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Young
Voices

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Nandhika Nambi

A collection of Stories & Poems
by Students of **Dikshant**

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Adab Foundation is a non-profit registered society. It aims to bring Writers, Poets, Actors, Scriptwriters and Thespians together on a single platform to initiate a meaningful exchange of ideas. Chandigarh Literature Festival was inaugurated in 2012 keeping in mind the objective of Adab Foundation. In the second edition of the festival, we adopted a new format, inviting some of India's leading literary critics to nominate books and films. The nominated books were then discussed, debated, critiqued, read aloud, enacted and celebrated the way excellent books truly should. The festival is committed to celebrating books, music, art and films, with some of the nation's finest creative minds in attendance.

FOREWORD

Hello!

Welcome to our world, the world of youthful voices at Dikshant Schools. We have worked hard and joyously to put together stories, articles, poems and illustrations for the first issue of Young Voices 2018.

Starting from May this year, Dikshant International and Dikshant Global schools hosted nine celebrated, award-winning Indian children's authors. At intensive two-day workshops, each author drew upon his or her own extensive experience in a particular genre to craft a stimulating learning experience for batches of about twenty children. Approximately 60 children participated in this carefully curated and painstakingly executed activity.

Each workshop yielded an average of four print-worthy stories. Many more than four poems emerged from the poetry workshops. Almost all the participating children received feedback for their work from the best in the field. For the children whose work did not make it into this volume, there will be a next time!

A little more about the experience... Children from

Dikshant schools registered voluntarily for workshops that explored story genres of their liking, taught by their favourite authors - truly a rare and unique opportunity for the children! Horror stories was taught by Adithi Rao, historical fiction by Devika Rangachari, teenage stories by Nandhika Nambi, nature stories, poems and illustration by Srivi Kalyan, adventure stories by Lavanya Kartik, English poetry by Samina Mishra, Hindi poetry by Lovleen Misra, stories of friendship by Ranjit Lal and journalism by me, Chatura.

Do read the notes by the author-facilitators that describe how they taught what they taught and the ideas they explored with their young writers during the two-day interaction. The authors mentored the young writers of the stories that made it into Young Voices 2018, through email and over the phone, giving them feedback on their drafts. We are indeed very grateful to the stellar author-facilitators who took time out of their busy schedules to afford our children this fine experience.

The result of this experiment, a mix of cerebral planning and fun exercises in creativity by the author-facilitators, is a myriad, playful, and sometimes meditative collection of stories, poems and articles... like a pool of exotic fish that you will want to watch and admire. Take it all in, slowly. These are the voices of the young, the citizens of tomorrow... a chorus that

sings in many enchanting scales.

Even as you read their pieces of writing and enjoy the illustrations that go with them, do remember the dedication and perseverance of the team of teachers and facilitating staff at Dikshant schools, led by Director Garima Dikshit and Chairman Mitul Dikshit... a team that conducts the Chandigarh Literature Festival and the Chandigarh Children's Literature Festival every year with warmth and grace, fuelled by a genuine desire to support and promote great writing in our country.

Where would Young Voices 2018 be without the support and encouragement of the parents of all our young participants? We hail and thank them.

Last but not least, the children. They came early to school, stayed back late, wrote drafts and drafts of their stories and poems (even when the exams were upon them), and even came in on holidays to rework their pieces. Each author-facilitator expressed their delight at how openly affectionate and enthusiastic their workshop participants were. Kudos to the children. Young Voices 2018 is "of them" and "by them". And for all of us to read and enjoy!

Chatura Rao

Curator and Editor, Young Voices 2018

HORROR STORIES

Illustration by Chehaq Wadhwa, Grade X



ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

“HONING THE HORROR”...

In the last two days of August, my gang of eighteen and I studied horror as a genre. While listening to stories, we paid special attention to incidents and characters that unsettled. This helped in examining the building of a narrative rich in drama, suspense and fear. Using “The Omen” as a case study, we explored the use of flat and round characters, *mise-en-scène* (colour schemes, lighting, weather, etc.), camera angles and music in creating an ambience of terror. Very short horror fiction helped in our study of brevity (a useful skill for any writer!). We edited longer forms, removing one word or phrase at a time, until we had arrived at the perfect expression, often telling whole stories in just a sentence or two. Today, we call ourselves the “Horror Story Factory”, from where we churn out tales that will turn our readers’ blood colder than ice cream!



ADITHI RAO

After a BA from Smith College, USA, Adithi Rao worked as an assistant director on the Hindi film Satya. Shakuntala & Other Timeless Tales of Ancient India and Growing up in Pandupur are her books for children. Her short stories have appeared in anthology collections published by Puffin, Scholastic, Harper Collins, Talking Cub, Wisdom Tree and Zubaan.

The rights to Adithi's film scripts have been bought by Aamir Khan Productions Ltd. and Excel Entertainment. Left from the Nameless Shop (Harper Collins), Chuchu Manthu's Jar of Toffees (Pratham Books) & Candid Tales: India on a Motorcycle (Harper Collins Jr.) are her upcoming books.

When Adithi is not writing, she takes long walks, smuggles biscuits to the friendly street dogs, and cooks food that her family politely enjoys.

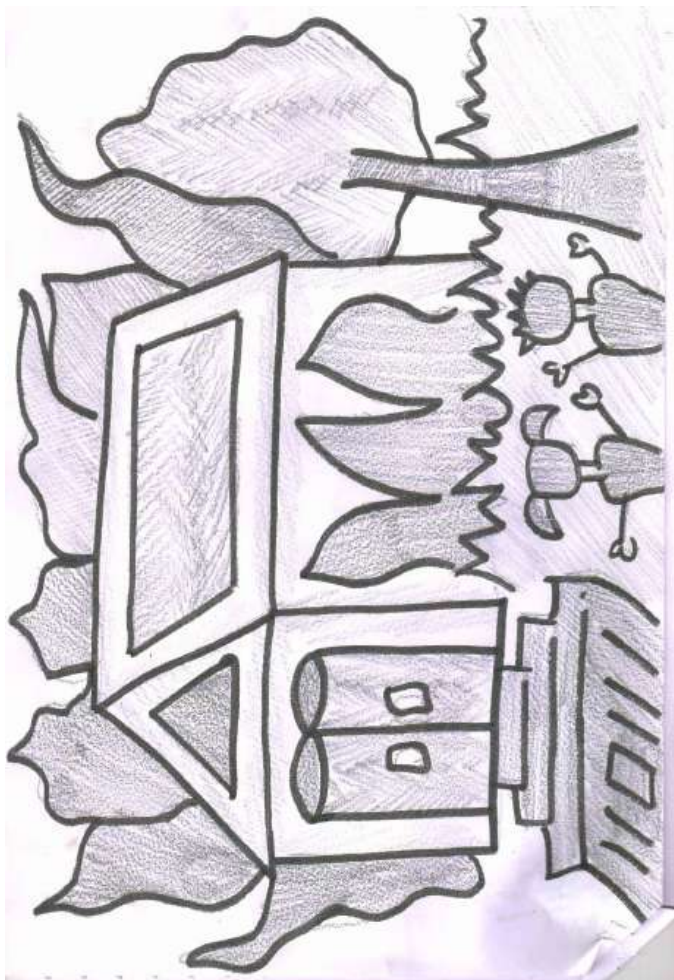


Illustration by Gauri Latta, Grade VIII



The House of Dead Fire

by
KHUSHI JAIN, GRADE IX

I know him. He is Mr Obream, the erstwhile owner, and the only resident of the Bungalow Malarkolta when it caught fire twenty years ago. The house has since been renovated and put on sale.

Whenever tenants moved into the bungalow, they complained of a horrible smell of burning flesh, and quickly vacated the place. Finally, the new owner himself moved in with bag and baggage, and began to reside in the house. He was a happy buyer with a happy family. But some days later the neighbours got the stench of burning carcass again. When they rushed over to Bungalow Malarkolta to investigate, they saw the whole family on fire. The fire had not spread to any other part of the house.

A bulldozer was brought in to break the house down. It worked all day, crashing into the walls, razing them to the ground. What should have been an easy task turned out to be unexpectedly difficult. You see, when the operator of the bulldozer returned the next morning to fell what remained of the structure, he found the bungalow standing there intact again, tall and untouched. The man stared up at it, shivering, while an unknown dread turned his feet to lead and his insides to jelly. A gentleman in a bowler hat passed that way.

“Are you okay, my friend?” he questioned gently.

The bulldozer operator turned bloodshot eyes to him and whispered, “But I... worked... all day yesterday... all day...”

The man smiled kindly and replied, “That has been known to happen. They say the house is haunted. Forget about it, my man. Take my advice and go your way. There’s other work for you to do. Don’t waste your time here.”

The operator nodded gratefully, scrambled back into his gargantuan vehicle and rumbled away.

Many years have passed. The man in the bowler hat must have been right, because from time to time people claim to have seen a shadow in the house, or to have heard a scream. They liked to think that they were hallucinating. For years, no one resided at the bungalow. But then recently, after nearly a decade,

Bungalow Malarkolta came alive again. A young couple by the name of Simmons moved in. When warned, they said that they did not believe in ghosts, and declared laughingly that they would force any spectre that got underfoot to flee. No one believed them, but silently handed them the keys to the bungalow because they were so insistent.

The Simmons were perfectly happy for the first fortnight after they moved in, laughing, cooking candlelit dinners and crossing the street to the grocery store five times a day, holding hands. It was a good fortnight for them. Probably the happiest they had ever been.

It was also the last fortnight of their lives.

By the end of two weeks, the couple began to observe strange goings-on in the house they had so come to love. Sounds of scratching at their closed bedroom door when they tried to go to sleep at night (“You reckon there are rats in the house, Paul?”), the words “Go away” inscribed in what appeared to be blood on their bedroom wall when they opened their eyes one morning (“But of course it can’t be blood!”), and the constant sounds of murmuring (“The neighbours leave their television on at all times of the day and night, it seems!”).

But when, on the eighteenth day, the writing on the wall disappeared (“You sure you didn’t scrub it out,

Marla? You sure?"), the couple began to wonder if they were going mad.

On the nineteenth day, the police found the Simmons burnt to char on a bed whose beautiful, gold-and-red upholstery and ornately carved wooden bedposts showed no signs of damage from the fire.

As the paramedics carried the bodies of the Simmons out of Bungalow Malarkolta, the townspeople gathered around to watch and exclaim. Only one man stood by himself a little distance away. A man in a bowler hat. He said nothing, but there was a strange smile on his face. I know him. He is Mr Obream, the erstwhile owner and the only resident of Bungalow Malarkolta, when it had caught fire some twenty years ago. After his death, the house had been renovated and put on sale...





An Outrageous Mistake

by

APAAR SINGH, GRADE VII

It happened during the vacations following our half-yearly examinations. I, along with my friends Hanush and Rudra, decided to embark upon an exploration of nearby places. When I was younger, I enjoyed digging around in unusual places, and Rudra always accompanied me. This time, I wanted to begin with the deserted building situated behind my housing colony. It had broken staircases and dilapidated rooms, and a roof that had caved in. It fired my imagination!

Rudra, on the other hand, preferred to go to a ruined school in Paanch Batti near the Hanuman Chauraha, which had burnt down in an accident some years ago. He told us that everybody had survived except a sweeper, who had gone missing in that fire.

The man's body had never been found, but everyone believed him to be dead. Rudra seemed reluctant to say anything further, but I pressed him, so he told me that the sweeper had been a weird fellow who never spoke to anyone. He had lived alone and kept to himself.

"How do you know all this?" I asked Rudra curiously.

"My didi once studied in that school," came the reply.

"Did she__?" I began, wide-eyed.

"Nope," he cut in promptly, anticipating my question. "She didn't see the fire because she was not there at that time. She had already left the school a year before it happened."

I decided that Rudra's place sounded even more interesting than mine. However, Hanush disagreed, because he was timid and he did not like ghosts. He started to crib and cajole us to go to the place I had originally suggested. We agreed and set out. We searched all over, but could not find the deserted building. That place had been located just behind my own colony but now we just couldn't seem to find it. How could this be?

