

Introduction

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- the story that you can listen to in the podcast;
- a comprehension activity based on the story.

Read the story

Rice Bowl Wishes

by Bernadette and Dr. Donald

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An old lady by the name of Nii Yoo had adopted three eleven-year-old boys from an orphanage. Their names were Lan Dua, Swa Jow, and Gow Sir. Lady Nii Yoo dressed Lan Dua and Swa Jow in fine clothes, and she sent them to school to get a proper education. Gow Sir, who was blind, was treated like a servant. He was dressed in old, ragged clothes and fed left-over food. He was required to attend to the old lady's needs, and he was deprived of schooling.

One night, while everyone was asleep, a fire broke out in the rice storage room that soon spread to the main house. Gow Sir yelled, warning everyone, the moment he sensed the heat from the fire. Lan Dua and Swa Jow, awakened by the call, got up and rushed out of the house. Gow Sir knew Lady Nii Yoo had difficulty moving about on her own; he hurried to help her. By the time he reached her, the fire was circling around them.

"Quickly, Lady Nii Yoo! Let your eyes be my guide." With Gow Sir carrying Lady Nii Yoo piggyback and Lady Nii Yoo giving directions, they were soon out of danger.

"You risked your life to save mine. You are a brave and unselfish boy, Gow Sir. I have finally found a worthy recipient for the rice bowl; I can rest in peace now," the old lady said. Then she handed a rice bowl to Gow Sir. "The rice bowl is capable of granting wishes. You may make one wish every year; two, every other year; or, three, every three years. Should the rice bowl be broken, all that it has granted will be lost. Take care of it. Wish wisely," the old lady advised, then she took her last breath and shut her eyes forever.

Lan Dua and Swa Jow left Gow Sir to bury the old lady by himself. Before he buried her, Gow Sir said, sadly, "Oh, how I wish I could see, then I would have a memory of her."

No sooner had he finished wishing, when Gow Sir's wish came true. His eyes opened and he could see. He was overjoyed. He enrolled himself in school, got a job at a local store to earn his keep, and started to rebuild the house.

"The intense heat and fumes from the fire must have opened his eyes," the people in the village speculated.

Lan Dua and Swa Jow, on the other hand, did not accept such an explanation. They went to ask Gow Sir. When Gow Sir told them about the rice bowl, they insisted that Gow Sir share the rice bowl with them. Gow Sir gladly agreed, and he gave them the same advice the old lady had given him. "What are your wishes?" Gow Sir asked

"A house . . . with plenty of food to eat . . . at all times," Lan Dua answered.

"And it would be nice if we could get high grades in school without having to do any studying," Swa Jow added.

Just as they had wished, there a house stood . . . right across from the old lady's that had just burned down. In it was plenty of food to be found in the storage room, kitchen, and on the dining table. Lan Dua and Swa Jow each picked up a pear to eat. Instantly two more pears appeared to replace the ones they had eaten. They, then, found themselves able to solve complicated multiplication and division problems, without

taking a lesson. "This is just what we want. We don't ever have to go to school, or work, or be hungry . . . ever!" And, that was exactly what Lan Dua and Swa Jow did. They were happy to be sitting around, eating, playing, and resting their lazy bodies . . . day after day.

Gow Sir was also happy, for he was doing what he loved most-- learning. He read and studied all he could. Three years flashed by; it was time for the boys (now fourteen years old) to each make his second wish. "What do you wish for?" Gow Sir asked.

"A house of my own, by the river, with a chest-full of gold," Lan Dua answered. This, the rice bowl granted.

"I wish also for a house of my own, only larger than Lan Dua's. Instead of by the river, it shall be on top of the hill. And . . . two chests full of gold," Swa Jow expressed his wish. This, the rice bowl granted. "I would like to have a library full of books. Many books, enough to keep me busy for the next three years," said Gow Sir, smiling. This, the rice bowl granted.

Lan Dua and Swa Jow laughed. "Books? You cannot eat them or buy fancy things with them. Books are but volumes of dull words," they remarked.

Gow Sir went on to spend the next three years reading, while still attending school and working at the local store. Lan Dua and Swa Jow went off to live in their own houses with chests full of gold. There they spent the next three years playing, eating, and resting their lazy bodies. It was, then, time for the boys (now seventeen years old) to make their third wishes. Lan Dua and Swa Jow promptly arrived at Gow Sir's door to claim theirs.

