: Anil gave him a fifty-rupee note in the morning. It was still wet from the night's rain.

20. How did the thief realise that Anil knew that it had been stolen?

Ans: Anil gave a fifty-rupee note to the thief. It was still wet from the night's rain. So, the thief realised that Anil knew that it had been stolen.

21. How did the thief know that Anil had forgiven him?

Ans: Anil did not express in any way that he knew about the stealing. Moreover, he promised to pay him regularly. He also promised to continue with his teaching him sentences.

22. Why did the thief smile without any effort towards the end of the story?

Ans: The thief was under tension that his master would be angry with him for stealing the money. But Anil did not express any anger. He said that he would pay him regularly and would remain to continue teaching him full sentences. This made him tension free and he smiled without any effort.

23. Why, according to Hari, is it difficult to rob a careless man?

Ans: Hari thinks that it is difficult to rob a careless man because sometimes he does not even notice that he has been robbed. This takes out the joy of robbing him.

24. Why did Hari Singh think of doing some real work?

Ans: By 'real work', Hari Singh means stealing. He wants to steal Anil's money because he has not stolen anything for a long time. Secondly, Anil is a careless man. If Hari Singh did not steal his money, he would waste it on useless things.

25. What made him think that he could live like an oil-rich Arab for some time?

Ans: Hari Singh was a poor boy. He stole Anil's bundle of notes. It was a sum of 600 rupees. Hari Singh thought that he could live in luxury like an oil-rich Arab for some time on this stolen money.

26. Why should he find friends to be more trouble than help?

Ans: Hari Singh was a very poor boy. Those whom he knew were also poor like him. So he thought that friends would be troublesome.

27. Why did he feel nervous about going back to Anil's room?

Ans: Hari Singh decided to go back to Anil and keep the stolen money back under the mattress. But he felt nervous about going there. He thought that it was much easier to steal something than to return it undetected.

28. How was Hari Singh's 'appealing smile' at the end different from similar smiles of his on earlier occasions?

Ans: On earlier occasions, Hari Singh's 'appealing smile' had been artificial. It was full of flattery. But in the end, his smile was real. It was natural and appealing.

29. Who is 'I' in this story? Why did he change his name every month?

Ans: In this story, 'I' is a boy, thief of 15 years. He often changed his name every month to avoid being caught by the police and his former employers. This time, he tells that his name is Hari Singh.

30. Why was the thief grateful to Anil?

Ans: The thief was grateful to Anil because he gave him a job. Secondly, he promised to teach him to read and write.

31. Why did he want to become an educated man?

Ans: He was an uneducated person. He made his living by stealing and cheating others. He thought if he were educated, then there would be no limit to what he would achieve.

Long Answer Questions (100-150 words)

1. Anil plays a major role in the transformation of Hari Singh. Comment on the statement by highlighting the values possessed by Anil which touched Hari's heart and made him return to his honest ways of earning his livelihood.

Ans: Anil was a struggling writer who befriended Hari Singh. Hari Singh was an experienced, 15-year-old thief. He found Anil an easy target to steal. Anil offered him to stay with him and to teach how to read and write. Gradually, Anil develops trust in Hari Singh. But Hari Singh was waiting for the right opportunity to do what he was best at. After stealing money, he tried to go away forever but some inner voice stopped him from doing so. He returned to Anil because he wanted to live a life of respect. Anil did not show that he knew the incident and accepted Hari with open hands. Thus, a well-intentioned person, Anil changed Hari Singh and brought him on the right path. The story shows that trust and spirit to forgive someone can bring big changes in someone's life.

2. Hari Singh didn't confess that he robbed Anil. Did he lack the courage to do so or he really wanted to maintain his relationship with Anil at any cost? Explain.

Ans: Hari Singh was a teenager of 15. He was good at stealing. He chose Anil to be his next target as he was a struggling author and a simple person. Hari Singh started living with Anil who in turn, started teaching him how to read and write. Hari Singh, one day got the opportunity to steal Anil's money. He left out with the money to go away forever but his inner voice stopped him. He returned back and kept the money in place. Next morning, he started with his routine work and didn't tell anything about the incident to Anil. He was a teenager and lacked the courage to face Anil with his truth. He did not want to lose Anil's trust. He wanted to maintain the relationship with Anil, wanted to get an education and become a respected man. So, he hid the incident from Anil.

3. Hari Singh believed that it was difficult to rob a man like Anil. Do you think that he really appreciated kind people? Why do you think he found it difficult to cheat a man like Anil? Discuss.

Ans: Hari did appreciate kind people as is evident from the story. In the descriptions that he gives about various people, Anil stands apart. Perhaps, it was the first time that anyone had done so much for Hari. Later, as he was running away after robbing Anil, his conscience kept pricking him. He was unable to betray the trust of the kind Anil. It was perhaps also because Hari was not a hardened criminal. He had probably become a thief due to circumstance, not by choice. His innate goodness and natural capacity to distinguish right from wrong stopped him from doing further wrong. These values help others too.