"Paanch Batti and that burnt down school is pretty close by from here, in case you guys change your mind," suggested Rudra mildly. I jumped at the opportunity. Now Hanush no longer had a choice. We set out at once. The place was fascinating. We stopped and

stared up at the burnt ruins in amazement. Rudra and I climbed the tall, iron gates and entered the premises. Too frightened by the prospect of encountering a ghost, Hanush remained in the street outside.

“Scared mouse!” I taunted him, and Rudra and I walked towards the school. But within seconds, I began to feel a strange, creepy sensation, and nearly screamed when a crow flew by, brushing its wing against my head as it passed. The only thing that stopped me was the prospect of Rudra telling Hanush and the gang at school what a coward I was. Coward I may be, but I preferred that nobody should find out about it!

Inside the school building, we went up the staircase to the first floor corridor. We peeked into the classrooms with their eerie, blackened walls. Aside of our footsteps, there was pin drop silence. This was the sort of silence our Principal expected when the chief guest arrived on the Annual Day function each year!

Without quite noticing it, Rudra and I had moved closer to each other. We didn’t want to admit it, but the place scared us.

“Hanush will be waiting,” said Rudra after a while, trying to sound casual. “Maybe we should get back to him?”

“Yes!” I agreed, a little too enthusiastically.

We went down the stairs and we found ourselves on the first floor. Again. We tried to climb down the

stairs once more. But again we found ourselves on the first floor. At the other end of the corridor we found the school kitchen. By now neither Rudra nor I could deny the presence of an unseen entity. We felt it in the pricking of the hair in the back of our necks, in the goose bumps that sprung up our arms, in the sudden shivers that ran up our spines and crawled over our scalps.

We entered the kitchen, cautiously. It was small and had survived the fire unscathed. The sudden wail of a pressure cooker made us jump in terror and grab on to each other. Whhhhhhshhh!!!!!! I spun around to the rusted gas stove on the dusty counter. There was no pressure cooker there or anywhere else. When I turned to Rudra, I found that he had fainted.

Turning on the tap, I collected water in my palms and sprinkled it on Rudra. But instead of water, it was blood that I had splashed on his face! Rudra sat up with a start and his hand went to his face. It came away wet and red. He recoiled. Leaping to his feet, he staggered out of the room, with me close on his heels. We were desperate to get out of this place! We plunged headlong down the stairs ... that had turned into a gaping dark hole! I felt myself falling ... falling... falling...

Until I hit the bed with a thump and sat bolt upright. It was my bed at home! It had all been a dream then? I almost cried with relief.

Half-an-hour later, after washing my face and brushing my teeth, I went downstairs where Mamma was boiling potatoes in the pressure cooker for the parathas she was planning to make for breakfast. The whistle went off and I smiled weakly. So this was the sound I had heard in my nightmare, then.

I sat down at the table and picked up the morning newspaper. The first words my eyes fell on were the headlines: “School in Paanch Batti burns down. Sweeper missing.”





Mirror, Mirror on the Wall!

by

JANVI SHARMA, GRADE VII

I hate to admit it, but I can't help playing pranks. This has got me into really bad situations. I have been sent to the Principal's office a hundred times because of it. One such day was when I tried to prank my mom! Believe me, since then I have never messed with anyone again.

We had moved into a new house, and so the cupboards were still empty. My sister and I decided that one of us would hide inside one and jump out at mom when the other one brought her into the room under some pretext. I knew that bringing her in here would be a much more difficult task, so I chose the easier one. I climbed inside the cupboard wearing a really horrid mask. The time was 9:59 a.m.

Illustration by Siddhant, Grade IX



I waited for fifteen minutes but nobody came. I got bored. I didn't even have my phone with me. However, I stayed where I was because I promised myself this trick was going to be amazing. We had even placed a camera so that we could record mom's reaction and upload it on YouTube. We were going to earn a lot of money!

Half an hour passed, and my patience was wearing thin. Besides, it was dark in there and all I had for entertainment was the reflection of my own face in the mirror fixed to the inside of the cupboard door. I peered at my reflection. Was that a zit coming out on my cheek? I leaned in closer to get a better look... and went inside the mirror! I mean I actually went into it. I don't know how that happened.

I landed with a thump on the floor of the world inside the mirror and my mask was gone. The sky was dark as night, whereas it had been morning in my world, remember? I stood up and dusted my hands. A beautiful castle stood before me! It was old and had giant gates and massive towers. It also had about a million windows, but there was no light shining through any of them. They were all dark.

I started walking towards the castle. Inside, it was even more beautiful than the exterior. Golden lights were shining everywhere, and the walls were filled with old paintings. It was like I had reached some kind of

magical land and I had already decided that I wasn't going back. Who wants to go to school when they can live here? Only, I wish I had brought my friends along because I was already missing them.

I started up the stairs that were covered with red carpets. When I reached the tenth step, the lights began to flicker. All at once, they went out completely, and the castle was plunged into darkness! I didn't know if it was just my imagination, but I thought I heard the sound of a girl wailing. I got goose bumps listening to the shriveled, grating voice, and my skin crawled with fear. But being pretty brave by nature, I mustered up the courage to keep going.

When I reached the first floor, I listened for the voice again. There it was! I followed the sound and reached a room. The voice was growing louder! I tried to open the door but found it locked. The wailing stopped. I bent down and peered in through the keyhole. The room was dark, but by the moonlight streaming in through the window, I could make out white sheets on the floor stained with blood. There was a girl in there, tied to a chair, and she had large slashes on her arms. That explained the blood! I started to shiver

My heart told me to go inside and help her. My mind screamed for me to run, run for my life, back to my world! Suddenly the girl turned her head to the door (as if she knew I was standing behind it!). It was my best friend! I

gasped in horror.

What was she doing there? In a panic, I picked up a heavy mahogany chair from the landing and hurled it at the door with a crash. When I burst into the room my friend was gone! The chair was gone! The blood-stained sheets were gone! I spotted another door in the room and opened it. It was the bathroom. Terrified, I turned on the tap and splashed water on my face. When I raised my head, I saw the mirror above the wash basin. Almost without my knowing it, I leaned in. . . . A second later, I was back in my cupboard at home!

I heard footsteps approaching, and then someone opened the door. I screamed. The someone screamed too. It was mom. She was as terrified as I was! Only my sister stood behind her, laughing. After everyone calmed down a bit, I pulled my sister aside and snarled, “WHY WERE YOU SO LATE? I ALMOST DIED OF FRIGHT IN THERE!”

“Are you crazy?” she demanded. “I was back in three minutes. Why were you scared? Did the spiders get you? Oh, for heaven’s sake, get that silly mask off your face!”

“Shut up! You took over an hour!”

My sister looked at me pityingly. “You know what? There’s no point in arguing with you. See for yourself.” She pointed to the wall clock and I looked. My sister was right.

The clock flashed 10:02 a.m.



The Revenge

by
MEHTAB SINGH, GRADE 8

CHAPTER-1

It's been thirteen years since Mary died in a terrible car accident. Alex, her boyfriend, loved her more than life. He got so shocked after the accident that he became depressed and couldn't sleep or eat. On the other side, Mary, in the form of a spirit, was looking for a way to talk to Alex. Some spirits of her past besties told her



Illustration by Harshita, Grade VI

that she could contact him by shifting her soul into a living being, but that she would have to do it very carefully, while no one was watching her. So at night she began looking for Alex, and found him in Arizona, in the house that he had built for her when they were to be married. She found out that there were seven servants at the house working for him. When she saw him upstairs, she started crying because he was so thin and weak. She sat beside him. He felt her presence, but ignored it.

Mary returned to her spirit home and came back the next morning. Jack, Alex's butler, was closest to him, and Mary decided that his was the body she would possess to fulfil her purpose. Over the next few weeks, she prepared herself for the take-over. Then, one night, Mary descended into Alex's physical realm through the body of Jack. It was the night of the tenth of August. The date on which, thirteen years ago, she had died.

CHAPTER 2

Mary had waited outside Jack's bedroom door, watching Jack sleep. She had memorized the spell she would need to use to enter Jack's body, and when the butler walked past her in the narrow corridor, Mary had known that the crucial moment had arrived! "Halelujah Wakamejuhah Transferahijuhah!" And lo! she found herself safely housed inside the body of

Jack! She was very happy that she had managed to do this without damaging herself or being observed by anyone. She entered Alex's room, and Alex awakened and became confused as to what Jack was doing inside his room at night. Jack approached the bed and sat down, looking at Alex silently. Alex became unnerved by the unblinking gaze of his butler.

Suddenly, the butler said in a voice different from his usual one, "I am Mary. I have come to ask you to avenge my death."

Alex cried out in fright. So Mary vacated Jack's body and returned to the spirit world. After that, for several weeks she tried to approach Alex. However, unable to believe her, Alex always grew terrified and ran away.

One day, growing tired of the routine, Mary once again possessed Jack and entered Alex's room. This time she locked all the doors and windows. Sensing the presence of the spirit, Alex prepared to scream for help when Mary clutched his knee urgently.

"Sit," commanded the butler sternly, in her voice, a voice that Alex remembered so well. Alex stopped screaming and sat.

"It is me, Mary," she explained gently. "I am using Jack's body since I have lost my own, and have no other way to speak to you."

Suddenly Alex became calm. "Why have you returned now?" he asked. "It's been thirteen years

since you died in that accident...”

“That was no accident,” said Mary sadly.

CHAPTER 3

Alex was shocked.

“But...” he stuttered, “the post mortem report said... a second car... accident...”

“The second car rammed into mine on purpose,” insisted Mary.

Alex stared at her, speechless. “Who... who did it...?” he whispered faintly at last.

“After the crash, my spirit left my body and followed the car that killed me, until I found myself in Thomas’ house. Thomas, Alex. My ex-boyfriend. Your best friend.”

Too stunned for words, Alex leapt to his feet. “Thomas?” he cried. “Thomas?”

“Thomas had been after my money when he dated me. After I left him and later fell in love with you, he was furious and wanted to make us both pay.”

In the silence that followed, Alex slowly sat down again, shaking. But Mary’s eyes were steady.

“Now, you must make him pay,” she said calmly.

Alex was a gentle and kind man, loved by all who knew him. He had never knowingly hurt anyone. And now he was being asked to kill someone to get his beloved the revenge she longed for!

“If you can transfer your spirit into the bodies of the living, why won’t you kill him yourself?” he asked.

“It is by means of a human hand that he must be killed, and killed fiercely, painfully,” she replied with such finality that Alex accepted her words and questioned her no more.

Slowly, he nodded. “Very well,” he said. “I will kill Thomas. But I will do so in a way that nobody suspects me. The world must never know. The respect I have always enjoyed should remain the same.” Mary agreed, and assured him that she would manage everything.

Someone had killed his beloved. He knew that now. And from that moment, a fire was kindled inside him, born of revenge. He began training himself to become a killer.

Many miles away from Arizona, in the city of San Diego, Thomas was enjoying himself at a party. He never suspected the danger that was coming closer and closer to him...

CHAPTER 4

A few weeks later, Mary and Alex began their journey to San Diego. They reached that same evening armed with a plan that would avenge Mary’s death without costing Alex his reputation. Alex reached Thomas’s house that very night. Mary, in spirit form, had already checked out the secret passages of the old

mansion (of which there were many, because Thomas's father worked as a high security official of the United States government), so that she was able to point Alex to the most unknown route into Thomas's bedroom. Once safely hidden under his bed, Alex would be able to shoot Thomas dead, quickly and without being discovered.

The secret passage began from the door of a subway, many miles outside the mansion. Alex walked for hours in total darkness, with only the dim torch from his cell phone to light his way. The passage was full of spider webs, and foul odours. At the end of the passage was a trap door that led to a steep flight of stairs. Exhausted, he sat down for a rest and fell asleep. But he woke up with a start from a nightmare in which he saw himself being killed. Finally, Alex climbed the stairs, pushed open the trapdoor, poked his head out ... and fainted.

