

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH



Moments

9. The Accidental Tourist

by
Bill Bryson

1. Summary

This is a funny essay written by Bill Bryson about all the little accidents he has whenever he travels. Once, at an airport, his bag would not open because the zip got stuck, so he yanked it hard. The zip opened suddenly, and everything fell all over the concourse. Another time, he spilt a soft drink on a lady sitting next to him. When the replacement drink came, he spilt that too. Yet another time, he was concentrating on some notes he was writing to himself, and put his pen in his mouth. The ink in the pen leaked and he had navy blue ink all over his lips! These accidents happen only when he is flying with his family. When he flies alone, he protects himself by keeping his hands firmly on his lap. However, this means he can't fly long distances because he can't go long without eating. The poor man is clumsy, but longs to be suave.

2. Vocabulary

1. **Accidental** - something that happens by chance.
The boy was looking at his phone and bumped against someone **accidentally**.
2. **Tourist** – person travelling to places for pleasure.
In the winter, Varanasi is full of **tourists** who come to see the Ganga Arti.
3. **Reflects** – thinks deeply; throw back.
He was **reflecting** on all the advice his teachers had given him.
The mirror **reflected** the rays of the sun on the wall.
4. **Humorously** – funny or making you laugh.
The girls commented **humorously** on the lady who had red hair.
5. **Evident** – clearly seen or understood.
It was evident that someone had drunk the milk because the jug was empty.
6. **Pretty much** – more or less.
The entire syllabus for Class IX was **pretty much** covered by the teacher by the end of January.

7. **Alley** – a narrow passage-way between or behind buildings.
The residents throw all the garbage in the **alley** behind their house and now it is stinking!
8. **Selflocking** – a door that locks by itself when it is closed.
It was a **selflocking** door, so I needed the key to open it.
9. **Specialty** – a subject that somebody knows a lot about, or has great skill.
He is a great chef; his **specialty** is baking fancy cakes.
10. **Confused** – unable to think clearly or to understand something fully.
I was so **confused** about the directions that I took four wrong turns.
11. **En famille** – a French word meaning with family.
The staff were invited **en famille** to the Manager's wedding.
12. **Easter** - Easter is a Christian festival when Christians remember the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.
This **Easter** I am going home to be with my family; we will go to church together.
13. **Frequent flyer programme** – a programme where an airline gives points to flyers who travel with them often. Once they collect a large number of points, they can exchange them for free tickets. The points are called frequent flyer miles.
Rajesh was able to take his family for a free holiday since he had collected many points on Air India's **frequent flyer programme**.
14. **Carry-on** – carry-on bags can be taken by the passenger into the plane, if they are not very large.
I don't like to take a **carry-on bag** when I travel, because my shoulder hurts if I carry anything heavy.
15. **Jammed** – to pack tightly or to be stuck, or unable to move.
I could not turn the key in the lock because it was **jammed**.
16. **Yanked** - pulled with a jerk.
Seeta **yanked** the microphone out of my hand and started singing.
17. **Grunts** - short low sound; the sound a pig makes.
I asked the old woman if she wanted tea, but she only **grunted**; so I did not know if she wanted the tea or not.

18. **Frown** – a facial expression when eyebrows are brought together to express annoyance.
Hari knew something was wrong when he saw his father's **frown**.
19. **Increasing** – to become greater in size, amount or degree.
My mother's anger was **increasing** with every passing minute.
20. **Consternation** – sudden feeling of worry, shock or confusion.
The train was delayed by two hours to the **consternation** of all the passengers.
21. **Budge** – to make a slight movement.
All the passengers got down to push the bus, but it would not **budge**.
22. **Abruptly** – suddenly or unexpectedly.
The Headmaster left **abruptly** in the middle of the meeting.
23. **Gave way** – when an object breaks or collapses.
Just as I was leaving the house, my shoes **gave way** and I had to run inside to change them.
24. **Flew open** – to open suddenly.
The door **flew open** in the strong wind.
25. **Pipe tobacco** – a tobacco pipe, often called a simple pipe, is a device specifically made to smoke tobacco. The tobacco used for the pipe is called pipe tobacco.
Albert Einstein, the famous scientist, often smoked a **pipe**.
Pipe tobacco is sold under various brand names.
26. **Extravagantly** – without restraint, or, in an excessive way.
The ceiling was **extravagantly** decorated with pictures of gods and goddesses.
27. **Ejected** - to come out or throw out suddenly.
The pilot **ejected** from the plane when its engines caught fire.
28. **Dumbstruck** – so shocked or surprised that one cannot speak.
I was so **dumbstruck** when I saw the wheels of the bus go over the lady's foot that I could not even cry out for help.
29. **Raining down** – to come pouring down or to fall in large amounts.
The Manager was **raining down** criticism on the new employees.

