

# 2 The Magic Powder



1. Make a list of things you will need if you want to make a sandwich.

- Two slices of bread
- .....
- .....
- .....

2. Unscramble these letters to find out what we call each item on such a list.

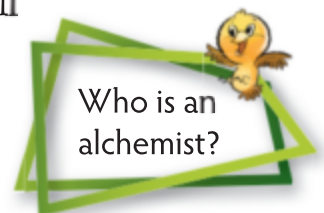
NGERIIDNTE .....

Now let us read a story about a young man who tried to make gold and of the magic ingredient<sup>1</sup> an old man told him about.

Once upon a time, in a little village on the banks of the Irrawaddy River<sup>2</sup>, there lived a young woman called Zeya. She was happily married to a good man named Thiri, but there was one problem that nagged<sup>3</sup> Zeya—her husband believed that he was an alchemist. Like other alchemists he believed he could make gold. All day he kept dreaming about ways to change mud into gold.

Soon their money had run out, and Zeya had to struggle to buy food for the two of them. 'You should find a job soon,' she pleaded with Thiri. 'We cannot continue like this!'

But Thiri would not listen. 'No, Zeya, I'm on the verge<sup>4</sup> of a breakthrough<sup>5</sup>! We will soon be able to turn all the dirt we find into gold!'



<sup>1</sup>**ingredient**: one of the things that you add when you are making something to eat    <sup>2</sup>**Irrawaddy River**: a river in the country of Myanmar    <sup>3</sup>**nagged**: worried    <sup>4</sup>**verge**: very near to the moment when something happens    <sup>5</sup>**breakthrough**: something achieved after hard work

Disheartened<sup>6</sup>, Zeya approached her father, wise old Win, for a solution. He thought for a while and asked to see Thiri.

The next day, Thiri arrived at his father-in-law's house. He was taken by surprise when his father-in-law took him aside and whispered, 'When I was young like you, I was an alchemist too!'

The two of them spent the whole afternoon discussing Thiri's work. Finally the old man said, 'Thiri, congratulations! You are definitely on the verge of a breakthrough. But you seem to be lacking a very important ingredient in your experiments. Only recently did I discover this, but I am too old for this task. It requires enormous effort ...'




'Then let me do it for you, Father!' cried Thiri. He was really excited. 'Tell me what the ingredient is!'

Win leaned closer and whispered, 'Son, the secret ingredient is a silver powder that is only found on banana leaves. You will have to plant the banana trees yourself and cast certain spells<sup>7</sup> on them. Then, as the plants grow, the powder on the leaves will gain magical powers.'

'How much of this powder will we need, Father?' asked Thiri excitedly.

'A kilo,' replied Win.



What was the secret ingredient that Win told Thiri about?  
What were the two conditions that Thiri would have to observe?

<sup>6</sup>disheartened: having lost hope    <sup>7</sup>cast certain spells: use magic words

'A kilo!' cried Thiri, 'That will require hundreds of banana plants! But I shall do it!' Later that evening, the old man taught his son-in-law the magic spells and loaned him the money to start the work.

The very next day, Thiri bought a field near his house and cleared it. Then he planted banana saplings<sup>7</sup>, after carefully chanting<sup>8</sup> the magic spells. He worked in the field, watered his plants, pulled weeds<sup>9</sup> out and kept pests<sup>10</sup> away. When the plants grew and bore fruit, he carefully collected the silver powder from the leaves.



There was hardly any powder on each leaf, so Thiri had to buy more land and grow more bananas. He was determined to do what was needed. It took him several years, but at the end of it all, he had managed to collect enough of the magic powder. He rushed to his father-in-law.

'Father, finally ... here is a kilo of the magic powder!' he cried.

'Wonderful!' said Win. 'I am proud of you, Thiri. Now I will show you how to turn dirt into gold. But first let us get Zeya. We need her help.'

Without losing any time, Thiri ran to his wife and was soon back with her. 'Zeya,' asked the old man, 'what did you do with the bananas when Thiri was collecting the powder?'

'Why, I sold them, Father,' replied Zeya. 'That's how we earned a living. I saved some money too. I have it safely at home.'

The three of them went to Thiri's house where Zeya brought out a bag that she had kept safely in the loft<sup>11</sup>. Win emptied the bag on the table. Gold coins tinkled<sup>12</sup> as they fell in a huge shiny heap. Then he went to the field and came back with a handful of dirt which he placed next to the heap of gold.



<sup>7</sup>saplings: young trees    <sup>8</sup>chanting: saying a word or group of words many times loudly

<sup>9</sup>weeds: wild plants that grow where they are not wanted    <sup>10</sup>pests: insects or animals that damage plants    <sup>11</sup>loft: the room or space under the roof of the house    <sup>12</sup>tinkled: made light ringing sounds

‘You see, Thiri,’ he said, turning to his son-in-law, ‘you have changed dirt into gold!’

