

3.4 How the First Letter was Written

■ ■ ■ Warming up! ■ ■ ■

1. List the materials that man has used for the following purposes in the different ages.

Objects	Neolithic Age (Later Stone Age)	1 st Century CE	Modern Age
Weapons	stone/bones/animal teeth		
Fuel			
Utensils			
Food			
Clothes			

2. Write your name in Bold Capitals.
- (a) Now, within 3 minutes try to make as many words as you can using the letters in your name. You cannot use the same letter twice in a word, unless it is so in your name.
- (b) You may use the above idea to devise a game with your friends.
3. List words from your mother tongue or from Hindi which do not have an exact English equivalent. Try to write their meaning in English.
4. Now, list at least twenty English words which do not have an exact equivalent in your mother tongue.
5. Browse the internet to find names of people/places, etc. in any language that is not familiar to you. Can you pronounce the names correctly? How will you find the correct pronunciation?

How the First Letter was Written

Once upon a most early time was a Neolithic man and he lived cavily in a Cave, and he wore very few clothes, and he couldn't read and he couldn't write and he didn't want to, and except when he was hungry he was quite happy. His name was Tegumai Bopsulai, and that means, 'Man-who-does-not-put-his-foot-forward-in-a-hurry'; but we, O Best Beloved, will call him Tegumai, for short. And his wife's name was Teshumai Tewindrow, and that means, 'Lady-who-asks-a-very-many-questions'; but we, O Best Beloved, will call her Teshumai, for short. And his little girl-daughter's name was Taffimai Metallumai, and that means, 'Small-person-without-any-manners-who-ought-to-be-spanked'; but I'm going to call her Taffy. And she was Tegumai Bopsulai's Best Beloved and her own Mummy's Best Beloved, and she was not spanked half as much as was good for her; and they were all three very happy.

Now attend and listen!

One day Tegumai Bopsulai went down through the beaver-swamp to the Wagai river to spear carp-fish for dinner, and Taffy went too. Tegumai's spear was made of wood with shark's teeth at the end, and before he had caught any fish at all he accidentally broke it clean across by jabbing it down too hard on the bottom of the river. They were miles and miles from home and Tegumai had forgotten to bring any extra spears.

'Here's a pretty kettle of fish!' said Tegumai. 'It will take me half the day to mend this.'

'There's your big black spear at home,' said Taffy. 'Let me run back to the Cave and ask Mummy to give it me.'

'It's too far for your little fat legs,' said Tegumai. 'Besides, you might fall into the beaver-swamp and be drowned. We must make the best of a bad job.' He sat down and took out a little leather mendy-bag, full of reindeer-sinews and strips of leather, and lumps of bee's-wax and resin, and began to mend the spear.



- ◆ Give one word for the meanings of each of the names:
 - Tengumai Bopsulai
 - Teshumai Tewindrow
 - Taffimai Metallumai.

- ◆ Who is the author telling this story to?



- swamp : a marshy land
- a pretty kettle of fish: a messy situation

- ◆ Why had Taffy stamped her foot? What did the stranger make of it ?



- hank : loosely tied bundle of strings

Taffy sat down too, with her toes in the water and her chin in her hand, and thought very hard. Then she said – ‘I say, Daddy, it’s an awful nuisance that you and I don’t know how to write, isn’t it? If we did, we could send a message for the new spear.’

Just then a Stranger-man came along the river, but he belonged to a far tribe, the Tewaras, and he did not understand one word of Tegumai’s language. He stood on the bank and smiled at Taffy, because he had a little girl-daughter of his own at home. Tegumai drew a hank of deer-sinews from his mendy-bag and began to mend his spear.

‘Come here’, said Taffy. ‘Do you know where my Mummy lives?’ And the Stranger-man said ‘Um!’

‘Silly!’ said Taffy, and she stamped her foot, because she saw a shoal of very big carp going up the river just when her Daddy couldn’t use his spear.

‘Don’t bother grown-ups,’ said Tegumai, so busy with his spear-mending that he did not turn round.

‘I aren’t’, said Taffy. ‘I only want him to do what I want him to do, and he won’t understand.’

‘Then don’t bother me’, said Tegumai, and he went on pulling and straining at the deer-sinews with his mouth full of loose ends. The Stranger-man – a genuine Tewara he was – sat down on the grass, and Taffy showed him what her Daddy was doing. The Stranger-man thought, ‘This is a very wonderful child. She stamps her foot at me and she makes faces. She must be the daughter of that noble Chief who is so great that he won’t take any notice of me.’ So he smiled more politely than ever.

‘Now,’ said Taffy, ‘I want you to go to my Mummy, because your legs are longer than mine, and you won’t fall into the beaver-swamp, and ask for Daddy’s other spear – the one with the black handle that hangs over our fireplace.’