30. **Fluttery** – light flapping movement
I love watching the colorful **fluttery** wings of the birds in my garden.
31. **Cascade** – a small steep waterfall.
We stood on the bridge to watch the **cascading** waterfall on the other side.
32. **Oblivion** – the state of being forgotten.
The leading actress went into **oblivion** in her old age; nobody recognized her although she was a famous star in her time.
33. **Concourse** - the open central area in a large public building; here it is in the airport.
There were no sign boards on the **concourse** to tell us where the concert was taking place.
34. **Disgorging** - to release large amounts of liquid, gas, or other contents.
We saw the damaged ship **disgorging** hundreds of gallons of oil into the sea.
35. **Horror** – a great feeling of fear, shock or disgust.
We watched in **horror** as the father beat his child with a stick.
36. **Budget** - an estimate of income and expenditure for a set period of time.
Every year when the government passes the national **budget**, things become more expensive.
37. **Gashed** – to make a long deep cut.
The knife **gashed** her finger and there was blood all over the kitchen floor.
38. **Shedding** - to fall off, as leaves fall off a tree, or hair falls.
The tree in front of my house begins **shedding** its leaves in January and in fifteen days it is bare.
39. **Lavish** - large in quantity and expensive or impressive.
Her father is a wealthy man so we expect a **lavish** celebration for her engagement.
40. **Hysterics** – uncontrolled emotion like laughing, screaming or crying.
The girl was **hysterical** when she failed in the exam, and began beating her chest and crying.
41. **Justified** – having a good reason for something.
The teacher was **justified** in punishing Prakash since he was the boy who started all the trouble.

42. **Hair went into panic mode** – usually when one gets scared or anxious, hair stands on end.
His **hair went into panic mode** when he saw the huge dog rush towards him.
43. **Exasperation** – a feeling of great irritation or annoyance.
The baby cried with **exasperation** because his mother would not put him on her lap.
44. **Catastrophe** – an event causing great and usually sudden damage.
The forest fires were an environmental **catastrophe**.
45. **Recline** - lean or lie back in a relaxed position with the back supported.
She was **reclining** on the sofa watching her favorite TV show.
46. **Pinned helplessly** – to be held by someone or something and not being able to move.
The door fell on me and I was **pinned helplessly** to the floor.
47. **The crash position** – also known as 'Brace Position', it is a position for an emergency landing of a plane, where the passengers sit bent forward with their hands behind their heads.
The pilot asked the passengers to sit in the **crash position** when the engines failed and the plane was going to crash.
48. **Clawing** - scratch or tear something with the claws or the fingernails.
The kitten **clawed** at the carpet all day and soon there were only threads and no carpet.
49. **Knocked** - hit, especially forcefully, and cause to move or fall; to repeatedly hit something, producing a noise.
He came running into the room and **knocked** the vase off the table.
50. **Replacement** – a person or thing that takes the place of another.
I have employed a young girl as a **replacement** for my old cook.
51. **Prop** - a prop, is an object used on stage during a performance e.g. artificial trees or even a chair; a pole or beam used as a temporary support or to keep something in position.
I need a large statue as a **prop** for my play.
We used a huge wooden pole to **prop** up the roof of the tent.