CHAPTER 5

When he opened his eyes, Mary's spirit stood before him. He was shocked that he could see her, but the sight of her familiar, beloved face which he had never thought to see again, made his heart clench.

"Darling," he said tenderly, "why are you crying?"

"Because," replied Mary with a sob, "you are dead."

Alex's blood froze. Dead! Dead? How could it be possible? Then suddenly he understood everything.

He could see her because he too had become a spirit! He looked down and gave a cry of horror. His body was lying on the ground at his feet, its eyes open and staring blankly at the ceiling. A trail of blood flowed out from under it. The blood was fresh. The blood was his!

Standing over the body of Alex was Thomas, pistol in his hand. Beside him was Jack. The Betrayer!

Now Mary and Alex, both dead, had nothing to lose. And they had no mercy to spare for their killers. With a cry, they transferred themselves into the other two's bodies - Alex into Jack, Mary into Thomas. The lovers looked at each other through the eyes of the other two men. Then, slowly, the hand of Jack and the hand of Thomas rose up to place pistols to their own heads. Jack and Thomas. Alex and Mary. They smiled at each other, twisted, lurid smiles. And their fingers pulled the triggers.

Mary and Alex emerged, holding hands. They looked down at the bodies of Jack and Alex, at the bloody holes in their heads. Where the bullets had ripped through skulls, small clouds of smoke emerged. Beside them, they saw the spirits of Jack and Thomas, staring down at their own dead bodies in horror.

Their work here was done. Their revenge was complete. United at last, Mary and Alex left for their home in the spirit world.



The Spirit of White Tiger

by
KARAN VEER, GRADE VIII

“Michael, I will be late tonight. Going around for dinner to George’s!” my father called.

“Alright dad!” I answered. I am a 16-year-old high-schooler. My father is a scientist who works in a research lab at a private company with his best friend George. Uncle George is great! He’s always been there for us, ever since my mother died twelve years ago.

I went to my room upstairs and got into bed when I heard the sound of gunshots. I quickly opened the window. Dad was lying on the front walk, face down. At first, I thought that he had ducked to the ground to escape the bullets. But then I saw the blood! Horribly frightened, I rushed downstairs.

“Dad!” I screamed. “Dad! Listen. Nothing will



Illustration by Dakshraj, Grade VI

happen to you, ok? Take a deep breath and keep your eyes open. I will call an ambulance!” I was really scared. As I rose to dial the medical emergency number, my dad held my hand and pulled me down. “Listen Michael,” he whispered feebly. “In the basement is a black iron box. It contains a golden locket with a very powerful spirit - the spirit of the Great White Tiger. Michael, I never told you that the locket chose you. It will give

you enormous power and speed. My child, you should use your powers for good. Fight for the oppressed. Michael, I believe in you..." He turned very pale.

"Dad!" I cried. The neighbours surrounded us quickly. The ambulance arrived. But my father was already dead. It was the saddest day of my life. I couldn't think of anything, there was nobody left. I was all alone. I couldn't stop sobbing.

"Don't worry, Michael," Uncle George said. "I will try to help you the best I can."

It has been six months since my dad passed away. I have started working in a bakery. Uncle George pays my school fees. By the time I am done paying the rest of my expenses, there is no money left. Things are difficult, but I always remember my father's last words: "Michael, I believe in you..."

I found the gold locket exactly where my father had told me it would be. There was a tiger printed on it. I was sitting in my room feeling confused about what to do next when suddenly the locket began to shine. My head started to throb.

"It's the locket." I gave a start as I recognized my dead father's voice. "It's warning you against danger."

"Dad!" I cried, leaping up and looking all around the room. "Where are you?" There was nobody in the room. But Uncle George was coming towards my house. "Mike, it's me!" he called. "Coming!" I answered.

I hurried to open the door. “Hey! I thought you were___” he stopped when he saw the light coming from my pocket. “What’s that?” he frowned curiously.

I told him all about the Spirit of the___

“White tiger,” finished Uncle George.

“You know about it?” I asked.

“Your father used to talk about it when we were free or hanging out at the lab doing nothing.”

“What did he tell you?” I asked.

“Many things. It’s a long story. I guess your dad mustn’t have told you that your grandfather too had the Spirit of White Tiger? He had enormous power and speed. He died protecting his city. Your father preserved the locket in the hope that he would receive its power. But the locket never gave him the Spirit. One day, when you were five, you accidentally discovered the locket. Your father was surprised to see that in your hands it shone brilliantly. This led him to believe that you would be the next White Tiger.”

“But... why me?” I asked, feeling dazed.

“Because the locket sees something special in you. Something that no one else has.”

“But...”

“The locket itself chose you. There is nothing more to be said.” Uncle George’s tone was final. I fell silent.

That evening, at the bakery, I had a phone call from Uncle George. I answered it and I heard someone

gasp, “Help me... it’s turning me into some kind of creature...”

Over and over again I called Uncle George’s name but the line went dead. I burst into the lab minutes later, panting for breath. The place was a wreck. One of the scientists was lying on the floor with strange marks on his body. I rushed to him. He was just barely conscious. “How did this happen?” I questioned him urgently. I saw his expression turn into fear. “A giant creature...” he gasped. “Very powerful ... destroyed ... everything ... George ... George destroyed ...” He fell silent and could speak no more.

The police arrived and took over. There was no sign of Uncle George. I searched desperately and finally I went home. That night I dreamt that I was in a very bright room and my father was there. He kept telling me that I was the new White Tiger. When I woke up the next morning, my finger nails had hardened and curved into strong, powerful claws. The claws of a tiger. The locket on my bedside shone brightly. The Tiger on it had vanished!

I didn’t know who had wrecked the lab or what had become of Uncle George. Was he the creature? Was there any way to bring him back? Whatever it was, no matter how difficult the task, I knew that I had the power to succeed. I no longer had with me the Spirit of White Tiger.

I was the White Tiger.



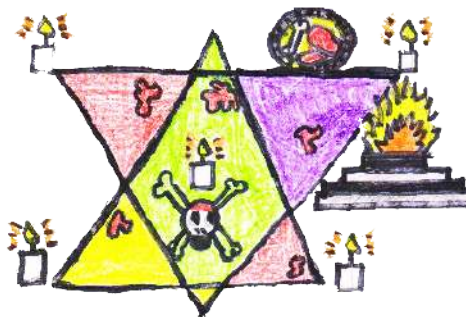


Illustration by Harshita, Grade VI

The Trip to Titan

by
ARJUN JAIN, GRADE VIII

“Would you like to go to Horand?” I asked John. He shuddered. Horand is a ghost town in Algiua. And Halloween was round the corner.

“As soon as they start selling the tickets,” I told John, “I will be the first to buy two, one for each of us.” The very next day, the ticket counter for Horand opened and I hurried over there to make the purchase.

When John and I entered the town, we came to know about an old castle and went there. When we entered an old, decrepit castle which was home to bats, and made our way to its library. I was going through the collections of books like the other tourists around me, when I came upon a strange one. The book was called ‘The Power of Black Magic’. I opened the pages

and found a button. I called to John, and he hurried over. While going through the book he accidentally pressed the button.

The book sucked us up and took us to ... Nowhere. That's right. It took us to a place called Nowhere in Titan. John and I were afraid. We could see whole space from there. Dark stuff loomed up in front of us. I ran, but the dark thing possessed the body of John. Now John started to chase me. His eyes turned red, a tail appeared, his teeth grew bigger. I was horrified!

I desperately tried to look for the book. An alien type of entity appeared before me. It told me that this was the Ghostyard of Titan, and if I was willing to leave John here, I could return to where I had come from. But John was like my brother. I couldn't just leave him alone in that terrible place! The alien entity gave me another option. It said that it would send John and me back to Horand with its highly-trained guards, and if I handed over 'The Powers of Black Magic' to them, they would leave us in Horand, from where we'd be able to make our way back home.

Now I was going nuts! The whole point of coming to Horand was to enjoy Halloween, but this turn of events had become more than I could bear!

I agreed to give the Entity the book, so it sent me on my way. John, the guards of Titan and I reached the library where this misadventure had all begun. I

scurried around searching desperately. Finally, at long last, I found ‘The Powers of Black Magic’. As soon as I picked it up, the book started to grow hot, and a page came flying out of it. On the page were printed the words:

NO EVIL SHOULD BE NEAR IT OR THIS
BOOK CANNOT BE OPENED.

- The Powers of Black Magic

I asked the guards to leave the library but they refused to budge. I got fed up and started chanting a Christian hymn. This made the guards uncomfortable and they began to squirm. The squirming became writhing, then thrashing! Finally, they began to disintegrate into pieces, until they vanished altogether.

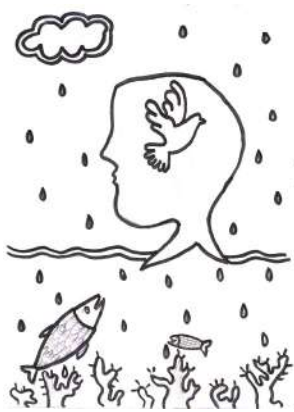
I held the book to my chest and closed my eyes tightly, weak with relief. Beside me, I could feel John’s body shaking with the aftermath of fear. Suddenly, a passer-by bumped into me. My hand slipped and accidentally jabbed the button. I felt myself being sucked up, and with me, John ...



BREATHE

by
NIDHI, ANNA, VARDHA

My breath carved
A long way
It went through the hay
Rustled with the leaves
Mixed with the soil



NATURE WRITING



Illustration by Pranat, Grade VI

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Nature and Self

In our contemporary world, we tend to get disconnected from nature and forget that we are nature. How do we cultivate our sensorial capacities to be more open to experiencing nature? In the two-day workshop we worked from awareness of breathing to mapping memory and place and then translated different ideas and experiences about nature through different modes of writing. We explored poetry, essay and short story writing. We also played with humour, sense of joy and sadness, wonderment, futuristic thinking to find diverse ways to think about nature. We also explored how we can use each of our senses to sensitise ourselves to nature and then bring it into our writing. Nature and self are entwined in our capacity to feel, use our senses and express our experiences as part of the natural world. The more we delve into the textures of the self, the more we will discover our relationship with nature. The workshop attempted to emerge a creative space and process in this exciting, unknown, undiscovered, and often forgotten spaces for children.

Illustration workshop

Reading the work of another author and poet is a delightful journey to discover our own connections. This workshop introduced students to reading and finding interesting moments in the stories and poems of other students to capture them in illustration. Different styles of art, illustration, compositions and layouts were introduced to children in this short workshop to inspire them to come up with ideas for their own illustration.



SRIVI KALYAN

Srivi Kalyan is an artist, designer, educator, writer and research scholar. She works at the fluid and exciting intersection of arts, media, education, design, environment and self-reflection. She has a Masters in Arts in Education from Harvard Graduate School of Education, Cambridge and a Masters in Fine Arts from Stella Maris College, Chennai. Srivi has authored and illustrated several books for children and adults and is an award winning writer and illustrator. She has worked for some of the leading educational/edutainment organizations like Sesame Street, NCERT, idiscoveri, Katha, Tulika, Birla Edutech, Macmillan, Young Zubaan, Ilango's Art space. She is the Founder-Director of Fooniferse Arts Pvt. Ltd. Her personal work can be viewed at www.sriviliveshere.com, www.fooniferse.com.

She is the Associate Dean for the School of Law, Environment and Planning at Srishti Institute of Art Design and Technology, Bengaluru, India. Her ongoing doctoral research focuses on Indian philosophical traditions, aesthetics and personal art practice to uncover intrinsic ecological consciousness. Blending expertise in research and practice across multiple disciplines, Srivi brings transdisciplinary approaches and insights to her work.



