

THE BARTON SERIES

BARTON SEES THE OTHER SIDE



BY

DR FAYAD W. ALI

(Ages 8 and over)

BARTON SEES THE OTHER SIDE

TABLE OF CONTENTS

STORY	PAGE
(1) THE OTHER SIDE	9
(2) DAD'S TREEHOUSE HOUR	17
(3) LOOK TO THE RIGHT, YET SEE TO THE LEFT	29

THE OTHER SIDE

It was the month of July and the mid-year sun shone fiercely on the countryside. Patches of brown grass, that once boasted a normally green hue, lay slumped at the side of the roadway. Hardly a cloud floated by and the blue skies offered little promise of rain. The birds just flitted about amidst the shady branches of the trees and the usual active squirrels seemed to just peep out of their little holes, as they conserved energy. The surrounding area, in rainier times, boasted several small ponds. Now, the few that were not dried up were visited by the wild animals, as they sought to quench their thirst. They no longer had a favourite watering hole, so to speak.



Barton sat with a few of his friends in his treehouse and slowly mopped his forehead. The others slouched lazily on their seats and Kwame lay sprawled on a mat that lay on the ground. The friends felt the wrath of the August heat and they too were less active than they usually were in cooler times. Occasionally, they would replenish glasses from a large pitcher of lemonade placed on the table next to where they sat. The small group had mixed the lemonade themselves from the fresh fruits that grew abundantly at the back of the Sandiford house, the home of Barton A. Sandiford. They sipped slowly on the sweet, cold, drink and sometimes chewed at the small cubes of ice that floated around in their glass.



“I’ll refill the pitcher of lemonade,” offered Barton as he looked at the empty container on the table.

“Thanks,” said the grateful group of friends as Barton made his way to the kitchen.

“It’s my turn,” Barton laughed.

The young boy took an unusually long time to return, but the friends didn’t mind and some seemed to be almost dozing off. However, it was the puzzled look on his face that livened their interest.

“What’s on your mind, Barton, questioned the observant Kwame as he, Shanna, Sian, Malaika and Alfredo looked at the small frown on his face?

Barton still kept the puzzled expression and didn’t answer at first. He looked at each of his friends, who had now drawn closer to him and rather anxious to hear about the new mystery that meandered in his mind.

“I saw something rather strange,” replied Barton softly.

“What did you see, Barton,” asked the children almost in unison?

“Was it a dinosaur,” laughed Alfredo.

“As scary as one,” replied Barton.

“Tell us,” begged the friends.

“Well,” started Barton, again sounding rather mysterious, “some time ago, one of my Aunts sent our family a gift of a beautiful wall plaque.”

The group loved listening to Barton’s tales which, though sometimes long, were never boring.

“The plaque,” Barton said, “has three instruments attached to a colourfully decorated wooden base. One of the instruments is a barometer, which measures the air pressure, another is a hygrometer, which measures the humidity of the air and the third is a thermometer which measures the temperature of the surroundings.”

“Such instruments are available in the ‘Household Fixtures Department’ in the stores in town, interrupted Shanna. “Nothing fascinating about the origin of that instrument except it came from your aunt.”

Barton only smiled. Shanna loved to tease him from time to time.

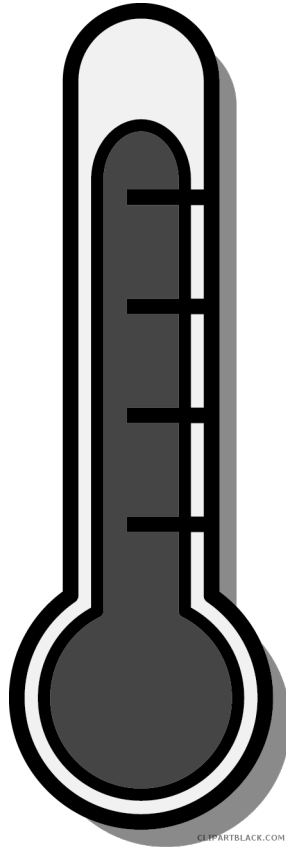
“I never really looked at the plaque in detail, as Dad only mounted it a few days ago. I know how to read a thermometer, but I wanted to do a bit of research on air pressure and humidity as I don’t know much about those terms,” narrated Barton.

“What’s the point, Barton?” asked the impatient Kwame.

“Well, anyway, I looked at the thermometer to read off the temperature,” continued Barton. “It read the temperature as being 37 degrees Celsius,” he added.

“Go on,” prompted the group, as Barton continued.

