

Essay on The Competition

A few years back when I was a student of standard 5 Green, our school organized a competition that involved all students. Actually, it was a competition to see which class could collect the greatest number of nails, broken bits of glass and other hazardous things in the school. As it was, our school compound and field were not exactly clean and the headmaster reckoned that the best way to clean the school was to make us do it. Prizes were offered for the best three classes.

We were given two weeks to collect as much rubbish as possible. 'Rubbish' here did not include any perishable things like dry leaves and dead frogs. Only solid non-perishable dangerous objects counted.

So, we set about diligently going around the school at every opportunity we got looking for rubbish. Suddenly rusty nails and bottle caps became valuable commodities. We combed the school field virtually lifting up every blade of grass to see if there was anything beneath. We looked under rocks, inside dustbins, behind the classrooms, underdrain covers, beneath the flower pots, inside our desks, and in every imaginable place.

For the whole of the stipulated two weeks, the school was a hive of activity. Every student was busy collecting and adding to the total amount for his or her class. Never before had I seen school children more involved. The spirit of the competition was high. Everybody was keen and excited. Such an atmosphere of high-spiritedness could only be found in a primary school.

Gradually the plastic bag we kept for our class grew in size until we had to get another bag. The amount of junk we collected was unbelievable. I could not imagine that the school contained so many useless objects, and still, the rubbish was coming in. What surprised

me, even more, was that some classes had collected more junk than us! It was quite incredible.

When the two weeks were nearly up we had three plastic bags full of assorted rubbish. However, I knew that our measly three bags were not going to win any prize. Compared to some classes which had ten bags or so, we were nothing! I wondered how they managed to collect so much junk. I suspected that they might have cheated and brought the junk from outside the school. What could I do to prove what I suspected? Nothing, I knew there was nothing I could do. Rusty nails and bits of glass from the school or from outside were all the same. I could not prove anything.

Finally, the appointed day arrived and we submitted our entry. The winners were decided by the total weight of the junk they collected. As I expected, we were not even placed among the top ten.

At a special assembly, the winners were given their prizes amidst a mixture of claps and boos. It was an open secret that some classes created. Nevertheless, the headmaster gave away the prizes and gave a speech thanking us for our efforts. For one thing, the school now looked immeasurably cleaner. Our labor had not been totally worthless. At the least, we had erased the dangers of stepping onto rusty nails and jagged bits of glass.

After the assembly, we marched back to class accompanied by Miss Gunaswari, our class teacher. We took out our history books and prepared for the lesson. Surprise, surprise instead of dishing out some historical facts, Miss Gunaswari dished out a whole lot of biscuits, sweets and other tidbits! We asked her what the treat was for. She smiled and said that this was her prize for the most honest class of the school!

Our teacher, bless her, knew about the cheating. Like us, she was helpless to do anything. Instead, she showed her appreciation for our honesty in the best way that she could think of. Ah well, honesty is still the best policy, provided you have teachers like Miss Gunaswari.