



**Dr. H. N. SINHA ARTS AND COMMERCE
COLLEGE, PATUR.**

**Faculty of Commerce and Management
B.COM. I SEMESTER I
Subject : Compulsory English**

**ONCE UPON A TIME
BY GABRIEL OKARA**

Okara, an African poet, was born in 1921 in Nigeria.

He worked as a book-binder and, later, as an information officer.

His literary contribution converted him into a of outstanding ability. He succeeded capturing the moods and manners, sights and sounds of his country.



Once Upon a Time by Gabriel Okara

- ▶ 'Once Upon a Time,' written by the Nigerian poet Gabriel Okara, is a satirical poem on the modern way of greeting someone. The lack of compassion, simplicity, and brotherhood is portrayed in this poem.
- ▶ 'Once Upon a Time' explains what happens when a traditional African culture meets the onslaught of the Western way of life. This encounter shows its effects on religious background and social life. While some Africans welcome the changes brought about by the Western influence, many detested the damage done to the African culture. It is claimed that 'They' in the poem refer to the Western people, who are white.



Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time, son,
They used to laugh with their hearts
And laugh with their eyes:
But now they only laugh with their teeth,
Search behind my shadow.

There was a time indeed
They used to shake hands with their hearts:
But that's gone, son.
Now they shake hands without hearts
While they left hands search
My empty pockets.

'Feel at home'! 'Come again':
They say, and when I come
Again and feel
At home, once, twice,
There will be no thrice –
For then I fond doors shut on me.


So I have learned many things, son.
I have learned to wear many faces
Like dresses – homeface,
Officeface, streetface, hostface,
Cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles
Like a fixed portrait smile.

And I have learned too
To laugh with only my teeth
And shake hands without my heart.
I have also learned to say, 'goodbye',
When I mean 'Good-riddance':
To say 'Glad to meet you',
Without being glad; and to say 'It's been
Nice talking to you', after being bored.

But believe me, son.
I want to be what I used to be
When I was like you. I want
To unlearn all these muting things.
Most of all, I want to relearn
How to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
Shows only my teeth like a snake's bare
Fangs!

So show me, son,
How to laugh; show me how
I used to laugh and smile
Once upon a time when I was like you.

Gabriel Okara

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- ▶ 'Once Upon a Time' is about the artificiality in human relationships prevailing in the present-day world.
 - ▶ The poet found the past better than the present.
 - ▶ There were love, sincerity and faithfulness in the past.
 - ▶ In the present everything has undergone a drastic transformation. There is no dearth of deception in the present.
 - ▶




Once Upon a Time

Once upon a time, son,
they used to laugh with their hearts
and laugh with their eyes:
but now they only laugh with their teeth,
while their ice-block-cold eyes
search behind my shadow.




- ▶ There was a time indeed they used to shake hands with their hearts:
but that's gone, son.
Now they shake hands without hearts
while their left hands search my empty pockets.






▶ ‘Feel at home!’ ‘Come again’:
they say, and when I come
again and feel
at home, once, twice,
there will be no thrice-
for then I find doors shut on me.




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- ▶ So I have learned many things, son. I have learned to wear many faces like dresses – homeface, officeface, streetface, hostface, cocktailface, with all their conforming smiles like a fixed portrait smile.



- ▶ And I have learned too to laugh with only my teeth and shake hands without my heart. I have also learned to say, 'Goodbye', when I mean 'Good-riddance': to say 'Glad to meet you', without being glad; and to say 'It's been nice talking to you', after being bored.



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- ▶ But believe me, son.
I want to be what I used to be
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Most of all, I want to relearn
how to laugh, for my laugh in the mirror
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▶ So show me, son,
how to laugh; show me how
I used to laugh and smile
once upon a time when I was like you.



THANK YOU