“The thermometer, as we all know, is filled with the liquid called mercury, which expands as the temperature increases and contracts when the temperature drops,” continued the storyteller.



“We learned that at school, Barton,” butted in Kwame. “The higher readings correspond to higher temperatures and lower readings correspond to lower temperatures. Didn’t we learn this in our science class,” asked Kwame?

“All of what you say is indeed correct,” continued Barton, enjoying the interest generated. “But, that is not what interested and puzzled me.”

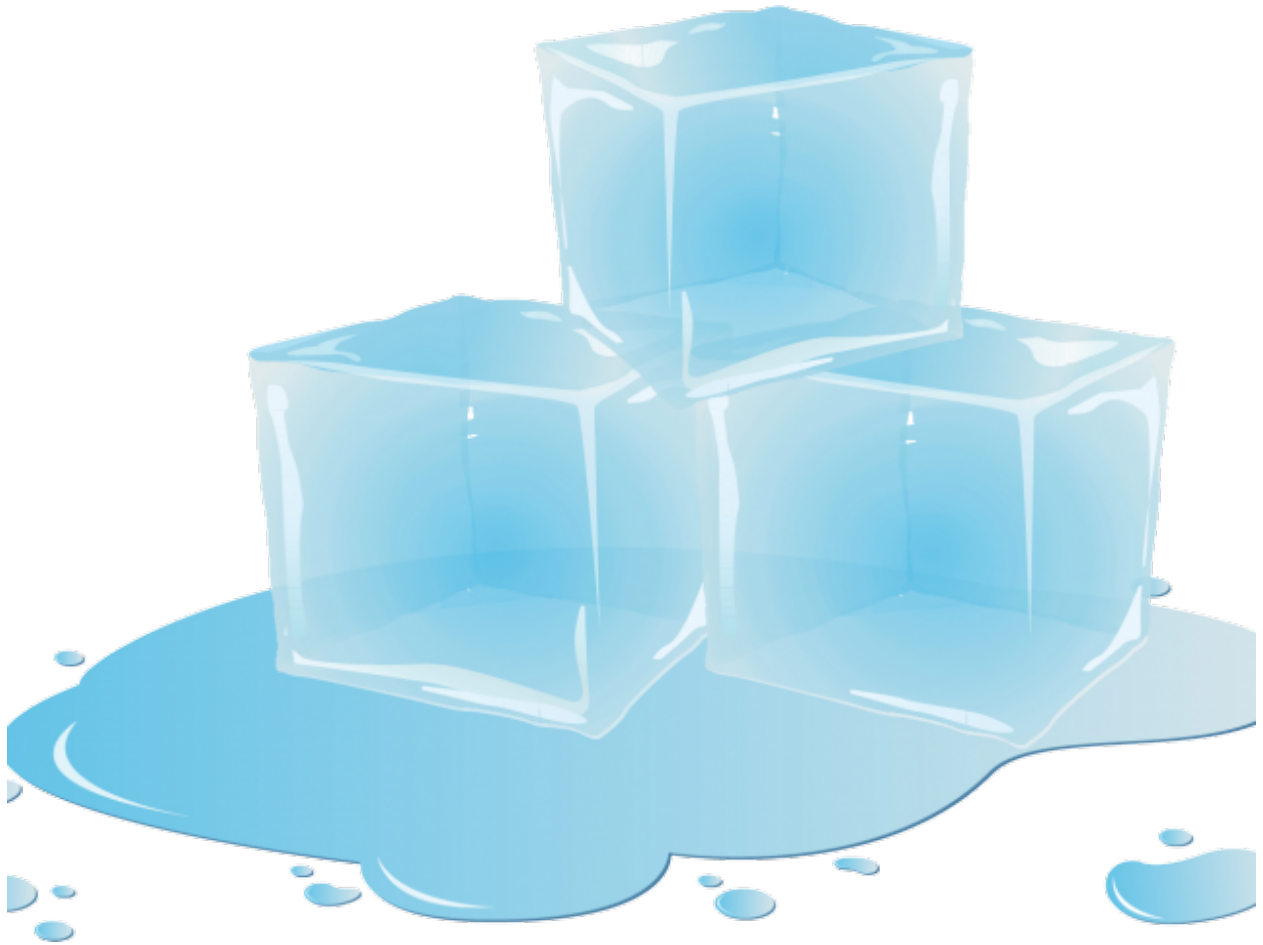
“Then what did?” asked Sian, sounding a bit impatient much as Kwame was.

