



The Snake Tamer Teacher's Package

Supporting resources for the StoryPlanet English story
"The Snake Tamer" by Jim Peterson

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This document and StoryPlanet English uses U.S. American spelling.

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What is StoryPlanet?

StoryPlanet is a mobile app to enhance the reading experience for language learners of English. It is available for free download on the **Apple** and **Android** app stores, just ask your students to look for **StoryPlanet English**. The app was developed by experienced language teachers and writers who founded the startup L-Pub. The company is based in Offenbach am Main, Germany's most multi-ethnic and multi-lingual city, and the founders are from the U.S.A, Italy, France and Germany.

The stories in StoryPlanet English are targeted at **B1-B2 (Intermediate to Advanced)** learners. All words and expressions at the B2 level and above are annotated and include monolingual definitions. You can learn more about the app here: www.storyplanet.uk

This is how the app works. Learners dive into an engaging story and are exposed to vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure in a relevant context. One chapter of a mini-story is published every day from Monday to Friday. In the **free version** of the app, learners can read the story of the week, as well as the last two weeks' stories. They can also look up the definition to any word or expression in bold. There is no advertising in the app, no personal data is stored and no login required.

If learners purchase the **pro version** (monthly subscription for approx. € 2) they can also:

- Save words or expressions to a personal learning list.
- Practice the words in a series of interactive exercises – based on the same sentences in the stories.
- Get access to more stories, e.g. stories older than two weeks.

Reading stories helps learners build up their English skills in an entertaining and stress-free way. They decide how fast or slow they progress. If they don't understand a difficult word or expression, they click on it to get the **correct definition in that context**. When they add a word to their personal learning list, they can focus on learning exactly what they need and what is relevant to them. In the "LEARN" area they can review their list and do a series of exercises. They can practice their words as long as they want, until they feel like they've committed them to memory. The different types of exercises keep them on their toes and the direct feedback ensures they always understand why they were right or wrong.

StoryPlanet focuses on improving reading comprehension. It does not claim to teach anyone English. It simply helps accelerate learning in a **targeted** and **individualized** way, with motivating content that engages students in their free time. The advantage with StoryPlanet is that it's on their smartphones and they can keep working on their English wherever they are!

You might wonder why our logo is goggles and a snorkel. Because with StoryPlanet learners can **dive deep into English** – they very simply see and understand more than without it! It's more fun to read and they learn more efficiently.

Classroom activities for “The Snake Tamer”

The story “The Snake Tamer” will be broadcast for the first time in the StoryPlanet app from **20-24 January 2020**. Anyone who has the app will receive the story at this time for free. After the middle of February, the story will only be accessible if the learner has purchased the pro version for approx. € 2 / month. We have suggestions for three weeks of activities: before, during and after the story broadcast.

Miming musical instruments

Activity for week 3 of 2020, 13-17 January (5-8 minutes):

1. Ask your students to form groups of 3 or 4. Ask them to **brainstorm typical musical instruments** played by girls/women versus typical instruments played by boys/men. (2-3 minutes)
2. Ask someone from each group to stand up and **mime playing an instrument**. The rest of the class has to guess the **name of the instrument**. Ask as many students as you like in order to get the names of several different instruments. (2-3 minutes)
3. As homework, ask your students to choose one instrument and **write about why** it is typically associated with female or male players. In their explanation, they should consider whether their gender association is based on **prejudice, socialization** or **biology**. (1-2 minutes)

Mapping the past

Activity for week 4 of 2020, 20-24 January (5-10 minutes):

1. Ask your students to read this week’s story “**The Snake Tamer**” in StoryPlanet English. It is about a man named Snake, who plays the fiddle (folk violin), and a woman named Ellen, who plays the banjo.
2. You may wish to review the **past perfect, past continuous and past perfect continuous** with your students, as all forms appear in the story and there is a homework assignment related to them. You may also wish to review or introduce **used to** and **would** as ways to describe actions in the past that happened regularly (not single actions).
3. Give your students a print out of the **Homework assignment for the story “The Snake Tamer”** (page 5) and ask them to complete it by next week.

Charades with new words

Activity for week 5 of 2020, 27-31 January (15-20 minutes):

1. Divide your class into 5 groups and **assign one chapter of the story to each group**. Each person in a group has to choose **one word or expression in bold** from the chapter that they will try to act out in front of the class. (1-2 minutes)
2. Group by group, ask all students to stand in front of the class and **act out their word or expression – without speaking!** The whole class (except that group) has to guess the word or expression within 15 seconds. (approx. 15 minutes).