Lan Dua greedily requested, "I want a mansion to replace the house I have. The following must come with it: one room full of gold; a beautiful and well-behaved wife who will bear me many healthy and strong sons; and a title for me. I wish to be the most successful and the smartest governor this village has ever known."

Immediately after, Swa Jow greedily requested, "I also will have myself a mansion to replace my old house. The following must come with it: two rooms full of gold; a wife more beautiful and better-behaved than Lan Dua's; she shall bear

me many healthy and strong sons; and status for me. I wish to be the most successful and the smartest merchant this village has ever known."

"And for you, Gow Sir?" Lan Dua and Swa Jow wondered.

"I would like to have more books to replace the ones I have already read and studied," Gow Sir answered without hesitation.

Lan Dua and Swa Jow laughed, shook their heads, and said, "Will you ever learn to be smart?"

The rice bowl granted all three wishes. Lan Dua and Swa Jow were pleased with their new life arrangements. As for Gow Sir, he continued to read, study, and work as hard as he had done before. On his twentieth birthday, he acquired a job as a teacher. He also married the daughter of a store-owner. It was time for the boys (or, rather, young men) to make their fourth wishes. By this time, Lan Dua and Swa Jow each had two sons.

"Wish wisely," advised Gow Sir.

"I WISH to KEEP the rice bowl to MYSELF. It shall grant wishes ONLY to me!" Lan Dua hurried to reply.

"No! It shall grant wishes ONLY TO ME!" Swa Jow shouted, then he quickly reached out and grabbed the rice bowl.

"I WISHED for it FIRST!" Lan Dua argued, struggling with Swa Jow, fighting for the rice bowl.

K-L-I-N-K! The rice bowl fell to the floor where it shattered into many pieces.

"What have you done?" Gow Sir yelled, then he cried out, "I cannot see! I cannot see!" The rice bowl had taken Gow Sir's eyesight away, as quickly as it had granted it to him . . . nine years ago. All the books vanished as well.

Lan Dua and Swa Jow rushed off to check on their own possessions. When they reached the lots where their mansions should have been, they found only miles and miles of weeds and wild flowers. Their devoted and beautiful wives and children were also no where to be seen. There was not one piece of gold left anywhere, either.

The real nightmare came when Lan Dua and Swa Jow discovered that they had lost their positions. Instead of the well-known and successful governor and merchant, they were nobody. In fact, they were no longer able to read or write, or do simple arithmetic.

When Lan Dua and Swa Jow heard that Gow Sir had managed to keep his teaching job, they went to see him. "How is it that you have lost your eyesight and all the books, but you are still able to read and write," questioned Lan Dua.

"And you haven't lost your wife," Swa Jow puzzled.

"My eyesight was granted by the rice bowl, thus it was its to claim. However, what I have seen with my eyes it can never deprive me of. The books were given to me by the rice bowl, so they were

its to take away. But, what I have read and learned is mine to keep. The knowledge I have acquired, the rice bowl has no power to claim. The same goes for my wife. I did not ask the rice bowl for her. She is every bit as real as you and I."

Lan Dua and Swa Jow learned of their stupidity and selfishness; they were very sorry and ashamed. They became the oldest students in the school, but they were the most dedicated. They had learned that life was what they CHOSE to make of it. They no longer wished to waste another precious moment.

Master Gow Sir was recognized as one of the wisest and the most caring teachers ever to teach in China. There on his desk always sat an ordinary rice bowl, which obviously had been glued back together from many broken pieces.

After reading

Exercise 1

Below are 14 statements about the text. For each one, decide if it is True or False.

1. The three boys were Nii Yoo's natural children.
2. Nii Yoo treated Gow Sir differently from the other two boys.
3. Gow Sir was braver than the other two boys.
4. Nii Yoo rewarded Gow Sir for his bravery.
5. The heat and smoke from the fire restored Gow Sir's eyesight.
6. All three of the boys were lazy.
7. Gow Sir was not as selfish as the other two boys.
8. Gow Sir liked studying.
9. Lan Dua and Swa Jow liked studying.
10. Lan Dua and Swa Jow were greedy.
11. Lan Dua and Swa Jow fought for the rice bowl.
12. The loss of their possessions was even worse than the loss of their positions for Lan Dua and Swa Jow.
13. Gow Sir had not wished for his knowledge or wife.
14. Lan Dua and Swa Jow learned a valuable lesson from breaking the rice bowl.

Answers

Exercise 1: 1. False (F); 2. True (T); 3. T; 4. T; 5. F; 6. F; 7. T; 8. T; 9. F; 10. T; 11. T; 12. F; 13. T; 14. T