

# From the Formalin Jar

Dr. Reeta S. Mani



## A. Lead-in :

Do you know that road accidents are very common in India nowadays? You will be shocked to know that 152,000 people died in India, including 5315 in Odisha in 2018 as a result of road accidents. The number of those who get injured or disabled is nearly three to four times higher than the number of deaths. Increasing incidences of traffic violation and lack of awareness about safety rules have turned out to be the major factors of such deaths. The WHO (World Health Organisation) has identified five major risk factors of road injuries such as speed, alcohol, seat belt, helmet and visibility. We can also add distracted driving such as using cell phones or listening to music while driving, besides tiredness and unsafe roads as the major reasons for death.

Let's read an interesting poem 'From the Formalin Jar' to know about road safety.

## B. Let's listen to the poem :

- Listen to your teacher as s/he reads the poem aloud with proper rhythm. Don't open your books while listening.
- Your teacher will read it aloud for the second time. You listen to him/her. Then read the poem silently and answer the questions that follow.

## C. The Text :

Hi ! I am Vicky's brilliant brain  
Sitting in a formalin jar with disdain;  
On display to promote knowledge gain  
Watching people stare at me again and again.

How insulting to be called a 'specimen'  
Two years ago I was part of a living human;  
I got no stroke, tumour or bugs within  
Yet ended up in this jar, to my chagrin.

Vicky was a young boy, smart and sane  
Full of life and vigour, sun, wind or rain;  
Computers and maths were his domain  
His motto in life was 'No pain, No gain'.

Vicky's love for his parents was truly insane  
And he adored his gran'ma, wrinkles and cane;  
In college, when he stole a glance at Lorraine  
Why his heart went thud-thud, only I could explain!

On a wet monsoon day, for a task mundane  
Vicky rode his bike to his friend in the next lane;  
For once, from wearing his helmet he did refrain  
God! He met with an accident gory and inhumane.

All it took was a stray moment inane  
A young life lost, a family crushed with pain;  
Dear friends, take care; risky driving can be bane  
DRIVE SAFE- let your precious life not be in vain!

#### **D. About the Poet :**

Dr. Reeta S. Mani is a doctor by profession and a writer by passion. She is a Neurovirologist at the National Institute of Mental Health and

Neurosciences (NIMHANS), Bengaluru. Dr. Reeta has published (online and in print) several short stories, poems, essays and travelogues, including several short stories for children. She loves to weave health information into her stories to educate and foster inquisitiveness in children.

#### **E. About the Poem :**

This poem (*From the Formalin Jar*) was written in September 2013 to create awareness about 'Safe Driving' and other road safety rules in the community and published online at *youthspring.net*, a forum for nurturing youth well-being. Road traffic injuries are the leading causes of death and disabilities, especially among children and young adults. This heart-breaking poem conveys how a moment of simple carelessness cost a young, lively and caring boy his precious life.

NIMHANS has a unique Human Brain Museum where many brain specimens affected by various disease conditions (like infection, tumor, stroke, injury and neurological disorders, etc.) are preserved in formalin and displayed in see-through jars. One of the brain specimens is from an unfortunate accident victim who succumbed to head-injuries. Perhaps, he would not have lost his life had he worn a helmet while driving his two-wheeler. 'Vicky' is a fictional character created by the poet for this poem, as she tenderly reflects on the individual behind the 'brain specimen' in the formalin jar, whose life was tragically cut-short in a road accident.

The poem teaches a lesson that age, fame, beauty, strength or wisdom becomes meaningless unless a person is careful about his safety.