Homework assignment for “The Snake Tamer”

There are several ways to describe actions in the past in English. It’s interesting to understand the differences, especially when there are several actions happening at the same time. You will find the following forms in the story. Please write down examples from the story for each form.

The words **used to** and **would** are used to describe actions in the past that happened regularly (not single actions). Example: “She **used to** visit her grandmother every Sunday.” This form appears three times in the story. Find out where and write them here (just the relevant phrase, not the whole sentence):

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

The **past perfect** is used for actions that happened before another **important action** in the past. Example: “They **had eaten** at six already, so they weren’t hungry at the concert.” What’s important is that they were not hungry at the concert and the reason for this (eating at six) lay further back in the past. If the sentence were “They ate before the concert,” there is no need for the past perfect as there is no other action or verb it is being compared to. Find one example of this form in the story and write the whole sentence here:

1. _____

Read the sentence carefully. The **important action** is actually not mentioned in this sentence, but only suggested with the word “**then**”. Read the sentences before this in the story and briefly summarize what important action was meant by “**then**”.

2. _____

There are three things that people were doing in this sentence that were ongoing before and after. Hint: They are words ending in “-ing”. What were these three activities:

3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

The **past continuous** is a way to describe an action that was ongoing when another shorter action happened. Example: "He **was riding** his bicycle when his sister **called**."
ongoing action shorter action

Besides the three examples you found in the previous exercise, there are three more examples of the **past continuous** in Chapter 3 of the story. Remember, it is always formed with "**was**" or "**were**" followed by the "**-ing**" form of the verb. Find the three examples in Chapter 3 and write them here (there is no need to write the whole sentence, just the examples of each type of action):

1. Ongoing action _____
Shorter action _____
2. Ongoing action _____
Shorter action _____
3. Ongoing action _____
Shorter action _____

The **past perfect continuous** is similar to the past continuous, except the shorter action happened before another important event in the past. Example: "I **had been wondering** about her message, when she suddenly appeared at the door. I was lucky, because a week later I moved." The time of the first sentence is a **week before** the important event of **moving**. Find one example of this form in the story and write it here:

1. _____
2. What was the shorter action that happened at the same time?
 - a. Snake woke up a baby.
 - b. Ellen invited Snake to her house.
 - c. Ellen and Snake got married.
3. What was the important event that happened afterwards?
 - a. Ellen threw a shoe at Snake.
 - b. Snake was invited to play at a wedding.
 - c. Snake and Ellen played music together.

The Snake Tamer

by Jim Peterson

Week of broadcast: 20-24 January 2020

NB: Definitions are provided for all **words in bold**, either directly in the app by touching the word, or in the vocabulary list found on pages 10-11 of this document.

Chapter 1

In the times before radio, a **fiddler used to** be the most popular person in town. Often the only **source** of music for dancing and **merrymaking**, **fiddlers** were invited to every party and **public** event, and they **led** every **parade**. Back then, the **finest** times in any small town in the United States were always **set to the sound of a fiddle**. Everyone loved **fiddlers**, **unless** that **fiddler** was Snake Cockerham.

Chapter 2

Snake Cockerham was so **mean**, he wouldn't **spit** on you if you were **on fire**. And although he was a **fine fiddler**, no one ever wanted to hear him play. Snake didn't play at dances, and nobody ever paid him a **dime** to play a **tune**. Instead, Snake would **strike up** a **tune** the moment you, or worse, your baby finally went to sleep. In fact, he only ever played when he knew it would wake someone up. This **tactic worked like a charm** for him. In most cases, the poor **sleep-deprived souls** would come out in their **pajamas** and just pay him – to stop playing.

Chapter 3

One **balmy** summer's night, Snake was **marching** through town **screeching out** his loudest **rendition** of "**Soldier's Joy**" when a shoe went **sailing** through the air and hit Snake **square** in the head. "Who did that!", Snake said, as he **reeled around** to catch the **perpetrator**. To his surprise, he saw Ellen Birchfield, the **belle of the town** – and she was holding a **banjo**. "Why don't you come on over to my **porch**, Snake, and we'll play some **tunes**?" A bit **dazzled** by her **charm**, Snake **nodded** and followed behind.

Chapter 4

Now this little **altercation** did not **go unseen**. Everyone **within spitting distance** had been watching out their window. And the news **spread like wildfire**: "Snake and Ellen are going to play **tunes** on her **porch**!" As they arrived at her house, Ellen turned to

Snake and said : “Now, Snake. All you ever do is **annoy** people with that **fiddle**. Let’s see if you’ve got any music **worth** hearing in that old **devil’s box** of yours!”