The Stranger-man thought, ‘This is a very, very wonderful child. She waves her arms and she shouts at me, but I don’t understand a word of what she says.

But if I don't do what she wants, I greatly fear that, that haughty Chief, Man-who-turns-his-back-on-callers, will be angry.' He got up and twisted a big flat piece of bark off a birch-tree and gave it to Taffy. He did this, Best Beloved, to show that his heart was as white as the birch-bark and that he meant no harm; but Taffy didn't quite understand.

'Oh!' said she. 'Now I see! You want my Mummy's living-address? Of course I can't write, but I can draw pictures if I've anything sharp to scratch with. Please lend me the shark's tooth off your necklace.'

The Stranger-man (and he was a Tewara) didn't say anything, so Taffy put up her little hand and pulled at the beautiful bead and seed and shark-tooth necklace round his neck.

The Stranger-man (and he was a Tewara) thought, 'This is a very, very, very wonderful child. The shark's tooth on my necklace is a magic shark's tooth, and I was always told that if anybody touched it without my leave they would immediately swell up or burst, but this child doesn't swell up or burst, and that important Chief, Man-who-attends-strictly-to-his-business, who has not yet taken any notice of me at all, doesn't seem to be afraid that she will swell up or burst. I had better be more polite.'

So he gave Taffy the shark's tooth, and she lay down flat on her tummy with her legs in the air, like some people on the drawing-room floor when they want to draw pictures, and she said, 'Now I'll draw you some beautiful pictures! You can look over my shoulder, but you mustn't joggle. First I'll draw Daddy fishing. It isn't very like him; but Mummy will know, because I've drawn his spear all broken. Well, now I'll draw the other spear that he wants, the black-handled spear. It looks as if it was sticking in Daddy's back, but that's because the shark's tooth slipped and this piece of bark isn't big enough. That's the spear I want you to fetch; so I'll draw a picture of me myself 'splaining to you. My hair doesn't stand up like I've drawn, but it's easier to draw that way. Now I'll draw

- ◆ Why did the stranger offer Taffy a big piece of birch-bark?



- ◆ Why did the stranger's admiration for Taffy grow?
- ◆ Who does the author refer to when he says 'some people'?
- ◆ Is Taffy's drawing realistic? In how many ways does it fail to show the real picture?

- ◆ Write 'fended' and 'splain' with their proper spellings.
- ◆ How did the stranger interpret Taffy's drawing?
- ◆ What mistaken notions made the stranger race off like the wind?

you. I think you're very nice really, but I can't make you pretty in the picture, so you mustn't be 'fended. Are you 'fended?'

The Stranger-man (and he was a Tewara) smiled. He thought, 'There must be a big battle going to be fought somewhere, and this extraordinary child, who takes my magic shark's tooth but who does not swell up or burst, is telling me to call all the great Chief's tribe to help him. He is a great Chief, or he would have noticed me.

'Look,' said Taffy, drawing very hard and rather scratchily, 'now I've drawn you, and I've put the spear that Daddy wants into your hand, just to remind you that you're to bring it. Now I'll show you how to find my Mummy's living-address. You go along till you come to two trees (those are trees), and then you go over a hill (that's a hill), and then you come into a beaver-swamp all full of beavers. I haven't put in all the beavers, because I can't draw beavers, but I've drawn their heads, and that's all you'll see of them when you cross the swamp. Mind you don't fall in! Then our Cave is just beyond the beaver-swamp. It isn't as high as the hills really, but I can't draw things very small. That's my Mummy outside. She is beautiful. She is the most beautifullest Mummy there ever was, but she won't be 'fended when she sees I've drawn her so plain. She'll be pleased of me because I can draw. Now, in case you forget, I've drawn the spear that Daddy wants outside our Cave. It's inside really, but you show the picture to my Mummy and she'll give it you. I've made her holding up her hands, because I know she'll be so pleased to see you. Isn't it a beautiful picture? And do you quite understand, or shall I 'splain again?'

The Stranger-man (and he was a Tewara) looked at the picture and nodded very hard. He said to himself, 'If I do not fetch this great Chief's tribe to help him, he will be slain by his enemies who are coming up on all sides with spears. Now I see why the great Chief pretended not to notice me! He feared that his

- slain : killed mercilessly

enemies were hiding in the bushes and would see him. Therefore he turned to me his back, and let the wise and wonderful child draw the terrible picture showing me his difficulties. I will away and get help for him from his tribe.' He did not even ask Taffy the road, but raced off into the bushes like the wind, with the birch-bark in his hand, and Taffy sat down most pleased.