“My dear friends,” said Barton, sounding rather confused. “I looked at the markings on the thermometer and saw that the numbers came down from one hundred degrees Celsius to zero degrees Celsius.”

“Zero degrees Celsius is the temperature at which water freezes,” interrupted Kwame again and sounding not too impressed. “Would you like to ask the ice cubes,” he asked?

Kwame looked towards the mug of lemonade and pretended to address it.

“Hello, ice cubes. Would you like to tell my friend Barton that your temperature is zero degrees Celsius?”



The group laughed at the funny Kwame and even more as Kwame kept a rather serious face. But, as the laughter subsided, Barton spoke again.

“Well, just under the mark of zero degrees Celsius, there were more numbers,” said Barton, creating interest among the group.

“The thermometer must have been incorrectly placed upside down,” suggested Alfredo, who was quiet all along but listening attentively.

“Numbering in two different directions, both up and down?” questioned Malaika. “That doesn’t sound correct. Maybe it might be an error by the manufacturer.”

“I don’t think it is incorrect,” replied Barton. “I checked and the thermometer was indeed right side up. There is a small part that holds the mercury, called the bulb and that is at the bottom of the instrument where it ought to be.”

The small group of friends seemed a bit perplexed and they looked at each other and then towards Barton for the rest of the story.

“What was even more surprising,” added Barton, “is that the number markings start and increase just like the number markings that are above the zero mark. It is just that they are in the opposite direction. Still, there is more, my dear friends. The mystery deepens.”

The group clustered around Barton and even Kwame got off from the floor and sat up.

“Below the zero mark of the thermometer,” said Barton a bit more loudly, “the numbers all have a minus sign in front of them.”

Kwame pretended to faint but as no one paid too much attention to him, he quickly got up. The surprised children absorbed Barton’s tall tale.

“Can we see this thermometer,” they asked?

“Follow me to the house,” obliged Barton. “You shall observe this odd phenomenon for yourselves.”

The group of five entered through the front door of the house and proceeded to admire the beautiful plaque affixed on the wall.

“This gift is far more beautiful than the ones that are at the department store in town,” commented Malaika.

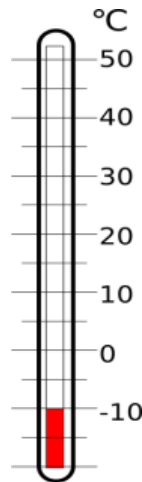
Shanna looked at the instrument and agreed.

“Your aunt has impeccable taste in furnishings,” she said.

The children all confirmed that the temperature reading was indeed 37 degrees Celsius as Barton had reported. They began to look at the numbers written just below the mark that was etched, zero degrees Celsius. Their friend Barton was

right. None of them had any doubts in their minds, but it was the first time they ever came across numbers alone, with a minus sign written in front of them.

“Only the numbers below zero have a subtraction sign written in front of them,” observed Alfredo. “But there are no numbers written in front of any of them, from which they can be subtracted. I, therefore, do not think that the minus sign means that these numbers are to be subtracted from some other one.”



“This is a great mystery,” said Malaika, “we need to solve it.”

Kwame sat on the couch and looked in deep thought. He was a smart student and widely read. He could see no feasible explanation and remained silent.

It was at that time the front door was opened and the tall majestic figure of Mr Robert Sandiford entered. He was greeted by Mrs Sandiford, Barton’s mother. All the children soon walked towards him and paid their respects to the jovial father of Barton and his two siblings.

“Have you been admiring the plaque we received from dear Aunt Jessie?” he asked the children, as he saw them near to the mounted figure.

They all replied in the affirmative.

“It is very pretty, said Shanna, “much prettier and larger than the ones that are available in the stores in the city. The wooden base is made of polished oak.”

“You are indeed very observant,” replied Mr Sandiford, realising that the little girl would have read the writings on the side of the plaque, which indicated that the base was made from oak wood.

However, there was a bit of silence among the children and they glanced from time to time at the plaque. This prompted Mr Sandiford to ask them if there were any questions about the instruments that they wanted him to answer. Immediately they pointed to the numbers that were written below the zero mark of the thermometer.

“Dad,” asked Barton, “what are these numbers that have a minus sign written in front of them?”

“I shall change, and if you will have me, I shall meet you in your treehouse in about fifteen minutes,” he offered. “I can give you a pretty good explanation.”

“We all most welcome you, Sir,” replied the group, “and we look forward to your presence and your explanation.”

The five children hurried off to the treehouse and readied themselves for their guest lecturer and what turned out to be a very thrilling lesson.