52. **Perch** – a horizontal bar or a branch of a tree where a bird can sit; sitting or resting delicately on the edge of something
The parrot never got off its **perch** unless it wanted to peck at its food.
53. **Stupefied** - unable to think clearly because someone is in a state of shock or is extremely tired.
I was **stupefied** when I saw the bridegroom arrive in a helicopter.
54. **Drenched** – to make completely wet.
I did not have my umbrella and was **drenched** in the rain by the time I reached home.
55. **Clutch** – to hold something very tightly.
I **clutch** onto my mother's hand whenever I cross a busy road.
56. **Clutch** – a mechanical device which is pressed to change gears in cars.
My car gear got stuck because the **clutch** wire broke.
57. **Conversation** - a talk, especially an informal one, between two or more people, in which news and ideas are exchanged.
Her **conversation** bores me as she is always talking about her clothes.
58. **Attractive** – pleasing or appealing to the senses.
The stern lady looked so **attractive** whenever she smiled.
59. **Scattering** - a number of things spread over an area.
After ploughing, the farmer was **scattering** seeds in the field.
60. **Urbane** – polite and refined manners especially of a man in social settings.
He seemed like an **urbane** gentleman, but I was told he beat his wife and child with a belt.
61. **Bon mot** – a smart yet funny remark.
She always laughed loudly at her husband's **bon mots**.
62. **Scrub** – to rub something hard to clean it.
I spent one hour **scrubbing** the greasy floor to clean it.
63. **Resistant** – not affected or harmed by something.
This cloth is stain **resistant** because it has been sprayed with a special chemical.
64. **Trust** – firm belief
I **trust** you will reach the office before anyone gets there.

65. **Ache** – a dull prolonged pain that is not very strong.
My heart **aches** for the poor hungry children on the road.
66. **Suave** – charming, confident, elegant and polite, often only on the surface; sophisticated.
Everyone admired the bank manager because he was tall, handsome and **suave**.
67. **Ache to be suave** - wants desperately to be sophisticated.
Rohit **aches to be suave**, but he is so clumsy that he keeps having silly accidents.
68. **Experienced** - having a skill or knowledge because you have done something many times.
He was an **experienced** surgeon; he had performed more than three hundred heart transplant surgeries.
69. **Localized** - confined or restricted to a particular location or affecting only a restricted part or area.
The riots did not affect the whole city, they were **localized** in some pockets.
70. **Seismic** - relating to earthquakes or other vibrations of the earth and its crust.
All earthquakes are a result of some **seismic** activity but all seismic activities do not result in earthquakes.
71. **Seismic Event** - an event as a result of seismic activity. In the context of this essay it means something that happened to the author that shook him up emotionally, like an earthquake.
I am always at the center of some **seismic event**; yesterday I stepped on my own shoe lace and fell down.
72. **Hood** - a covering for the head and neck with an opening for the face as in a jacket.
My windcheater has a detachable **hood**.
73. **Mischief** – pranks or jokes that annoy other people but are usually harmless.
The little boy is always up to some **mischief** like splashing people with muddy water.

74. **Liquid Mischief** - liquid mischief is using water to make mischief.
Liquid mischief is common at Holi when kids throw water balloons on unsuspecting people.
75. **Laundry** - refers to the washing of clothing and other textiles.
I give all my **laundry** to a person who lives near my home.
76. **Frustration** - disappointment at not getting what you want or expect.
The child cried in **frustration** when his mother did not buy ice cream for him.
77. **Accumulated** - to collect over a long period of time.
The old lady had **accumulated** enough money to buy herself a small house.
78. **Entitled** - having a right to certain benefits or privileges.
All soldiers are **entitled** to free medical treatment.
79. **Zillion** – a zillion is a huge but non-specific number. ... Zillion sounds like an actual number because of its similarity to billion, million, and trillion. It is only an informal way to talk about a number that's enormous but indefinite.
I have guests coming for lunch, but I have a **zillion** things to do before they arrive.
80. **Venerable** – old and very much respected
She bowed her head down in front of the **venerable** old man.

3. Questions

1. **Bill Bryson says, “I am, in short, easily confused.” What examples has he given to justify this?**
2. **What happens when the zip on his carry-on bag gives way?**
3. **Why is his finger bleeding? What is his wife’s reaction?**
4. **How does Bill Bryson end up in a “crash position” in the air craft?**
5. **Why are his teeth and gums navy blue?**
6. **Bill Bryson “ached to be suave”. Is he successful in his mission? List his ‘un suave’ ways.**

7. **Why do you think Bill Bryson's wife says to the children, "Take the lids off the food for Daddy"?**
8. **What is the significance of the title?**

4. Talk About It

To get confused and behave in 'un suave' ways like Bill Bryson is normal and human. Tell your class about any similar situation that you found yourself in.

5. Suggested Reading

- *Three Men in a Boat* by Jerome K. Jerome
- *Three Men on a Burnell* by Jerome K. Jerome
- *Riding the Ranges* by Bill Aitkin