Never after that day did Thiri collect any more *magic powder* from the leaves, but he continued to grow bananas. His *alchemist* father-in-law had taught him the best way to turn dirt into gold!

(a folktale from Myanmar)

## Making connections

### Quick answers

1. Complete the following sentences.

- a. Zeya and Thiri lived in .....
- b. Thiri did not stop his experiments when Zeya asked him to because he thought .....
- c. Zeya’s father was .....
- d. Zeya’s father asked Thiri to .....

2. Match the columns.

A	B
a. Thiri wanted to	solution to Zeya’s problem.
b. Zeya was worried as	Win loaned him some money.
c. Old Win provided a	collect the silver powder.
d. Thiri was able to buy a field because	Thiri spent all day dreaming while they had no money.
e. It took Thiri several years to	turn dirt into gold.

### Reference to context

3. *Soon all their money had run out, and Zeya had to struggle to buy food for the two of them. ‘You should find a job soon,’ she pleaded with Thiri. ‘We cannot continue like this!’*
  - a. Why did Thiri not have a job?



- b. Find words in the lines above that mean:
- i. tried very hard to do something that is not easy
  - ii. asked for something with strong feeling
- c. Did Thiri listen to her? Whom did Zeya then turn to for help?
4. *Then he went to the field and came back with a handful of dirt which he placed next to the heap of gold. 'You see, Thiri,' he said, turning to his son-in-law, 'you have changed dirt into gold!'*
- a. Who went to the field? What did he bring back?
  - b. Find the opposites of the following words/phrases:
    - i. came back      ii. turning to
  - c. What did Thiri realize when his father-in-law told him that he had changed dirt into gold?



## Read, reflect and write

- 5. What task did Win set Thiri to do? What reason did he give for not being able to do it himself?
- 6. At the end of the story, Win is called an *alchemist*. Do you think it is a fitting title for him? Give reasons for your answer.
- 7. Give two words each to describe Win, Thiri and Zeya.
- 8. In this story Win teaches Thiri a lesson. What do we, the readers, learn from this?

## Word wall

### Sound words

Some words imitate the sounds of objects or actions.

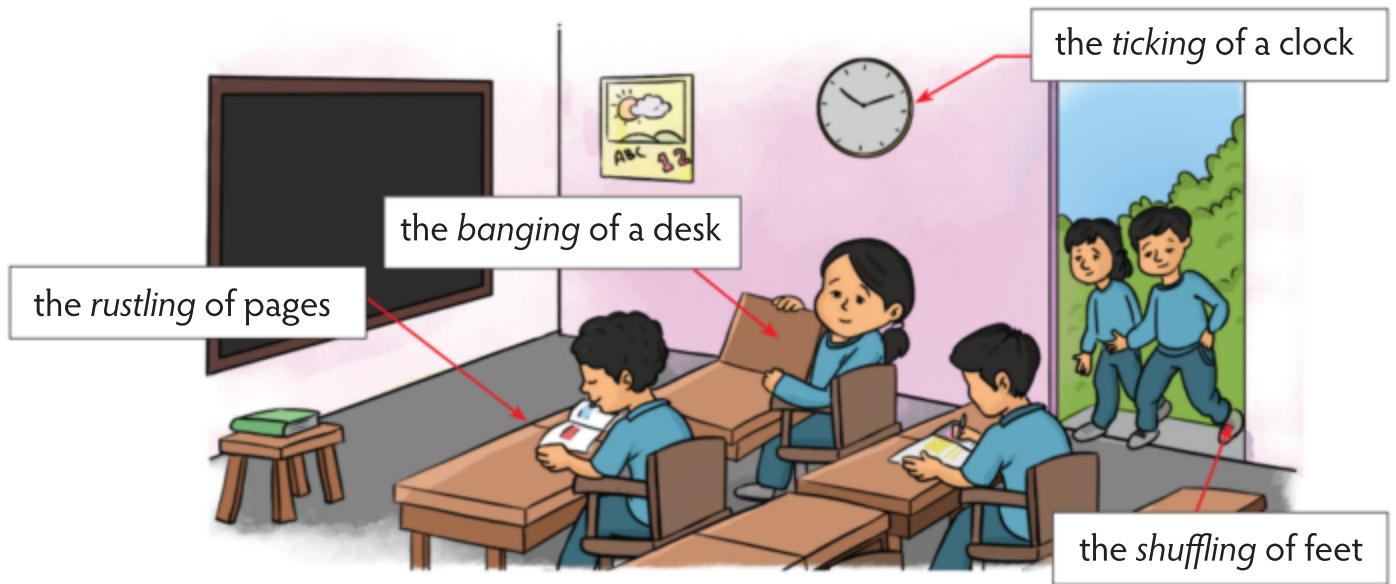
**Example:** Gold coins *tinkled* as they fell in a huge shiny heap.