Banyan tree's journey

by

NIDHI GUPTA, GRADE VII

Once upon a time, a baby sapling of a banyan tree was growing. His friends and parents were fed up of his interests of sending his roots to further places but he wanted to explore more. His parents asked him to become a normal tree. He tried to behave like normal banyan trees but it didn't work for him. Then after two days he again pursued his interests to meet new friends but he failed. He tried again and again and finally one day he went a little further. From then on he used to send his roots to further places. Time passed, he became older and made many more friends. He sent his roots far away to meet his old friends. His roots travelled through from forests, houses, hills, etc. Once a tree root came and told him that his parents are not

well. His roots went there. He got to know about different kinds of soil. He went to explore more, he got to know more about the trees with different fruits' soil. He faced many problems. Some times in different soils his roots were not able to absorb the water and heat. When he went into the desert, his roots didn't get water and sufficient nutrients. After ten years he became a huge forest and now he could easily travel. He taught many other trees how to send their roots to different places.

At last he died due to a drought. His students taught other students and they further taught other students and the cycle of life continued.

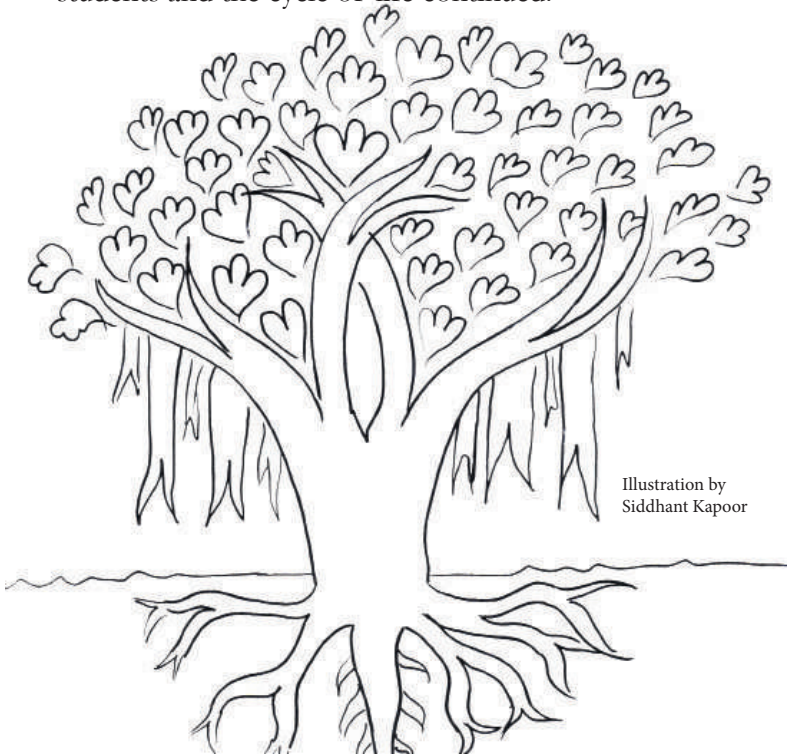


Illustration by
Siddhant Kapoor



Darkened Doorway

by

VARDHA VERMA (GRADE VII)

I stood near
a darkened doorway
I drew
the curtains away
Tiny droplets
on their way...
Windows were
misted up today
Petrichor's aroma
summed up
the day
Grass dewed her lashes
This was my journey
on a perfect
monsoon day
to a darkened doorway



Illustration by Jashnoor Kaur, Grade X

Being Rain

I am rain and my life is full of fun. I have travelled the world; I keep on travelling indeed. Being rain makes life exciting. Up in the clouds is my home. I enjoy being in the cool and condensed house of mine. I have discovered many things of interest. I am thankful to the water bodies that make me who I am. I enjoy every aspect of my life. I am divided into small droplets, which shine like pearls. I enjoy raining everywhere and you can never guess how thrilling my life is.

One of the days, clouds were getting heavier and they could not bear our weight anymore. So it was time to pour down as rain; it was time to swing in the air. I was really excited to rain. We were having a talk, when suddenly one of our mates slipped out of the cloud. He was not a veteran. It was the first time he was going down. He seemed to be scared and at the very moment one more droplet went down. We were all elated to rain and swing in the air. So one by one we started falling down. Suddenly a large mass came and dragged us along. Well! Well! That was adventurous too. So we left the first droplet to travel on his own. His journey was till the attic of the 12th floor apartment of an old building. Leaving him behind we continued our journey. Not bothered about others, I continued my

journey happily. Finally I was able to spot land. It was wet. I was coming with a great force and was about to drop on the surface. I started thinking where would I drop. I could get down swiftly from the surface of a small green leaf. I could slide and hang at the tip of the leaf and have a glance at the world. I could then look forward to my second destination. My second destination could be a rock. Making it clean and tidy and dragging myself through its surface. I could also drop on the face of a little girl. I would alert her that it would rain soon. I could drop on the bough of a tree. Being dropped on a bough would be the best as I would roll from one leaf to another. As I was thinking, I dropped on a smooth surface; it was a leaf. I went through the delicate symmetry of a leaf and slid down slowly. This was the best part of all. Being a raindrop is a blessing.

We raindrops sail with the boats and travel with the winds. We rain through the streets and the highways. We are raindrops and we travel all day.



Dreamland of Myths

by

MUSKAN DHARWAL, GRADE VII

This is one of my childhood tales from when I was a little five-year-old girl and lived with my grandparents in the hills of Shimla. I am very good at creating poems. I asked my grandparents one day, “Do the mythical creatures we read about really exist?”

“The world came into existence millions of years ago with several creatures on it. Mythical creatures are those creatures about which we have only heard moral stories but no one has ever seen them. Mythical creatures have been a mystery till now and no one has ever discovered that they really exist or not,” replied Granddad.

“What amazing creativity nature has! Mythical creatures are magical creatures of nature,” said Granny.

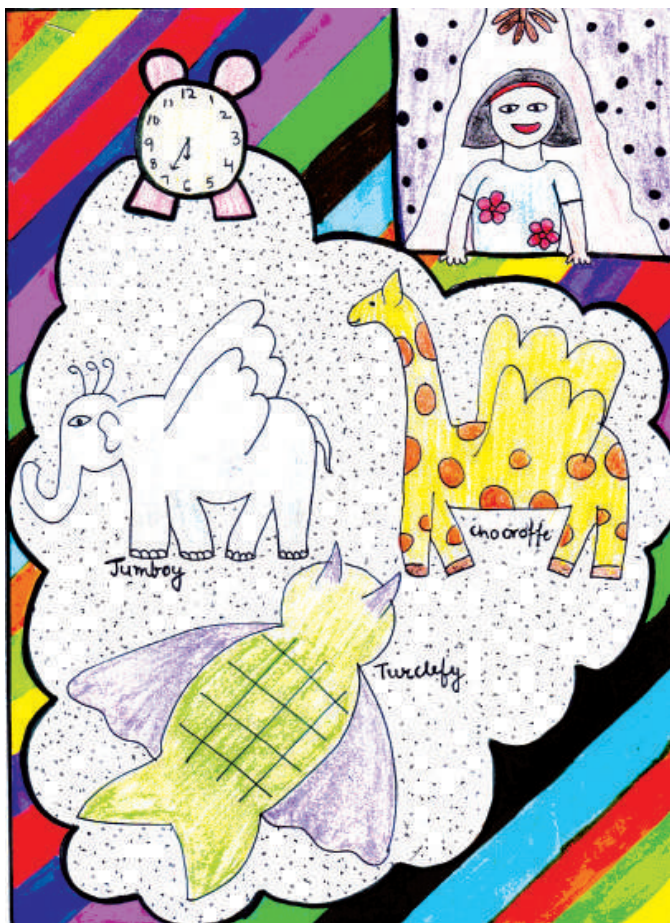


Illustration by Chehaq Wadhwa, Grade X

“Is it true Granny? I wish I could meet a mythical creature!” I said excitedly.

“Yes, I am sure you will definitely meet one!” chuckled Granny.

I thought that it would be such an amazing and extraordinary thing if I really met one such creature in the beautiful hills, which too are a beautiful creation of nature.

That night I could not sleep after dinner as I was all lost in the dreams of the mythical creature. I did not even hear someone knocking at my window pane. I only heard it when he started calling my name. His voice was deep and scary, but I still crept out of the bed and opened the window to see who he was.

When I opened the window I jumped back like a grasshopper. He was a huge creature who looked much like a turtle but was accompanied with horns on his head. He also had a tail of a fish as well as a pair of wings.

Oh my god! He was a mythical creature! Yes, I had made it; I had finally seen a mythical creature. I was about to shout out to my Granny, but then the creature told me not to call anyone and I agreed to it.

“Hi what is your name,” I asked nervously.

“My name is Turcleyfly but you can also call me Tefly and I have come here specially to meet you as you wanted to meet a mythical creature,” said Turcleyfly.

I got super-duper excited and hugged Tefly tightly.

“Hop on my back and I will take you to my land where you can meet all the other mythical creatures who live in Shimla and are very good friends of mine,” said Tefly.

I sat on his back and said, “Ready get set fly, Tefly...”

Up he flew and it was such an amazing sight to fly over Shimla as the entire city is there on a hill. The beauty of Shimla is just wonderful. The big and tall mountains, the pollution free air and most important of all, the scenery of Shimla gives us the view of heaven. I felt as if I was touching the beautiful stars and the moon.

“Wow! Shimla looks so beautiful from up here,” I said, bouncing on his back.

“Be careful Ammie or you might fall,” said Tefly.

“Oh! I am really sorry,” I said apologetically.

“It’s ok. And overall our Shimla is a very beautiful place to live in. You know nature is very beautiful if we do not destroy it,” said Tefly.

I was so touched with the words of the mythical creature. He cared so much about nature.

Tefly and I had a huge talk before we reached his home. I asked him a lot about the things he could do and got to know exciting things about him. And I have prepared a poem for the things that Tefly can do. It goes this way:

Tefly Tefly my best friend
Can turn a cruel man's soul to a kind den
He can fly high up in the sky
With the help of his beautiful wings
And with the help of his horns
Can turn an injured man
Healthy and sane
His body even glows in the dark
to decorate the world all stark
Tefly can turn dirty and still water
clean with his tail
and has much to do instead of playing in vain.

Soon we reached a cave at the top of a high snow-covered hill which Tefly claimed to be his home and his friends were in there but I could not see anything as it was dark inside. Tefly got me down from his back and led me, letting his beautiful green skin glow in the dark. Then I could see that it was not just a cave.

It was a beautiful place which I referred to as 'land of myths' at the first look. I was wonderstruck to see so many creatures of whom I had never heard.

They organised a grand party for my welcome. I was so excited that I was about to faint in excitement. The inside was a wonderful cave which hardly looked like one. It was far far better than Shimla with hills all around covered in snow and rivers flowing between the valleys. It was like God had settled all of nature's

beauty here.

I felt like I was in paradise. I couldn't wait to tell granny about the wonderful encounter I had with these mythical creatures which were all a part of nature!

Tefly introduced me to all his friends. There were at least a hundred of them! I cannot list all of them so I will list only my favorites.

The first and my most favourite one was Griffly. He had the body of a lion with a pair of wings. He was very courageous and bold just like a real lion but he was also very kind and generous. He offered me a ride on his back and introduced me to all the places in the cave. After the ride I knew each and every corner of the cave. All thanks to Griffly!

The next one which became a very good friend of mine was a little firefly with long legs like a giraffe. His name was Chocroffe. At first I was very scared - I thought him creepy-looking, but then I enjoyed his company. I played a lot with him, plucking fruits from tall trees by sitting on his back.

I also met an elephant with a pair of wings. His name was Jumboy. He was a strange one because he had small ears instead of big fanny ones. It was a delightful experience riding up and down his long nose.

I enjoyed a lot with these creatures. They were working very hard to make this world a better place in

many ways. I have made a poem describing what these animals were doing to make the world a better place to live in. It goes this way:

Grifly, Chocroffe, and Jumboy
Are best friends of mine
Grifly is very courageous
And loves his pride of mythical creatures
If a man befriends him
He will become as courageous and loving as him
Chocroffe has legs of a giraffe
Which glow in the deep dark
Helping people find their way
Chocroffe is helping nature this way
Jumboy is as large as a pumpkin
Can give anyone the power he has gained.

