

Turning Bananas into Gold

adapted from a Thai folktale
by Judith Lloyd



1 Long ago, in Thailand, there lived a man named Nai Hah. He had inherited a little money. Nai Hah could have had a good life, if only he had found a practical way to earn a living. But Nai Hah had a dream. He spent all of his time and money on experiments.

Nai Hah was trying to turn ordinary copper into gold! Then, he would be a rich man.

2 Nai Hah's wife, Nang Song, worked very hard. She was a good wife and tried to be supportive of Nai Hah. However, Nang Song knew that they would soon have no

- money if her husband kept chasing his foolish dream. Discouraged, she went to her father for advice.
- 3 Nang Song's father listened carefully to her story. Then he sent her home, promising to talk to Nai Hah.
- 4 The next day, Nang Song's father sent for Nai Hah. "It's too bad you didn't come to me sooner. I could have saved you much work."
- 5 "How is that, Father-in-law?" asked Nai Hah.
- 6 "I have spent many years on the same problem," replied Nang Song's father. "I am very close to success. If you promise to do as I tell you, I will share my secret."
- 7 Nai Hah eagerly agreed.
- 8 "I have gathered almost everything I need to turn copper into gold. The last substance requires great patience to collect. That will be your task."
- 9 Nang Song's father explained that the last ingredient was the silvery powder found on the leaves of the banana tree. "You need two pounds of this substance," he said. "It must come from banana trees that you have planted yourself."
- 10 Nai Hah knew that it would take many banana trees to make two pounds of the fine, light powder. It would take years of hard work. However, he thanked his father-in-law for his generous advice. Then, he hurried home to tell Nang Song.
- 11 The news delighted Nang Song. She agreed to help her husband with the new project. First, they bought some land and prepared the soil. Then, Nai Hah carefully planted hundreds of banana plants.
- 12 After some time, the trees grew large and full of bananas. Each day, Nai Hah gently brushed the tiny grains of powder from the leaves. There was very little of the precious powder on each leaf. Nai Hah knew it would be years before he had enough.
- 13 Nang Song was also very busy. As the bananas grew ripe, she selected only the best bunches. She hired workers to cut them and take them to market. Soon, people came from all around to buy the high-quality bananas from their farm.
- 14 Nai Hah barely noticed the bananas. Day after day, he tended the banana trees so that they would make big, strong leaves. Because he took such good care of them, the trees also produced many fine bananas.
- 15 At last, after five years of hard work, Nai Hah's bag of powder weighed exactly two pounds. He and Nang Song visited her father. With great care, Nai Hah offered the precious bag of powder to his father-in-law.
- 16 "You have worked hard, Nai Hah. Now you shall be rich." Nai Hah grinned and thought about all the gold he would have.
- 17 "What has happened to the bananas you have grown?" asked his father-in-law.
- 18 Nai Hah looked bewildered. *Bananas? What bananas?*
- 19 Nang Song stepped forward. Several of the farmworkers followed her, carrying large bags of coins. "We have sold all of our bananas, my father," she announced. "We now have twenty thousand silver coins."
- 20 Nai Hah could hardly believe it. Nang Song's father explained that Nai Hah could exchange the silver coins for pure gold if he wished. He could use the coins to buy cattle or fine clothes. He could buy anything he desired!
- 21 "Don't you agree that all your hard work has been much more fruitful than your foolish experiments, Nai Hah?" asked his father-in-law.
- 22 At first, Nai Hah was angry at having been tricked. Then he understood. Why had he wanted to turn copper into gold? So that he could become rich! Now he was!
- 23 Nai Hah thanked his father-in-law and his wife for their wisdom. Together, they had opened his eyes to his foolishness. They had made him a wealthy and respected businessman.

COMPREHENSION

A Choose the best ending for each sentence. Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 1 Nai Hah began this story as a dreamer and ended up
 - a as a famous man who turned copper into gold.
 - b as a practical man who became a wealthy farmer.
 - c as a lazy man who had no time for work.
- 2 Nai Hah's father-in-law probably
 - a knew how copper could be turned into gold.
 - b knew how banana leaves could be turned into gold.
 - c knew how hard work could make someone wealthy.