Chapter 5

As Snake started **fiddling**, Ellen **followed** right **along** with her **banjo**. Snake didn’t **expect** much from a woman, but she was good. He decided to play faster to see if that **tripped her up**, but Ellen didn’t **miss a beat**. In fact, she **sped up** a little bit on him, too. By then, a **crowd** had started to form and everyone was dancing, laughing and having a good time. Something changed in Snake Cockerham that night when he **witnessed** the power of music to bring people together. Well, it wasn’t long before Snake and Ellen got married, and the dances in front of their house became the **talk of the town**. And that’s the story of how an old snake was **tamed** by a pretty lady with a **banjo**.

Book the author for a reading and writing workshop

Having a writer come into your class can be a great way to motivate your students to engage more actively with the English language, since listening, reading, speaking and writing skills can all be practiced.

A live reading & writing workshop

The author of this story, Jim Peterson, or one of the other StoryPlanet writers will come into your class (or join by video stream) to give a reading as well as conduct a writing workshop. The workshop will have a structure something like this:

1. The author introduces the context and the key vocabulary of the story they are going to read. This is done in an interactive way that encourages student involvement.
2. The author reads their story, after which the students have the opportunity to ask questions about the story or the author.
3. The students are given a written version of the text to read. They are asked to highlight any words they do not understand.
4. The author introduces the class to a few basic rules when writing a mini-story. A few creativity tips are also shared.
5. The class is divided into groups. Everyone shares the words they underlined and as a group they agree on five words or expressions to use for their own story. Then they work together to write a mini-story. The teacher and the author go from group to group to encourage them, give advice and help with language questions.
6. At the end, one person from each group reads their story aloud to the class.

A reading & writing workshop like this takes about 1-2 hours and costs **€ 360** (or more depending on travel costs). If the workshop is held by video stream, steps 5 & 6 are replaced with an e-mail correction round in which up to 5 of the students' stories are corrected and commented by the author.

Our writers live in the areas of Frankfurt am Main and Berlin, Germany. To book a workshop, please contact L-Pub managing director David P. Steel: steel@L-Pub.com

About the author of “The Snake Tamer”: Jim Peterson

Jim received his BA in German, BS in Education and TEFL Certificate from Ohio University in 2004. After graduating, he spent a year in Hanover, Germany, on a Fulbright scholarship. He taught English from 2006 to 2014, the same period in which he earned his Master's in Applied Linguistics from St. Mary's University in London, UK. Since 2014, he has been working at steelecht as a copywriter, but stays involved in the language teaching space through projects with L-Pub. He spends his free time with his family, fiddle and miscellaneous books.

Vocabulary list

Lemma	Definition	POS
altercation	a fight or argument	n.
to annoy	to disturb, to bother, to irritate	v.
balmy	mild, warm, relaxing	adj.
banjo	a string instrument with a guitar-like neck and a drum body, common in the U.S.A.	n.
belle of the town	the most beautiful girl or lady in a small city	id.
charm	the ability to easily convince people, e.g. with smiles and favors; natural likeability	n.
crowd	a large gathering; many people who have come together for an event or who share a common interest	n.
to dazzle	to confuse, impress, surprise; to blind with a strong light; to sparkle and shine	v.
devil's box	a fiddle/violin; an old legend says that the devil played violin and would challenge humans to a violin battle	id.
dime	a 10-cent coin in the U.S.A.	n.
to expect	to believe something will happen; to look forward to something; to anticipate a certain behavior	v.
fiddle	a violin played in a folk or non-classical style	n.
to fiddle	to play the violin in a folk or non-classical style	v.
fiddler	a person who uses the violin to play folk or pop music, i.e. not classical music	n.
fine	good, nice, decent	adj.
to follow along	to accompany, to go behind, to copy or keep close to the actions of a leader	p.v.
to go unseen	to happen without anyone observing	id.
to lead	to be the first in a group, to show others the way by going ahead	v.
to march	walking in a fast and rhythmic way; how soldiers move in formation	n.
mean	not nice, evil, unlikeable	adj.
merrymaking	having fun or partying; a festive activity	n.
to miss a beat	to hesitate, to fall out of line, to not keep up with the music	id.
to nod	to say "yes" by moving one's head up and down	v.
on fire	to be burning, to be covered in flames	id.
pajama	light clothes worn in bed; a sleeping outfit, often two-piece	n.
parade	an organized celebration with people walking down the street	n.
perpetrator	the person who did something (often illegal)	n.
porch	an outdoor area of a house which has a floor and is covered by a roof	n.