When I turned around for a moment I could not see these creatures anymore. Suddenly I heard a sound and I realized that it was my morning alarm. Oh my god! This was just a dream. Oh! How I wished it was true!

I told Granny about my dream and she was fascinated by my imagination. I just loved those mythical creatures and really want to meet them again!

“Nature is all around us.”





Journey to Space

by

JAGMEET SINGH, GRADE VII

My spaceship launched on October 19, 2059. My name is Jaggi and my friend is Harsh. We were the astronauts of my spaceship.

The morning of 15th October, I was drinking my tea and reading a newspaper. Suddenly the phone rang and I picked it up. It was my friend Harsh. He said, “There is a new planet near planet Zubarium and that is 1009075 light years away from Zubarium.” “What should we do, I asked him. Then he said, “We can go to that planet with only your rocket as it has supersonic thruster lightning buster. So we can both go to that planet and find out if it really has life or not.” It sounded like a grand adventure to me and I said, “Yes! Let’s go. Pack your bag and we will meet at Chatbir and

go from there. Take everything that is necessary.”

Present Day – My spaceship was launched and Harsh and I went to space in just sixty minutes. We got out of the solar system. We were at a speed of 18950 mph. And suddenly came a sound from the Thruster, “Boom” and we crashed on to an unknown planet. We were very scared as we had no other way to be alive. We needed to go out and find some help. So we both wore our spacesuits and went walking on the planet. When we were walking we saw some antenna. Harsh held that antenna and pulled it. When he pulled more he saw that the antenna was that of an alien. That alien was like an ant, just a cm long but with an antenna 2m long. There were lots of aliens and a lot of antennae

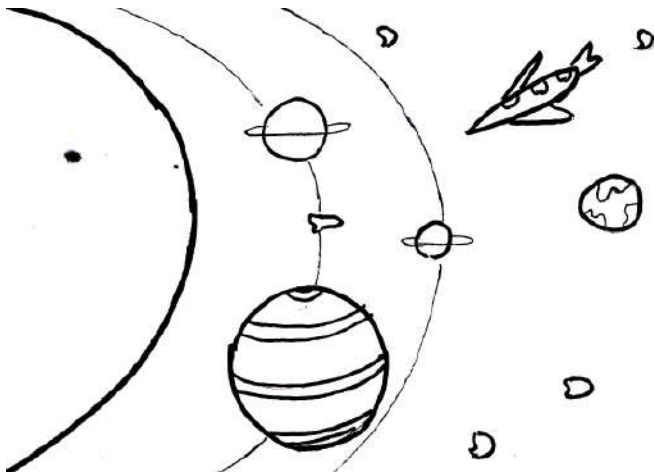


Illustration by Simrandeep, Grade VIII

around us. I think they were scared of us so they attacked Harsh and me. Their guns were very small and less harmful but with the lasers, we fell down and a piece of chocolate, which was in Harsh's pocket also fell down. They started eating that piece of chocolate.

Then an alien came flying to me and said, "Hello my friend!" We were amazed to see that he could speak English, so I asked, "can you please speak in English with us?" They said, "yes, we can speak every language in the universe." I was amazed as normal humans cannot learn more than ten languages. Suddenly he said, "my mechanic will repair your spaceship in thirty-five minutes and six seconds." I was amazed as human beings take a year to repair spaceships like mine. Then the alien said, "my name is Zubahu and this is planet Kurana. Welcome. Let's rest in the castle of Kurana." So we walked to the castle. When we were walking we could see that Kurana had many moons. I asked Zubahu why there were so many moons for his planet. He said that they were making the moons. I was surprised to hear that they were artificial moons. Then he said, "they are not moons, they are planets made by us. There were many people living in Kurana, but the resources of Kurana are very low. So we decided to make many planets, so citizens could live there happily." I was amazed to hear that they made the planet. I think they were using their ant ability to

build, as the houses were like anthills. They knew the secret of turning waste into nutrient-rich soil. Hence they could make their own planets.

So in a few minutes, they repaired my spaceship and we carried on with our journey. Our speed was twice as fast as our original speed, now we were going at 37900 mph. But I was tired, so I gave all the controls of my rocket to Harsh. I went to bed and slept. Suddenly we crashed into another planet. I ran to the main room of the spaceship and I saw that Harsh was also sleeping. I slapped Harsh and asked why he was sleeping. He looked guilty. Suddenly he said, “Look! There is a metal plate, so there could be life on this planet too.” So we wore spacesuits and went out to look and we met a bird. He had huge wings, the tail of a lion, and the body of a gorilla. We both hid and wondered what was happening on this planet. Sometime later, many such aliens who were like big birds came. One baby alien suddenly saw us and said, “Look, a Buggy!” They attacked me at first. I was scared and suddenly an alien stopped them and said to the others, “They are humans from earth. They are intelligent.” Then the alien said, “I am so sorry that we scared you.” Harsh said, “It’s okay. But hey, you can also speak English. Could you also speak in Punjabi?” He said, “Yes!” Then I said, “It looks like you are going somewhere. Where are you going?” Then he said, “My name is Birdquarter and

this planet is Arjunator. We have the longest friendship with earth because we migrate to earth during the cold winter season. We cannot repair your rocket though. We can give you the materials for it.” I said okay. We had learnt to repair quickly from the Kuranas. So we quickly repaired the rocket in two hours as nothing major was damaged.

When we started our rocket, it began to fly like a jet plane. But suddenly we saw one more planet! Harsh said with a happy expression that this was the planet we had come looking for. We entered the planet. There were only trees everywhere. Harsh said, now we don’t need to wear spacesuits, as there are many trees here. So we got out with excitement and began to walk. We walked for miles, but we did not see anything except trees. But suddenly, we saw a city of marbles. When we entered the city, we saw two kinds of species: Plant species that could walk, and tiny red people who could fly. They did not seem scared of us. One red man saw us and said that he will take us to the castle. We were scared of what we would meet there.

He took us to a castle. There we saw two kings sitting on a big golden chair. The kings were one tree and one tiny red villager. And they said, “Welcome humans!” I was again amazed as they could speak our language. They said, “You have come to find out whether life exists here. Yes, life exists here! Do you

know why we are alive? It's because villagers provide us with carbon dioxide and we give them oxygen, fruits and other things they need." Then another king said, "Do you know that we have a long relationship with Earth? We sent our trees to Earth and also the people who populate your villagers."

Harsh and I began to wonder – Here we are in space, looking for life, but everything seems to be connected back to Earth! And it looks like all other species are also as intelligent or more intelligent than us! We thought we should begin exploring life on Earth more closely!

"So let's begin a new adventure," I told Harsh. We had just started our journey back when my alarm went off and I woke up. Aliens, my dream and my best friend Harsh, all had flourished in my dreams.



NATURE'S TRUTH

by

BHAVY MOUDGILL, GRADE VII

I woke up at six in the morning. There were sheep in front of my house that morning as usual. But the sheep were huge in size! In fact, all things were larger than me! And another unusual thing was that there were flamingos besides my house! What was happening to me? I ran at top speed to my parents. My father and mother were also small in size like me! Another thing was that all the members of the society were at my house the same size as me! How could this have happened? Now, what to do? At last, after a lot of discussions, we decided to look for a solution outside our home.

“But there are many risks to our lives outside our home,” said Mr. Sharma.

“But we do not have any option now except to take



OFF ON A HOLIDAY

by
ANNA, GRADE VIII

Early morning, I got off the bed after a relaxing night's sleep. I looked out at the sky through the window. Rain made the climate pleasant and cool. It made me very happy. On a plant at my window, a colourful butterfly's tiny eggs seemed like pearls on a leaf. The greenery started my day with joy.

I quickly dressed up and went for breakfast. My summer vacation had just started. It was the second day of my holidays. My parents had planned a trip to a hill station. "Oh wow! Hill station. I am fond of watching mountains covered with green trees," said I. We decided to go to Nainital in Utrakhand. Nainital is a Himalayan resort town in Kumaon region of Utrakhand. I was very excited about the trip and started researching about Nainital. My mother

started packing our bags. I put in some adventurous things like a rope for climbing, a compass, etc. My parents and I were ready to go on this trip.

We travelled on the train from Delhi to Kathgodam station and took a taxi from there to Nainital. While travelling, I saw so many small fields full of flowers and butterflies. Everywhere I felt different colours had covered the fields with happiness. I saw people cultivating the land. We crossed the plains and were travelling in the hills. I could see big mountains looking like barriers. I saw deep valleys having narrow rivers and they seemed so deep in comparison to the mountains. We were not too far from our destination. We took a taxi to Nainital. After we reached Nainital, we took rest at the hotel. I could feel the fresh air

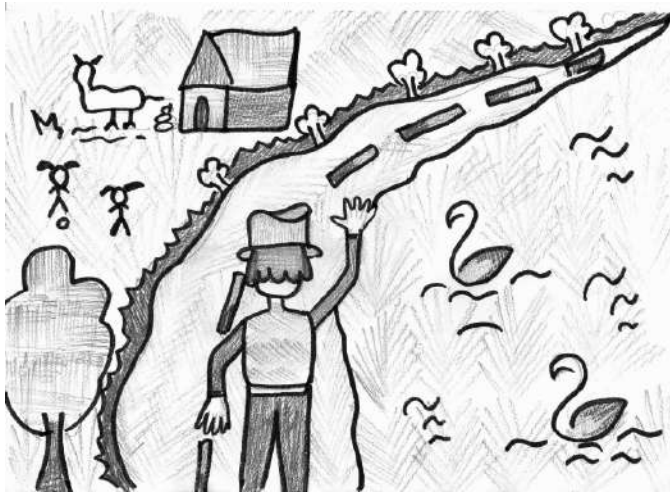


Illustration by Gauri Latta, Grade VIII

and cool climate, quite different from that of Delhi.

I was very excited to see different hills, parks, coniferous trees as I was greatly interested in nature. I love adventures and enjoy walking through forests alone. It relaxes my mind. The best thing I like is when it rains on the mountain. The wet soil makes the land beautiful. The aroma of flower and wet soil make the mountains seem alive. Mountains are the best place for listening to silence and the voices of birds.

We went to our hotel rooms which we had booked online.

The next day we went hiking. Climbing hills are my favourite activity. Hills are beautifully covered with tall, green trees looking like poles of light. I think that trees are our best friends since they help us in so many ways. As we walked, I saw that some people were standing near trees and were marking red colour cross sign on big trees. I went and asked the man why they were marking the trees. He told me, “after a week, the construction of a mall is going to start here and for that, we need to cut the trees.” I was very upset on hearing about the decision to cut the trees. Climbing the hill was interesting, but I could not bear to think of all the trees that would be cut soon. As much as I was happy climbing and having adventures, I was even worried about the trees. As we climbed, I had met many children who lived in the hills and we had played together. They had told me about their favourite trees on the hills.

My family and I went to our hotel had dinner and went to sleep.

That night I felt sad. I felt that I couldn't help my tree friends from being cut down. Then suddenly I had an idea.

I got up early in the morning and went to those same hills and called out to my new friends. We saw that some people had already started cutting trees. I ran to them and said, "Why are you cutting the trees for constructing the mall? Trees are very important for our life and breathing." They laughed at me and said that it was their job and they had to do it. All my friends and I went to that hill and we hugged the trees tightly as if we were never leaving them. Then the men came and asked us to move aside. My friends from the hills were also very upset and told their parents to come. We all spoke about the importance of trees and wondered why we even needed a mall. "Why don't we build a forest mall?" I suggested.

"Malls are not as important as trees are! Instead of a double-storied mall, you can make shops in a single line," said the parents.

"We need to cut these trees. The orders have been given by the government," said one woodcutter.

"The mall is going to be made for the public but the public loves trees more than they love the mall," said the parents and the children.