#### **E. Notes and Glossary**

formalin : a simple chemical compound made of hydrogen, oxygen and carbon

disdain	: the feeling that someone, or something is unworthy of respect
stare	: to look at somebody, or something for a long time
specimen	: sample
stroke	: sometimes called a 'brain attack', it occurs when blood supply to an area in the brain is cut off.
tumour	: a mass of cells growing in or on a part of the body, usually causing medical problems
bug	: an infectious illness that is usually fairly mild
chagrin	: a feeling of unhappiness, disappointment or annoyance
smart	: looking clean and neat, well dressed in new and attractive
sane	: having a normal healthy mind/sound health (not mentally ill)
vigour	: energy/force/enthusiasm
domain	: an area of knowledge, or activity
motto	: aims and beliefs of a person
No pain, No gain	: It is necessary to work hard or suffer in order to gain success in life
insane	: (here) excessive
adored	: loved very much
wrinkles	: lines on the skin due to old age etc.
cane	: stick (walking stick)
mundane	: ordinary, not intensive or exciting, not important
refrain	: to stop yourself from doing something
gory	: involving a lot of blood/bloodshed
inhumane	: cruel, unkind
stray	: separated from others
inane	: stupid or silly
crushed	: suffered
bane	: cause of misery, opposite of boon, curse
in vain	: useless, or unsuccessful

#### **F. Let's understand the Poem :**

1. What is this poem about?
2. Where is Vicky's brilliant brain?
3. Why is the brain put inside the formalin jar?
4. Who does 'I' refer to in the poem?
5. How does the brain feel inside the jar?
6. Who is the brain talking about?
7. What does the brain say about Vicky?
8. Do you think that Vicky and the brilliant brain are two persons?  
Why ?
9. Which were Vicky's favourite subjects ?
10. What was the motto of his life ?
11. Was Vicky good at studies ? How do you know this?
12. Vicky loved his parents. Which line says so?
13. Which word says that Vicky loved his grandmother very much?
14. What else, besides studies, did Vicky do during his college days?
15. Who was Lorraine? Why did he steal a glance at her ?
16. Why does the poet say that only the brain could explain the cause of Vicky's heart-beat; thud-thud?
17. Read the stanza 5 and stanza 6 again. What are they about ? How are they different from others ?
18. Where was Vicky riding ? When and why ?
19. Where was his friend's house? Was it very far?
20. Why did he go to his friend?
21. What caused the accident ? Which words in the poem describe the accident ?

22. What meaning does the line-‘For once, from wearing his helmet he did refrain’ convey? Was it Vicky’s habit to wear his helmet while riding his bike ?
23. How did the accident affect Vicky and his family ?
24. What message does the poet have for the young generation through this poem ?
25. Can you say why such dreadful accidents occur on road and cause death every moment?
26. Suggest some ways to reduce Road Traffic Injuries (RTI)?

**G. Let’s appreciate the Poem :**

1. Who donated Vicky’s brain to the Medical College? How is it preserved and used?
2. What does the line ‘On display to promote knowledge gain’ express?
3. What is called a specimen? Why is the brain preserved as a specimen?
4. How was the brilliant brain a part of a living human two years ago?
5. What does the phrase-‘Yet ended up in this jar’ mean to you?
6. Which expression suggests that Vicky was hard working?
7. Why does the poet say, “Only I could explain”?
8. Should we consider such demise ‘by chance or by choice’?
9. The poet uses flashback, which is often used to recount events that had happened before the story started. Which stanzas talk about the past events and which ones the present incident?
10. Find the rhyming words in the poem.
11. Why does the poet use capital letters for the first two words in the last line of the poem?
15. You read and understood the poem. Do you like the title of the poem? Why/Why not? Can you suggest another title for the poem?

#### **H. Let's listen and speak :**

**(a)** Listen to the following sentences about the poem (Your teacher reads the sentences aloud.) and say whether they are right or wrong. Then correct the sentences in case you find them wrong.

- i. Vicky's brain was sitting in the formalin jar with pleasure and respect.
- ii. The brain didn't like the people staring at him.
- iii. The brain felt insulted to be a specimen for others.
- iv. Vicky was a strong and stout young man.
- v. He was good at math and computer
- vi. He believed in taking pain to succeed in life.
- vii. He liked neither his grandmother nor her wrinkles and stick.
- viii. All his friends in the college disliked him.
- ix. He rode to his friend on a monsoon day for an important work.
- x. His friend's house was very far from his place.
- xi. He usually liked to wear helmet.
- xii. He was killed in a serious accident.
- xiii. He was clever, handsome and careful.