4. "You look a bit of a wrestler yourself." I said. A little flattery helps in making friends. Hari Singh believed that a little flattery can help in making friends. Did he

lack love and empathy? Was his attitude towards friendship acceptable or not? Explain.

Ans: Hari Singh was an experienced thief. He knew how to win others' trust. He saw Anil who was watching a wrestling match, he was a slim, lean man of 25. He found him an easy target to rob. He started talking to him by saying that he looked like a wrestler. Then he told Anil that he wanted to work for him. When Anil told him that he could not pay him, so he, in order to win his confidence asked Anil if he could feed him. This kind of attitude is not acceptable to win over true friends. True friends show love, empathy and true care for their friends.

5. Write a character sketch of the thief boy.

Ans: The thief was a fifteen-year-old boy. But in this story, he has been presented as a well experienced and skillful thief. He had a great knowledge of human behaviour. He knew that simple looking persons could be robbed easily. He had an understanding that a little flattery could help in making friends with them. He was clever enough to change his name to keep himself away from the police and his former employers. He was perfect in telling lies. He had a desire to become a big man in life. He robbed Anil of his six-hundred rupees. But in one corner of his heart, there was a sense of trust and goodness. He thought that he should not betray Anil. He had the ambition of becoming a big man and he knew that he could realise his ambition only when he is educated. Thus, he was an interesting character.

6. Draw a character sketch of Anil.

Ans: Anil was a young man of twenty-five years. He was a tall and lean fellow. He looked easy-going and kind. A small boy met him. The boy wanted to rob him. He found him fit for his purpose. The boy told him that he wanted to do a job for him. He said that he could cook food. Anil gave him a job. The food cooked by the boy was very terrible. He told the boy to run away, but later he taught him to cook the food and to learn reading and writing. Anil earned money by fits and starts. He wrote articles for magazines. One day, he earned 600 rupees. In the night, the thief boy stole the money and ran out in the rain. Later, his heart changed and he decided to put the money back under the mattress. Anil discovered all this. But he was so large-hearted that he said nothing to the boy. Instead, he promised to pay him regularly.

7. How did Hari Singh rob Anil of his six-hundred rupees? What stopped him to rush away?

Ans: The thief boy met Anil. He found him an easy-going person. In his mind, he decided to rob him. He said that he would cook food for him. He told Anil that his name was Hari Singh. Anil engaged him on work. He taught him to cook the food and to read and write. Anil had no regular income. One day, he brought a small bundle of 600 rupees. He put the bundle under his mattress. When he was fast asleep, the boy drew out the bundle under the mattress and ran to the station to catch the Lucknow Mail at

10:30 p.m. The train had just steamed off. But something stopped his feet to jump into the train compartment. It was Anil's goodness and carelessness. He realised his folly and decided to go back to Anil. So he went back and placed the money under the mattress.

8. Why did Hari Singh decide to return the stolen money? What light does it throw on his character?

Ans: After stealing the money, when Hari Singh reached the station, he could not board the Lucknow Express, though he could easily get on it. He stood alone on the deserted platform and thought about Anil who he knew would feel only sad for the loss of trust, when he would discover the theft. He felt that he should go back to Anil only to read and write. So, he decided to return to Anil, feeling very nervous. The thief was very grateful to Anil and quite liked working for him. Since Anil was the most trusting man he had met, Anil's confidence had awakened his conscience. He wanted to become a good man. Anil could only make him a good man. So he decided to come back to Anil and return the money that he had stolen.

9. 'The Thief's Story' is an in-depth study of the human mind. Discuss.

Ans: The human mind is a very complex thing. It is a mixture of opposite opinions. Sometimes, a man fails to understand his own mind. In this story, the same thing has been presented by Ruskin Bond through the character of a thief boy named Hari Singh. The boy starts working for Anil. His primary aim was to rob him. Anil's carelessness wins his heart. But the boy's bad mind provokes him to rob Anil of his money. One day, he robs his six-hundred rupees and runs away to the station. But his good mind stops him boarding the train. He decides to come back to Anil and return his money. So this story is an in-depth study of the human mind.

Self-Assessment Test

Short Answer Questions

1. Why did Hari Singh smile in his most appealing way?
2. What did Hari Singh find strange about the way Anil made his living?
3. What kind of life was Hari Singh leading with Anil?
4. Why did Hari Singh's heart sink when Anil met him in the morning?
5. Where did Anil meet Hari Singh? What did they talk about?

Long Answer Questions

1. What made the narrator steal Anil's six-hundred rupees? What stopped him to rush away?
2. Who was Anil? How did he treat Hari Singh and how did it influence Hari's life?
3. The story, 'The Thief's Story' is the study of human mind. Comment.