The woodcutters went back. When my parents and I were going to the hotel, we were thanked by all the people

for helping to save the trees.

After resting a little while, my parents and I went to Nainital lake which is also known as Mango Lake. I felt very happy after saving the trees and having enjoyable moments with my new friends. Now it was nearly time to go back to our home in Delhi. I wanted to live here throughout my life because the fresh air, mountains, greenery, animals, and birds touched my heart. I was not willing to go to Delhi. Hill stations are much better than cities because the development of cities has resulted in so much pollution. Now I was sitting in the train with my parents. I had enjoyed every moment on the hills. Through the window of the train, I noticed a great difference between mountains and cities. As I was travelling from Nainital to Delhi, I could see that trees were getting lesser in number. I enjoyed so much that I wished to go to hill stations every year. Hill stations are places for relaxing and enjoying with nature.

We reached our home and I decided to write all my adventures in my diary. Now my school holiday homework was left - we had to fill our travelogue. I wrote everything that I had done including how I had saved trees from being cut. This was the last night of my summer vacation. Next morning, I woke up and went to school. I was very excited about sharing my experiences in class. A few days after submitting my travelogue, my teacher called me to her and said, "Anna, you won first prize for your travelogue!"



The Mysterious Bug

by

MANVI LONGIA, GRADE VII

It was a sunny day
In Science class
I was feeling ill
When suddenly
I saw a bug on the window sill

Silently I moved towards the bug
And held it
In my hands' hug
It was red in colour
With black spots
And looked like a
Polka printed ball

Illustration by Jashnoor Kaur, Grade X



I felt a connection
With this insignificant creature
My friends didn't matter now
When I was feeling bored
the bug became a way of my recreation

Suddenly the bell rang
And we had to walk to the petrol pump
My new friend and I walked together
Enjoying the weather

Life was now to change
It was to become interesting
With the experience
Of watching the world of a bug
Who is happily strange

At the pump
The bug started tickling me
I could see that it was getting irritated
With petrol's smell
Whereas people in normal world
Rather like it well

We both hopped on to the bus
And the bug jumped on my hand
Was he scared or excited

to listen to cheerful voices?
He rushed up and down my arm
And then settled calmly in my palm

In the evening, in my garden
I left the bug on the ground
It seemed to be hungry
And I could hear its stomach howl
Searching for aphids
It went all around

Scared from its predators
Birds, wasps and spiders
It hid under the leaf
Of the fennel plant
And housed there
For a life which is brief

This little bug
Dressed in red
Strolling among grass-beds
If I were as tiny as it
I would do the same
I would stay in a leafy house
And travel to so many wild places
In my little garden

I saw how bugs play in their own world
They roll in the soil and get dirty
Staying deeply rooted to nature
Enjoying themselves in full swing
I enjoyed this game more than
Playing with computers.
I get my feet muddy,
I flap my arms like I have little wings
And fly with my little ladybug
Exploring leaves and flowers.

This lovely little ladybug
My secret friend
Sent from the heaven above
Will watch over my garden
And fill it with love



Secrets in the forest

by

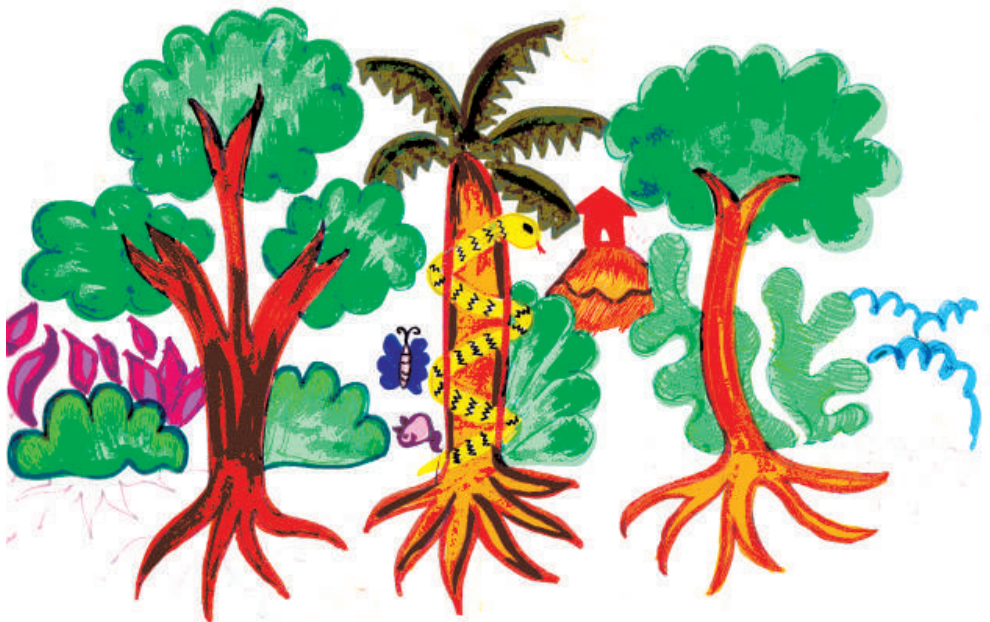
ARJUN JAIN, GRADE VIII

After finishing a hotdog in the junk corner, I bought a packet of popcorn, planning to feed the ducklings in the pond. I left the junk corner and went towards the pond. After a while, I heard some rustling noises from the bushes. I thought there must be a rabbit so I took a close look. Unfortunately, there was an Oriental Rat snake which was feeding on a lizard. I dropped my popcorn packets to go take a closer look because it was swallowing the lizard. I was always curious to watch a snake swallowing anything. As I took out my phone to take a picture, the snake struck me. It bit me on my foot and after a few seconds, I was feeling nauseous and faint. I tried to run but my wound was hurting me and I fell. After a minute I stood up but threw up right

away. I took out my water bottle and drank some water. I took my father's handkerchief (that I happened to be carrying that day) and wrapped it around the wound. I couldn't put weight on my right foot so I basically dragged it around and went to the nearest doctor to get treated.

I told the doc that it was a rat snake bite and he treated me for it. I was nervous, but the sound of the birds was so delightful that my nervousness drifted away like a pollen grain from its flower. Fortunately, because the snake was non-venomous, I felt better soon and went to my friend Neel's house to rest because it

Illustration by Mehakdeep Kaur, Grade X



was close by. Neel and I talked about the creepy forest because if I had to go home I would have to cross the forest. It was 8:00 pm so I went with Neel. We passed through the reserve and could hear the scuffling of small animals hunting for their dinner, the last call of day birds and the hoot of an owl. After walking for ten minutes we reached the forest and could hear the wolves howling. Neel and I were rather worried that the wolves might attack us, so we took a stick with us and lit the tip with fire and got on our way. We didn't talk until I reached my home.

My mother invited Neel to stay over because it was night and dangerous for Neel to go back alone. My mother talked to Neel's mother and they both agreed. We slept as soon as the dinner was eaten. In the morning we discussed how to get over our fear of the forest. We ate butter and bread. Neel told my mother and me that he had to go, so I accompanied him. When we reached the forest, I told Neel that we should have a camping trip with our parents and it will be enough to remove the fear. Neel agreed and we went home.

We reached Neel's house and talked to his mother. She agreed and when I reached home, I knew that my mother would say no if she came to know that I had been bitten by a snake. I reached home and you bet I didn't tell my mother about the bite. She said yes for the camping the next morning. I went to the pond and fed

the ducklings, had dinner and slept.

Next morning Neel, I and our families took off and reached the forest. I was nervous (Neel was listening to songs so he wasn't). We reached an elevation that seemed right and agreed to spend the night there. We ate some rice balls and pitched the tent. It was already 6 pm so Neel and I started looking for ways to entertain ourselves. We heard crickets and cicadas begin their dusk call. We heard monkeys making disturbing noises. My father said that these noises were to chase predators away. If monkeys make noises to chase away predators, we can too, we thought. We got a tape recorder out, waited for the monkey to make noises and once we got it we taped, we left it by the door of our tent. We had dinner and then we had a campfire. We talked a lot and enjoyed the sky full of stars.

Just as I'd begun to believe my fear was gone, we heard howling voices and I got spooked. My father took a torch and went into the bushes to check. My father came back with a puppy. The puppy was howling. Neel and I almost burst with shame because we had been freaked out by a puppy. The puppy was black in colour and looked very cute. When I touched it, its fur was similar to the rabbits of the reserve. I begged my parents to keep the puppy. They said yes and my fear of the forest was suddenly gone. Nowadays when Neel and I go to the butterfly garden we take the cute black

puppy with us and it plays with the butterflies.

I can hear nature talking to me in so many different voices now. When I walk in the forest with my puppy, we hear the monkeys and know their alarm calls. We can hear the deer. We wonder about tigers, but I now know how to walk quietly and listen to its secrets. It has become my favourite place to play.



The Upside Down Bat

by
JANVI SHARMA, GRADE VII

I was in my room. The science book was lying open on my lap but I wasn't studying. I was being forced to study Science. I felt like a prisoner locked up in a cell.

I felt like going to my best friend's house and standing on her terrace with her, calling people rude names and playing pranks on them.

However, even my best friend was stuck in her house and locked up in her room. Our phones had been taken away. It's so unfair, I thought.

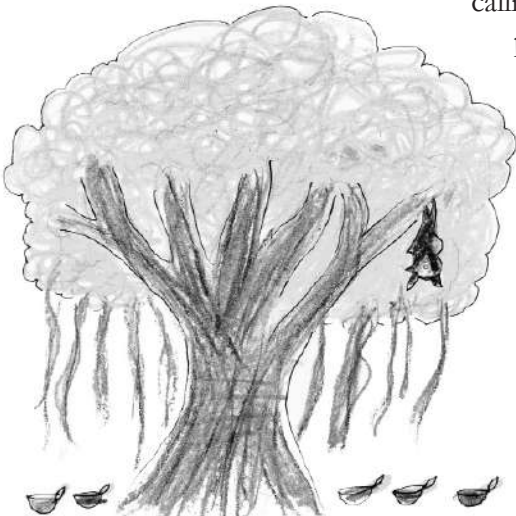


Illustration by Janvi Sharma, Grade VII

I felt suffocated sitting in my room the whole day... I definitely needed some fresh air. So I went out into the balcony. Finally, I could feel a bit more like myself. I felt like growing wings, rescuing my best friend, lifting off into the sky and never coming back. But it was impossible!

I began looking at the people who were down below on the road. Everybody was in a rush. I looked at the banyan tree that was right in front of my house. It had threads and diyas from people's offerings. People worshipped that tree but I thought that it was really spooky. Then, I saw something black on the tree. It must have been someone's cloth stuck up in the tree. It looked like a really thick and huge sweater. But it was summer and people don't wear sweaters in summer. I wondered what it was.

I came out of my room and went down to the banyan tree, telling my parents that something from my room had fallen down and I was going to fetch it. I opened the gate and went and stood beneath the tree. Nothing was visible from down there. So, I came back up. I found a pair of binoculars from the pile of junk in my cupboard. I went outside and tried to see what the sweater-like thing was. It was a bat and what was worse was that it was hanging upside down. It wasn't moving so it was probably dead. The dead bat fascinated me so much that I dragged a chair from my room and sat

in the balcony with the book still open on my lap. It was really difficult to concentrate on my exam with the bat hanging upside down right in front of me. I kept watching the dead bat. After a while, I decided to go inside and study. But just when I was leaving the balcony, the bat moved one of its wings. I got so terrified that I went inside. Bats could fly and this one was probably going to come and suck my blood.

I was still distracted by the bat. I could not help it. I watched it from my window for any sign of movement. I was really scared, but my heart was telling me to go out and help the bat. I felt a bit sorry for it. Instead of flying in the sky, it was stuck in that scary tree. Of course, the tree was scary for me but not for the bat. The scary tree must have been the bat's home.