*Tinkle* describes the sound that the coins make as they fall.

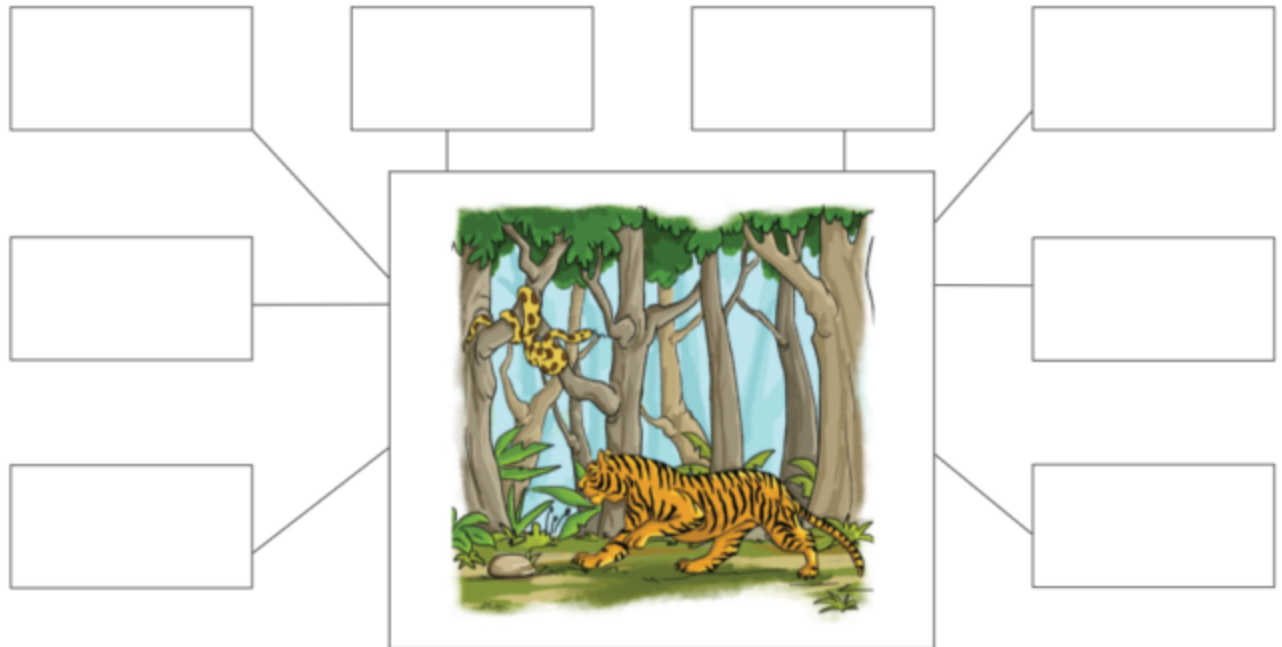
We give a l-o-n-g name to these words—onomatopoeia.  
Can you say it out loud?

Here is an illustration of some sounds that you usually hear in the classroom.

### Classroom sounds



Now think of the sounds that you would hear in a jungle and fill up the following web.



## Grammar time

### Definite article: *the*

Read these sentences.

Thiri bought *a field* near his house. He worked in *the field*.

Zeya brought out *a bag* that she had kept safely in the loft.

Articles are words that go before nouns.



Win emptied *the* bag on the table.

When we say *a field*, we mean *any field* near Thiri's house.

*The field* shows a specific or definite field—the one that Thiri had bought.

We say *a bag* when the bag is mentioned for the *first* time. When the noun *bag* is repeated, we use *the* before it.

A, *an* and *the* are articles.



We use *a* and *an* when we do not refer to someone or something specific. That is why we call *a/an* indefinite articles.



We use *the* when we want to refer to someone or something specific or definite. That is why *the* is called the definite article.

1. Fill in *a*, *an* or *the* in the blanks in the short story given below.

There was once ..... flock of birds peacefully pecking at seeds under ..... tree. .... old hunter came along and threw ..... heavy net over them.

He said, 'Aha! Now I have my dinner!'

All at once ..... birds began to flap their wings.

Up, up they rose into ..... air, taking ..... net with them. They came down on ..... apple tree nearby, and as ..... net got caught in ..... tree's branches, ..... birds flew out from under it, to freedom. .... hunter looked on in wonder, scratched his head and muttered, 'As long as those birds work together with one another like that, I'll never be able to capture them! Each one of those birds is so weak, yet, together they can lift ..... net.'