- 3 If Nai Hah had continued doing his experiments, he probably would have
 - a used up all of his money.
 - b turned copper into gold.
 - c planted something other than bananas.
- 4 The couple became wealthy because
 - a Nang Song sold the bananas.
 - b Nai Hah sold the precious powder.
 - c his father-in-law taught Nai Hah how to make gold.
- 5 Nai Hah probably
 - a continued growing bananas.
 - b stopped doing his experiments.
 - c Both **a** and **b**

LEARN ABOUT WORDS

B Often you can find out the meaning of a word by seeing how it is used in a story. The other words in the story give you clues.

Find the word in the story that best fits each meaning. (A paragraph number tells you where to look.) Write the word.

- 1 received; been given (1)
- 2 useful; sensible (1)
- 3 sad; disappointed (2)
- 4 ingredient; material (8)
- 5 valuable; rare (12)
- 6 puzzled; mixed up (18)
- 7 worthwhile; bringing results (21)

C A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning will depend on how it is used.

The *fly* buzzed around the room.
The bird will *fly* to its nest.

Look at each word in **bold type** below. Note the paragraph number. Look back at the paragraph. Which meaning does the word have there? Write *a* or *b*.

- 8 **hard** (2)
 - a difficult
 - b with energy
- 9 **close** (6)
 - a near in time
 - b crowded
- 10 **light** (10)
 - a not heavy
 - b not dark

THINK ABOUT IT

- D** The banana leaves *rustled*.
The coins *clinked* as she counted them.

Some words imitate the sounds they refer to. *Rustled* and *clinked* are two such words.

Read each sentence. Which word imitates a sound? Write the word.

- 1 The wind whistled through the trees near Nang Song's house.
- 2 Nai Hah's feet squished in the muddy field as he planted the bananas.
- 3 A bunch of bananas hit the ground with a thump.
- 4 His father-in-law's bell clanged to announce the visitors.
- 5 Nai Hah sputtered when he saw all the silver coins.

- E** Writers try to make stories more interesting by using colorful or funny language that doesn't mean exactly what the words say.

The man was *scared to death*.

This sentence means that the man was very scared. It doesn't mean that the man died.

Read the sentences. What does each sentence really mean? Write *a*, *b*, or *c*.

- 6 "Nai Hah was chasing a foolish dream" is a lively way of saying that
 - a he chased a silly person.
 - b he was wasting his time on his silly experiments.
 - c he was having nightmares.
- 7 "He turned the idea over in his mind" is another way of saying that
 - a he did somersaults.
 - b he spun around in circles.
 - c he thought about it.

- 8 "Nang Song pitched in to help" is a different way of saying that

- a she worked to grow and sell bananas.
- b she put bananas in a pitcher.
- c she played baseball.

- 9 "The sight of the coins knocked his socks off" is a funny way of saying that Nai Hah

- a dropped the coins on his feet.
- b walked barefoot on the coins.
- c was shocked to see the coins.

- 10 "Nang Song opened Nai Hah's eyes to his foolishness" is a lively way of saying that

- a she pushed his eyelids open.
- b she made him aware of his silliness.
- c she bought him glasses.

- F** Nai Hah's *beautiful* wife was attractive.
Nai Hah's wife was attractive.

When writers or speakers are careless, they sometimes use an unnecessary word and say the same thing twice.

Read each sentence. Which word in **bold type** is not needed because the same idea is expressed elsewhere in the sentence? Write the word.

- 11 Nai Hah's **silly** dream to turn **copper** into gold was foolish.
- 12 The **excited** man was thrilled to **hear** his father-in-law's news.
- 13 **Alone** one day, Nai Hah **planted** bananas by himself.
- 14 The **heavy** bunches of **bananas** weighed a lot.
- 15 **Wealthy** Nai Hah now had a **successful** farm and a lot of money.