**(b)** Pronounce the following words correctly.

disdain, gain, again, human, sane, rain, insane, cane, explain, mundane, refrain, inhumane, pain, bane, in vain

**(c)** Imagine that Vicky's friend, Akash visited the Medical College, where Vicky's brain was preserved in a formalin jar. Given below is a dialogue between Vicky's brain and his friend, Akash. Practise the dialogue.

Brain : Hi, Friend! How're you?

Akash : Good. Who's speaking?

- Brain : I'm Vicky's brain!
- Akash : Where you're?
- Brain : In the formalin jar!
- Akash : Who put you here?
- Brain : The doctor.
- Akash : What for?
- Brain : For display! Students will gain knowledge.
- Akash : How did the doctor find you?
- Brain : Listen, Vicky was a young college boy. He was strong, stout, careful and brilliant. One monsoon day he was riding without wearing the helmet to his friend who lived the next lane. On the way he was killed in an accident. The doctor parted me from his body and put here for his students to gain knowledge.
- Akash : How sad !
- Brain : Dear Friend, Vicky was a brilliant boy, but on that fateful day he took it casually to wear his helmet as he was to ride to his friend who was staying the next lane. For his carelessness a precious life was lost. So please be careful and always **DRIVE SAFE** on road. Don't lose your life and put your family in sorrows and sufferings.
- Akash : Thank you Friend for your advice. I'm very sorry for Vicky, my fast friend, bye, see you!



**I. Let's read and write :**

(a) Given below is a table showing a chart of penalties for the road offences. Read the table and write a sentence for each.




One is done for you.

SI No	Offence	Penalty (Rs) (Minimum Amount)
1	General	500
2	Rules of road regulation violation	500
3	Travelling without ticket	500
4	Unauthorised use without licence	5000
5	Driving without licence	5000
6	Disobedience of orders of authorities	2000
7	Drink and Drive	10,000
8	Speeding or Racing	5000
9	Vehicle without permit	10,000
10	Driving without qualification	10,000
11	Without Seat belt	1000
12	Without helmet	1000
13	Oversized vehicles	5000
14	Not providing way for emergency vehicle	10,000
15	Over speeding	1000/2000
16	Driving without insurance	2000
17	Dangerous driving penalty	5000
18	Offences by juveniles	25,000
19	Overloading of passengers	1000/1passenger
20	Overloading of two wheelers	2000

Example :

1. As per the Motor Vehicle Act, if you ride a bike without licence, you will have to pay a fine of Rs1000/.

(b) Read the traffic symbols and write one sentence for each. The first one is done for you.

				
Right Hand Curve	Left Hand Curve	Right Hair Pin Bend	Left Hair Pin Bend	Right Reverse Bend
				
Left Reverse Bend	Steep Ascent	Steep Descent	Narrow Road Ahead	Road Wideness Ahead
				
Narrow	Slippery	Loose Gravel	Cycle Crossing	Pedestrian

					
Stop	Give Way	One Way	No Entry	One Way	One Way Both Direction
					
Right Turn Prohibited	Left Turn Prohibited	One Way	U-Turn Prohibited	Over Taking Prohibited	Horns Prohibited
					
Speed Limit	Compulsory Turn Left	Compulsory Ahead Only	Compulsory Turn Right Ahead	Compulsory Ahead Or Turn Right	Compulsory Ahead Or Turn Left
					
	Compulsory Keep Left	Compulsory Sound Horn			

Example:

1. The first symbol indicates that there is a right hand curve ahead.

- (c) Imagine that you are a reporter of 'The Times of India' in Bhubaneswar. Write a report basing on the incident/contents of the poem 'From the Formalin Jar' for the newspaper. Suggest some ways to check road accidents, and advise young children to be careful about the traffic rules.
- (d) Work in groups of four and prepare placards / posters on ROAD SAFETY. Display them near school notice board. (Your teacher will guide you.)