We also use *the* to show that someone or something is special or one of a kind: *the principal of our school, the sun, the moon and the air.*

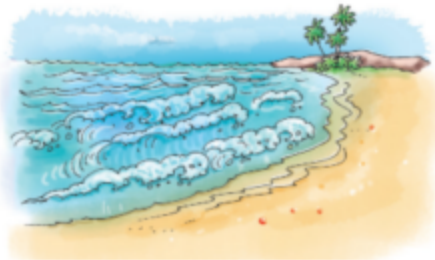


## Geographical uses of *the*

Read this sentence.

Once upon a time, in a little village on the banks of *the* Irrawaddy river, there lived a young woman called Zeya.

We use *the* before the names of rivers. Let us learn more about the geographical uses of *the*. We use *the* before the names of the following:



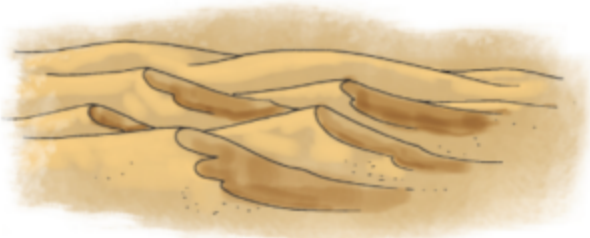
Oceans and seas: the Atlantic Ocean, the Arabian Sea



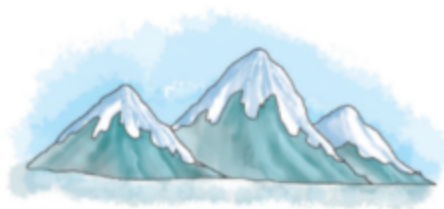
Rivers and canals: the Nile, the Suez Canal



Groups of lakes: the Great Lakes; but not before the names of lakes: Lake Superior, Chilika Lake



Deserts: the Sahara, the Gobi



Mountain ranges: the Alps, the Urals; but not before the names of mountains: Mt Everest, Mt Kanchenjunga



Groups of islands: the Andaman Islands, the West Indies; but not before names of islands: Greenland



Points on the globe: the Equator, the North Pole



We do not use *the* before:



Names of continents: Asia, Africa, Australia



Names of countries: India, Nepal, Sri Lanka  
But we do say: the Netherlands, the USA, the UK, the Philippines and the West Indies



Names of cities, towns or states: Mumbai, Madwa, Mizoram



Names of streets: Park Lane, Oxford Street

We usually pronounce *the* with a short sound like *thuh*. But when *the* comes before a vowel sound, we pronounce it as a long *thee*.

Practise saying: the antelope, the earth, the umbrella, the onion, the inkpad.

How would you say: the unicorn?

## 2. Put a tick against the sentences in which the use of articles is correct.

- a. Hillary and Tenzing climbed the Mt Everest.
- b. Kanchenjunga is a mountain in the Himalayas.
- c. The Asia is the largest continent.
- d. There are very few trees in the Sahara Desert.
- e. The Nile is the longest river in the world.

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## Punctuation

### Comma

We use commas to separate words or word groups in a series (three or more things).

Read this sentence.

He worked in the field, watered his plants, pulled weeds out and kept pests away.

This avoids confusion when we read and also helps us pause at the right moments and places while reading long sentences.

We also use commas before or surrounding the name or title of a person directly addressed.

Read these sentences.

‘No, Zeya, I’m on the verge of a breakthrough!’

‘Father, finally ... here is a kilo of magic powder!’ he cried.

‘I am proud of you, Thiri.’

Thiri is so excited that he is speaking without pausing at the right places. Insert commas to help Win and Zeya understand Thiri better.



Yes Father I realize how much time I wasted on my useless experiments. Zeya we will buy another field with the money you have collected. We will plant banana mango cherry and papaya saplings. You have been a kind patient and hardworking wife Zeya. You Father are the wisest man I know. I shall work hard to earn gold instead of dreaming of ways to make it.

## Write well

1. Write a paragraph on the uses of bananas. A fact file has been provided to help you.

### Fact file

**food products:** jam, toffee, milkshake, chips

**animal food:** eaten by monkeys, cows, birds

**banana fibre:** bags, carpets, ropes, paper

**banana leaves:** to serve food on

**medicinal properties:** vitamins and minerals, energy, rubbing a slice soothes itch caused by mosquito bites



Here are a few words that you can use in your paragraph.

delicious    enjoy    lovely    healthy    alert    useful

2. Give a title to your paragraph.

## Listen and speak well

1. Zeya and Thiri decided to go on a trip. Listen carefully to their travel plans and mark the route that they followed during their trip.



2. Imagine you are Zeya. With the help of the map, describe your trip to Win.

3. In pairs, plan how you will give directions to a tourist visiting your hometown. The direction should be from your school to a famous landmark in your hometown. Share the directions with other pairs in the class. Compare the directions. Which pair gave the most precise directions?