Now this is the picture that Taffy had drawn for him!

'What have you been doing, Taffy?' said Tegumai. He had mended his spear and was carefully waving it to and fro.

'It's a little berangement of my own, Daddy dear,' said Taffy. 'If you won't ask me questions, you'll know all about it in a little time, and you'll be surprised. You don't know how surprised you'll be, Daddy! Promise you'll be surprised.'

'Very well,' said Tegumai, and went on fishing.

The Stranger-man – did you know he was a Tewara? – hurried away with the picture and ran for some miles, till quite by accident he found Teshumai Tewindrow at the door of her Cave, talking to some other Neolithic ladies who had come in to a Primitive lunch. Taffy was very like Teshumai, especially about the upper part of the face and the eyes, so the Stranger-man – always a pure Tewara – smiled politely and handed Teshumai the birch-bark. He had run hard, so that he panted, and his legs were scratched with brambles, but he still tried to be polite.

As soon as Teshumai saw the picture she screamed like anything and flew at the Stranger-man. The other Neolithic ladies at once knocked him down and sat on him in a long line of six, while Teshumai pulled his hair.

'It's as plain as the nose on this Stranger-man's face,' she said. 'He has stuck my Tegumai all full of spears, and frightened poor Taffy so that her hair stands all on end; and not content with that, he brings me a horrid picture of how it was done. Look!' She

- ◆ What was the stranger's impression of Teshumai Tewindrow?



- ◆ Is it possible to promise that one will be surprised?

- ◆ What terrible message had Taffy's drawing conveyed to her mummy?

- brambles : wild prickly pushes

- ◆ Point out two humorous expressions from – ‘all the Neolithic ladies sitting patiently on the Stranger-man’.

showed the picture to all the Neolithic ladies sitting patiently on the Stranger-man. ‘Here is my Tegumai with his arm broken; here is a spear sticking into his back; here is a man with a spear ready to throw; here is another man throwing a spear from a Cave, and here are a whole pack of people’ (they were Taffy’s beavers really, but they did look rather like people) ‘coming up behind Tegumai. Isn’t it shocking!’

- Rudyard Kipling

(Adapted from ‘How the First Letter was Written.’)

■ ■ ■ ENGLISH WORKSHOP ■ ■ ■ ■ ■

1. Read the remaining part of the original story.
2. Make as many 5 to 8 letter words as you can within 5 minutes, from the name.

TESHUMAI TEWINDROW

Five-letter words	Six-letter words	Seven-letter words	Eight-letter words

3. How do the following characters in the story live up to their names? Provide points from the story.
 - (a) Tengumai Bopsulai :
 - (b) Taffimai Metallumai :
 - (c) Teshumai Tewindrow :
4. The story is written in an informal, colloquial style – the way it would be told orally. Find and write the expressions where the author addresses the audience directly in the story – for example, ‘but we, O Best Beloved, will...’, ‘Now attend and listen!’
5. Write a character-sketch of the ‘Stranger-man’ using examples from the story to support the following attributes.
 - (a) ignorant, innocent and polite
 - (b) calm and cool
 - (c) jumps to wrong conclusions
 - (d) hasty and unwise at times

6. Note the punctuation used in the story. Here, single inverted commas or quotation marks have been used to show conversation. Rewrite the following using double quotation marks:

(a) 'Here's a pretty kettle of fish!' said Tengumai.

(b) 'It will take me half the day to mend this.'

7. Underline the main clauses in the following sentences:

(a) And she was Tegumai Bopsulai's Best Beloved and her own Mummy's Best Beloved, and she was not spanked half as much as was good for her; and they were all three very happy.

(b) One day Tegumai Bopsulai went down through the beaver-swamp to the Wagai river to spear carp-fish for dinner, and Taffy went too.

(c) They were miles and miles from home and Tegumai had forgotten to bring any extra spears.

(d) Just then a Stranger-man came along the river, but he belonged to a far tribe, the Tewaras, and he did not understand one word of Tegumai's language.

8. Imagine Taffy comes to you for help to write a letter of apology, in the modern script we use. She wants to express her regret to the stranger-man for her mother's action. Write that letter of apology (informal) on her behalf.



9. Imagine the Stranger-man narrates how the Neolithic ladies overpowered him. Write an account of the same making him the narrator.

10. Making suitable groups, convert the entire episode into a short skit and write it down. Each group leader must discuss at first with the others and add a different end to the skit.

(1) Happy ending

(3) Surprise ending

(2) Sad ending

(4) Humorous ending



11. Write a short passage/essay on 'Women Power' in the Neolithic, Medieval and Present Times.

12. **Read :** 'Just So Stories' and 'The Jungle Book' by Rudyard Kipling.