Enough was enough; I had to help the bat no matter what! I went down and called my father. He was actually really pleased that I cared about freeing the bat. Dad said that I needed to hit a ball near the bat. So, I brought the new pack of balls I had bought for a friend. I threw a ball close to a branch near where the bat was, but it flew at a building nearby. I wasn't that good at throws. I told Dad to throw the ball but he wouldn't agree. He wanted me to be the one to free the bat. I was kind of scared that I might hit the bat. After wasting four balls, I hit a branch close to the bat. I was hoping to see the bat fly up, but it didn't. Instead, it fell on the road.

At least now I knew one thing: it was dead. Maybe its wing moved earlier because of a gust of wind. I had seen many dead animals but I had never felt that sad. I had even killed many ants, flies, and mosquitoes. That's when I realized that I was a killer. In fact, every human is a killer of animals. We don't realize that we are killing a living animal. We are taking someone's life away.

It was morning now and the bat was still lying on the road. My neighbours were going batty over the bat. They weren't sad because the bat was dead. All they cared about was the smell coming from the decomposing bat and how it was blocking everyone's way. If they knew that I had brought it down, they would have killed me!

I told my dad about this. Even he thought that something had to be done about the bat. He called two men from work. They put the bat in a carry bag. They insisted on throwing the bat into the garbage, but I requested them to bury the bat and they finally agreed. They did a good job of burying the bat carefully in our garden.

A question lingered in my mind - how did the bat die? I searched online and found that bats die because of viral and bacterial infections or a lack of food to eat because of human impact on the bats' environment. We have killed mosquitoes and insects, which are the major food of bats... Could it be that the bat simply fell asleep and never woke up?

We kill animals, we cut trees and we destroy the environment. Bats help the environment more than humans do. Bats are the reason we are alive. They eat insects and mosquitoes that cause fatal diseases. After all these ways in which bats are useful to us, we still continue to treat bats and other wild animals like they are of no use to us, indeed as if they are criminals.

I wondered about death in nature. Why does everything that is born have to die? Why did the bat have to die? I wondered what would have eaten the bat if it had been left on the tree; what will happen to the bat after it's buried? Will it still remain the bat that I saw, after a year or two?

First, I thought that bats were killers and that they were worse than vampires but this incident has changed my opinion about them and all other animals. I have realized that animals have sensations and they don't deserve to be killed. Now, I love bats and think of them as friends. I wasted five balls and ruined my friend's gift because I wanted to dispose off the bat respectfully. After all the heartache and effort, I realize all of this was worth it. At least now the bat can rest in peace, within the earth, its home.

THE BREATH'S VENTURE

by
TEAM POEM (MANVI, MUSKAN,
JANVI, ANUSHKA)

I finally reached here
At last I have entered the atmosphere
Reached the peak
And felt like the king of the hill
I jumped to the clouds
And ate cotton sprouts
Came plummeting to the tree
And saw the beautiful sea
I went through
And danced with the waves
Hung out with a stranger
And got stuck in a cave
I hugged the back
And cuddled with the leaves
Guess what?
I'm breathing.



POETRY



Illustration by Siddhant Kapoor, Grade X

POETRY WORKSHOP

The poetry workshop that I conducted focused on two key ideas – self-expression and rhythm. We began with reading and discussing a picture book, *This Is A Poem That Heals A Fish*, a wonderful resource to reflect on what a poem is about. This led to playful exercises using words as building blocks, making word lists and word chains, focussing on sounds and syllables. We then moved on to writing Chinquapins, short 5-line poems that focus on an economical and imaginative use of words. The workshop also included reading and discussing different kinds of poems to understand the ways in which words create rhythm–repetition, alliteration, assonance and consonance – and how imagery and metaphor form the basis of the poetic imagination. Exercises in the later part of the workshop were structured around particular poems as resources, such as *A Room in the Past* (Ted Kooser) and *I was Raised By Women* (Kelly Norman Ellis). This led to students writing poems on memory, family and growing up, reinforcing the importance of self-expression in poetry.



SAMINA MISHRA

Samina Mishra is a documentary filmmaker, writer and teacher based in New Delhi, with a special interest in media for and about children. Her films include *The Teacher and The World* (2016), *Jagriti Yatra* (2013), *Two Lives* (2007), *The House on Gulmohar Avenue* (2005) and *Stories of Girlhood* (2001). She has also created a multi-media exhibition, *Home and Away* (2004) and written children's books published by Scholastic, *Tulika*, *Young Zubaan*, *The Wisdom Tree* and *Penguin*. She worked on *Nehru's Children*, an archival research project on the archive of the Children's Film Society of India for the India Foundation for the Arts. Her interest in the ways that the arts can be included in education led her to head programming at the Nehru Learning Centre for Children and Youth for two years. Her book, *My Sweet Home: Childhood Stories from a Corner of the City* (Mapin 2017) comes out of a creative writing and art workshop designed to reflect the world through children's self-expression and creative practice. She is a board member of IAWRT India and is the co-curator of *Soundphiles*, an experimental listening experience, at IAWRT India's Asian Women's Film Festival. She is currently teaching the International Baccalaureate Film programme at Pathways School Noida and collaborating on *Torchlight*, a web journal on libraries and bookish love. She is also the Curator of *Half Ticket*, the children's section at the MAMI Mumbai Film Festival.



The House Had a Room

by
MANVI LONGIA
GRADE VII

The lanes of the city
Lead to the house with the cheerful green walls
And a happy tree with fragrant leaves in the garden

The house had a room
A room with curtains of vibrant and lustrous blue
A room with a lampshade that needed repair
A room with the sound of chirping birds waiting for
their old man
A room with a wooden bed, a cupboard, a wooden desk
with drawings
Things among which my grandfather bustled keeping
things spotless

The house still has that room
But
It is now a room with my grandfather's spirit walking
on cat feet
It is now a room where light from my grandfather
Now a shining star in the sky
Spills through its window
It is now a room where the birds are silent
The lanes of the city
Now lead to the house with faded green walls
And an old tree with withered leaves
in a lonely garden

Chinqapin: Table

Table

Rectangular, four-legged
Holding, helping, hurting
Really wants to move

Desk

Home

A home is a heaven with our parents' as God
A home is an ocean with the waves washing troubles away
A home is a cloud with shade on a hot summer's day
A home is a nest with children safe in mother's lap
A home is a garden with birds chirping grandparents' stories
A home is a heaven



I Feel Happy

by

BHAVY MOUDGILL
GRADE VII

I feel happy when
I play the guitar and
Dream of becoming
A star

I feel happy when
I draw and sketch
Places I have been to
People I have met

I feel happy when
I have new clothes
To wear
“You look beautiful!”

I hear

I feel happy

I feel happy

I feel happy

A Home

A home is a warrior because it fights to protect us,
A home is an eraser because it rubs all our problems away
A home is an umbrella because it shelters us from heat and
rain
A home is a true friend because it helps us without any
demand.



Illustration by Krietty Sharma, Grade IX



The House without Him

by
JANVI SHARMA, GRADE VII

A house full of noise
Where everyone's screaming
at the top of their voice
Music playing very loud
Everyone dancing around
But someone's not here
"Where is he?" whispers the chair
"Is he never going to open me again?" murmurs the
cupboard
"Who's going to keep books on me?" The table
mutters
I go to his room
Without him
Even the bright lights seem so dim

Without him
The sound of a rocking chair
Mute, like it was never there
Without him
The bookshelf feels empty even with the books
I open his cupboard
I lay on his bed
“I’m always with you,”
Is what he says

The Mall in the Past

by

VARDHA VERMA, GRADE VII

I left behind a place
Which had snow like cotton
It had a big church
Where worries were forgotten
The church stood tall and stared
Saw birds and leaves
Always there

It still abides in my mind
But I wonder how the mall looks now
Is it still surrounded with boughs?
Do people still move like clouds?

The mall on the hill
The mall of my memories
The mall of my childhood



Illustration by Trishi Jain, Grade V

Raised by Trees

by

VARDHA VERMA, GRADE VII

I was raised with trees
Shelter-giving, life-giving
Type of trees

I was raised with trees
Branches spreading, roots growing
Type of trees

I was raised with trees
Facing challenges -
Biting cold, scorching heat
Changing with seasons
Type of trees

I was raised by the trees



Illustration by Manvi Longia, Grade VII

Home

by
ANUSHKA SHUKLA, GRADE VII

Home is a school where children bloom
Home is a hospital that cures our problems
Home is a garden where we are carefree
Home is a heaven full of people we love

Ice Cream

Ice cream
Chocolaty, sweet
Licking, lip-smacking, freezing
Tasty to eat
Yummy





Illustration by Anushka Shukla, Grade VII

My Old Park

by

SHREYA SRIVASATAVA, GRADE VI

In my old park is a mango tree
The wind blows freely
Standing on the green grass is my favourite slide
I climb and slide
I climb and slide
In the setting sun
“Come back home” calls out my mum
But I am on the swing
The merry-go-round
The branch of the mango tree

The streetlights twinkle
It is time to go
The stars shine above me
And I am far now
Far from the mango tree in my old park

I was inspired by

by

ANSH BANSAL, GRADE VII

I was inspired by my father
By his motivating speeches
By his style of working
By his reaction towards wrongdoings
I was inspired by my father

I was inspired by my mother
By the delicious food she cooked
By the wonderful gifts she bought
By the love she showed for everyone
I was inspired by my mother

I was inspired by my teachers
By their knowledge
By their speech
By their style of teaching
I was inspired by my teachers

ANIMALS

COLLECTIVE POEM

The elephant's tail is a rope
The elephant's body is an asteroid in space
The wings of a bird are waves in the ocean
The bird's shedding feathers are flowers falling off trees
The coat of a tiger is the stolen hues from a setting sun
The tiger's teeth are a freshly-sharpened pencil
The fur of the bear is hot chocolate on a cold day
The cocoon of the caterpillar is the ozone of the earth
The cheetah's legs are the hoverboard's base
The peacock's tail is a rainbow
The sting of a wasp is the prick of a rose stem
The eye of the eagle is a lens of the DSLR
The rabbit's eyes are shiny crystals in a mine
The glow-worm's light is a star in the night sky

THE BREATH'S VOYAGE

COLLECTIVE POEM

It went to a cruise
A world tour
Feeling like a tourist
Then went to a forest
But bored by seeing the monuments
Heaven was beautiful
Hell was creepy
Soil was sleepy
Some people were beautiful
Some were creepy
Then I saw a man with a fan
When I went near it, I was blown
Away and landed on hay
I crashed on the hay and there
I lay



ADVENTURE STORIES



Illustration by Jashnoor Kaur, Grade X

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP :

ADVENTURE STORIES

Through the course of the two-day workshop, the children were given an understanding of how to develop and write an adventure story. With slides, interactive discussions and a series of fun exercises, participants were taught the different elements of a story, the importance of strong characters and given the tools to build a good plot. Each participant was encouraged to begin developing their individual stories. The workshop ended with an introduction to the editing process and its role in shaping a good story.



LAVANYA KARTHIK

Lavanya Karthik is a writer and illustrator of children's books, based in Mumbai. She has written several picture books for various Indian publishers, illustrated over twenty books and is the creator of the Ninja Nani series for middle grade readers. Her picture book, 'The Lion's Feast', was shortlisted for the Hindu Youngworld – Goodbooks Award for best picture book in 2017. Her book, 'Neel on Wheels', won the Children First contest organized by the Vidyasagar Trust and Duckbill Books. Lavanya also writes fiction for adults - her speculative fiction has appeared in Crossed Genres and Zubaan Books' anthology, Breaking the Bow. Her comics have been published in Kindle magazine, the Comix India anthologies, Youth Inc. magazine and The Rundown.



NEVER GIVE UP...

by
BY KUNAL WADHWA, GRADE VII

It was a lazy Sunday morning and Noah decided to while away his time playing video games. Suddenly his Whatsapp notification flashed 'Alex'. Noah cried out with delight, "Ah, Alex!"