public	open to everyone, for the whole community, of general concern	n.
to reel around	to turn 180° very fast	p.v.
rendition	a version, variation or adaptation of something, e.g. of a song or recipe	n.
to sail	to fly without wings; to move quickly in a fluid style	v.
to screech out	to speak (or play an instrument) in a high, scratchy pitch that hurts the ear	p.v.
set to the sound of	when something happens with a certain song or music in the background	id.
sleep-deprived	when one stays awake very long and feels very tired; unrested	adj.
Soldier's Joy	a very common North American fiddle tune	n.
soul	a person, often used when someone is suffering	n.
source	the original place of origin; where something comes from	n.
to speed up	to go faster, to accelerate	p.v.
to spit	to eject saliva from the mouth, to shoot something from between the lips	v.
to spread like wildfire	to expand very fast; when information passes from person to person so that everyone knows about it quickly	id.
square	directly, on the spot, firmly	adv.
to strike up	to start something; to start playing a song or start a conversation	p.v.
tactic	one part of a larger plan; a method or strategy	n.
talk of the town	something that everyone in a small city discusses; very popular in a small community	id.
to tame	to cause something wild to become quiet and obedient; to train an animal to behave	v.
to trip someone up	to cause someone to make a mistake; to make someone stumble	p.v.
tune	a piece of music, usually without enough singing to be called a song	n.
unless	but not if, with the exception	prep.
used to	previously, in the past, no longer true	id.
within spitting distance	very close, not far	id.
to witness	to see a something happen with one's own eyes; to observe a crime	v.
to work like a charm	to function perfectly; when a certain method is very successful	id.
worth	acceptable, of value, not a waste of time	adj.

Homework assignment KEY (approximate correct answers are highlighted green)

There are several ways to describe actions in the past in English. It's interesting to understand the differences, especially when there are several actions happening at the same time. You will find the following forms in the story. Please write down examples from the story for each form.

The words **used to** and **would** are used to describe actions in the past that happened regularly (not single actions). Example: "She **used to** visit her grandmother every Sunday." This form appears three times in the story. Find out where and write them here (just the relevant phrase, not the whole sentence):

1. A fiddler **used to** be the most popular person in town.
2. Snake **would** strike up a tune the moment you went to sleep.
3. The poor sleep-deprived souls **would** pay him to stop playing.

The **past perfect** is used for actions that happened before another **important action** in the past. Example: "They **had eaten** at six already, so they weren't hungry at the concert." What's important is that they were not hungry at the concert and the reason for this (eating at six) lay further back in the past. If the sentence were "They ate before the concert," there is no need for the past perfect as there is no other action or verb it is being compared to. Find one example of this form in the story and write the whole sentence here:

1. **By then, a crowd had started to form and everyone was dancing, laughing and having a good time.**

Read the sentence carefully. The **important action** is actually not mentioned in this sentence, but only suggested with the word "**then**". Read the sentences before this in the story and briefly summarize what important action was meant by "**then**".

2. **Ellen and Snake were playing music together on her porch.**

There are three things that people were doing in this sentence that were ongoing before and after. Hint: They are words ending in "-ing". What were these three activities:

3. **dancing**
4. **laughing**
5. **having a good time**

The **past continuous** is a way to describe an action that was ongoing when another shorter action happened. Example: "He **was riding** his bicycle when his sister **called**."
ongoing action shorter action

Besides the three examples you found above, there are three more examples of the **past continuous** in Chapter 3 of this story. Remember, it is always formed with "**was**" or "**were**" following by the "**-ing**" form of the verb. Find the three examples in Chapter 3 and write them here (there is no need to write the whole sentence just the examples of each type of action):

1. Ongoing action **Snake was marching** through town.
 Shorter action **Snake was hit** by a shoe.
2. Ongoing action **Snake was screeching out** a tune on his fiddle
 Shorter action **Snake was hit** by a shoe.
3. Ongoing action **Ellen was holding** a banjo.
 Shorter action **Snake saw** Ellen.

The **past perfect continuous** is similar to the past continuous, except the shorter action happened before another important event in the past. Example: "I **had been wondering** about her message, when she suddenly appeared at the door. I was lucky, because a week later I moved." The time of the first sentence is a **week before** the important event of **moving**. Find one example of this form in the story and write it here:

1. **Everyone within spitting distance had been watching** out their window.
2. What was the shorter action that happened at the same time?
 - a. Snake woke up a baby.
 - b. **Ellen invited Snake to her house.**
 - c. Ellen and Snake got married.
3. What was the important event that happened afterwards?
 - a. Ellen threw a shoe at Snake.
 - b. Snake was invited to play at a wedding.
 - c. **Snake and Ellen played music together.**