Alex was his classmate, a sporty person with a black belt in karate. No doubt he was rude to many but was kind towards Noah. Alex was Noah's saviour whenever he got into a trouble with the boys who bullied him for not being



Illustration by Myeisha Kaur, Grade VIII

masculine and aggressive. The message read, “Hey Noah, let’s meet at the old manhole near the church right now.” After reading the message, Noah at first turned back to his video game. However, his screen showed “Game over”. So he stood up to get ready. He applied oil on his hair, combed it nicely, and picked up the most important thing - a tube of Odomos to carry along. He rushed off to the manhole.

Alex was waiting for him when he arrived there and as he saw him, he asked, “Hi Noah, what were you doing?”

“Playing video games as usual,” replied Noah.

Alex commented, “I don’t understand your craze for video games.”

“I like them because they excite me and there is always a sense of achievement when you reach the target you have set...” Noah would have said more but Alex interrupted him.

“Listen to me. Peter and his friends disturb me a lot. I can’t tolerate them anymore. I called you here to discuss this.”

“They bully me too,” Noah moaned. “The other day they tore up my Maths homework and flushed it down the loo. I got into so much trouble with Miss Rose! I could not tell her what had actually happened. They would have beaten me up!”

“Did they dare do that? Enough is enough!” this was one aggressive Alex. “They have crossed all limits. We

need to fix them.

“Oh yes! But how?” Noah said with as much excitement as if he was thinking about crossing a maze in one of his video games. As they were about to discuss their plan, they saw the very subject of their conversation, Peter, and his gang, walking towards them.

Peter was a senior in Alex and Noah’s school. His father was the big shot of the city so Peter assumed he would be the big shot in the future, who could hence bully everyone at school. When Alex and Noah saw the way Peter was looking at them, they tried to run.

“Hey!”

“No!”

“Stop it!”

Protesting was no use. Peter and his friends shoved their juniors around and finally pushed them into the manhole. The sound of thrashing and yelling echoed inside the cave-like manhole which led to a dry drain, but there was no one to listen to Alex and Noah crying out for help.

Peter shouted down at them, “don’t you ever dare enter my area... or I’ll...!”

Alex shouted up ferociously, “What? What can you do?” Peter looked at Alex sadistically and then laughed. “Oh, just see, the fake black belt is trying to act brave even from inside a manhole. And what about you, loser?” But Noah was looking down with slumped shoulders.

Labelling them cowards, Peter and his gang walked

away, whistling, now in search of a new target.

Down there in the semi-dark, Alex asked Noah, “Why are you so scared of them? I can’t save you all the time, as you just saw. But you need to be able to speak up.”

“They are very strong and I can’t fight them,” Noah replied in a defeated voice. Alex tried to console him, saying, “No bro, you give up too early, even without trying”. Alex wanted Noah to understand the meaning of “Never give up”. While they were trying to recover from the insults, a passerby heard their voices. He looked down into the manhole.

“What are you kids doing down there?” he called. When the boys told him what had happened, “I will help you get out,” he said.

The man went and fetched a rope. He threw it to them. While Alex was climbing up the rope, an object lying on the dry mud ground caught Noah’s attention. What was it?

“Grab the rope, Noah!” Alex was calling, “It’s your turn to come up now!” Noah pushed the strange-looking object under his shirt and climbed up the rope.

After getting out of the manhole, Noah asked Alex to come to his home immediately. He said it was an emergency. Alex agreed, a bit worried yet curious to know the nature of the emergency, but Noah would not tell him anything.

Once they reached his house, Noah cleaned that mysterious object and to his surprise, it was a video game.

He immediately plugged the socket in and as he was about to begin the game, Alex (who had been watching him with surprise) shouted, “So this was your emergency? You idiot! I don’t have the time to play your useless video games! I have a Taekwondo class.”

Noah snorted, “Shut up now and let’s have fun.”

Alex shook his head. “I don’t know how you have the energy to play these games. Why don’t you use this energy to defend yourself when others bully you?” Noah ignored his words, grabbed the remotes and gave one to Alex.

The game sparked to life with a pretty scary sound - hoho...hahaha in a bass voice and then another high-pitched voice that screamed for help. The boys jumped, startled. Then their eyes met and they laughed nervously. “Sounds like it’s a game from hell!” Alex mumbled.

The game began. Noah gripped his remote, readying himself for instructions, while Alex pretended no interest in all this and started to adjust his hair. All of a sudden it seemed as if time stopped..! Alex and Noah’s eyes grew heavy and they fell unconscious. When they came to their senses and opened their eyes, they found themselves in a desert-like place. The first thing they noticed was a board swaying to and fro that had a large blood stain with the words: “Welcome to Heaven” written on it. Alex and Noah were scared to death!

Then they noticed hundreds of skeletons piled up. A letter flew out of nowhere straight at Noah’s face and it

went like this:

We are very pleased to have you here. You may consider it a hair-raising experience but then if you are not our friendly neighbourhood Spiderman, you can't do a thing. Welcome to our beautiful heaven which is ruled by the King of Hell. Falcon, the King of Hell, always had an eye on heaven. And one fine day he attacked us and has taken control of our kingdom. Please save us! We want our heaven back from these dangerous intruders! Help us... please help us!

Sincerely,

The King and Citizens of Heaven

Alex didn't like the idea "Why should we fight with Falcon? We have nothing to do with all this."

After a long pause, Noah uttered in a serious manner, "I need to help them. Heaven is the home of God. How can we refuse to help the people of God?"

Alex tried to convince Noah. "Noah, try to understand - we are normal human beings, not Superman or Batman. Don't you know the difference between an ordinary man and a superman?"

Noah chuckled, "An ordinary man wears his underwear inside his pants, however, a superman wears it outside. If you want to become a superhero, pull your underwear out but I am absolutely fine with keeping it inside."

Alex protested, saying, "Oh you fool, it's not about

their underwear. They have superpowers, we don't."

Noah spoke with determination. "I am a superhero in my heart. Everyone is a hero; the point is we should never give up."

Noah moved ahead, leaving Alex behind, on a mission called Heaven vs. Hell. At that moment Alex realized that this was not the Noah he had known before. "He is not a loser anymore. He has changed," Alex mumbled and followed Noah's retreating back. After walking for around two kilometres they reached a dilapidated building. There was nowhere else to go, so they decided to take their chances. As they entered, a ghostly face received them, staring at them through the wall.

"So, you little kids have come to save heaven!" the Ghost greeted them with a sneer. "I can see fear on your faces. You clearly are losers!"

Noah said, "I am here to save heaven and I am going to fight till the end. You just let me know what to do."

The Ghost replied, "Don't be impatient for success. It will not come easy. There will be three levels, just like a video game. The first level is a test of intelligence. The second one shall test your luck. The final one tests your bravery. Let the games begin!"

So began round one.

"There are three doors. You have to enter one of them and pass through the room safely. Within the first door, a lion and a wolf await you. The second room is on fire.

Within the third room are crocodiles. You have a gun with only one bullet inside it. So, which door would you choose?”

Alex suggested, “I think we should go with the crocodile one. We can kill a crocodile and dodge the rest.”

“No,” said Noah. “We choose the first door.”

“Well done,” laughed the Ghost. “Level One accomplished!”

To a stunned Alex, Noah explained, “One bullet can only kill one crocodile. And we could perhaps not have dodged the rest. But in the first room, the lion will kill the wolf, so with one bullet we could shoot the lion and survive.” Alex was amazed by his logical reasoning.

The Ghost continued, “Here comes the second level. There are three mirrors. Only one possesses success and other two hold failure which throw you into the deep sea. So which one would you choose?”

Alex decided to take this one. “Let me handle this, Noah.”

He addressed the Ghost: “Sir, I think you are very intelligent.”

“Yes,” the Ghost admitted with a small smile.

“So answer my simple questions: Where is the Taj Mahal located? What is the national animal of Canada?” Alex asked many such questions rapidly. As the Ghost was trying to prove his intelligence by answering all the questions as quickly as he could, Alex played a trick:

“Which mirror possesses success?”

“The one on the right!” the Ghost rattled off. Alex grinned and Noah jumped a foot into the air, with a shout of laughter.

The ghost was furious. “This is cheating,” he protested.

“All is fair in love and war,” Alex reminded him. “And this is war,” Noah added with a chuckle.

“More than you know,” the Ghost smiled cruelly and the boys stopped laughing. Something wicked was surely coming to them in Round Three.

A massive black and grey falcon with huge talons came swooping down at them.

“Well-played boys,” he shrieked. “Your childish dream to save heaven demands a lot of courage and involves a lot of pain. The question is: do you have it in you?” Alex could not resist his urge to aim a punch at the hellish falcon, but Noah stopped him and stepped up. “I’ll go first,” he said calmly and entered the fighting arena, a ring of flame that had suddenly appeared.

Alex pleaded with him to come back but Noah was determined. Falcon warned him, “keep track of the blood meter above your head. As soon as it becomes empty, you will die and become a Ghost. I have a need for Ghosts to govern my Hell!”

The Game began. Falcon was fast, graceful and ferocious. He flew round and round Noah and attacked him. Thhppakswoooshbaaaaanngg!! Watching this tooth

and nail fight, even the black belt Alex's heart was sinking. Noah was badly bruised within a minute. But he roared, "I won't give up!"

He punched at Falcon's face with all his might whenever he could get a fist in, but Falcon was unperturbed. "You weakling, trying too hard for your own death!" he taunted as he pecked and jabbed Noah.

Alex pushed Noah not to give up. "Noah, you are a video game champ, so think about video game moves. I believe in you!"

Noah's video games monsters flashed through his mind. He could terminate them in seconds by targeting an object that belonged to them. Immediately he noticed a shining diamond in Falcon's crown.

At the same time, Falcon picked Noah up by his leg and threw him at the wall. Noah was writhing with pain. His blood meter was dipping down at an alarming rate. He could only hear Alex's faint cries, "Get up Noah. You promised yourself that you would save heaven at any cost. We don't get many chances to be the superhero we love".

Noah pushed himself up with all the force of a superhero and attacked Falcon with non-stop kicks and punches. Falcon was taken aback and fell down on the ground. Noah jumped on his head and pulled out the diamond from his crown.

Falcon fell down begging for his diamond, "I surrender.... Please return it or else I will die. It contains

my soul.” This was all that Noah needed to hear. With a mighty cry, he smashed the diamond against a rock, breaking it into pieces. The monster vanished into thin air. In the silence that followed, Noah fell down on his knees, trying to believe what he had experienced. Alex hugged him and tried to patch up his wounds with his handkerchief.

The desert country became green. Mighty trees that had perhaps just faded away became visible again. Birds sang sweetly. The King and citizens of Heaven who had been hiding in the trees emerged. They couldn’t stop thanking Alex and Noah and arranged their departure after honouring them with flowers and chocolates.

Alex and Noah were back in Noah’s room.

They decided to play an online video game in competition with each other since they were wired up from the excitement of recent events. Surprisingly, Alex was getting ahead in the game while Noah was struggling to gain points. Unexpectedly the screen went blank. Both of them tried to get the game back by pressing random buttons. They were transported into the time when the world was experiencing a zombie apocalypse. Instead of trying to run away, they held hands and shouted “Never Give Up!”



Illustration by Sidhant, Grade IX



The Truth About Devi Maa

by

BY MANPREET SINGH BHATTI, GRADE IX

My work as a journalist makes me live like a nomad. Nothing feels as good as the thrill of homecoming after my latest project. I loved my home in the city of Chandigarh, but the many awards I won during my reporting stints in remote villages made up for the ache of being far from home. So here I was in the village of Handi in the hills of Himachal Pradesh.

Under the ancestral mango tree of a village called Handi, rumours fly like a jet and its sound grabs everyone's attention. Never underestimate the power of seclusion in a remote area... the peculiar beauty of a village devoid of all urban clutter. It made me recall John Keats', A Thing of Beauty. Walking in this place brought to the fore vivid memories of the typical Punjabi village of my childhood.



Illustration by Krietty, Grade IX

I tried to reimagine where I was. I changed the hilly brown land, painted it in tones of green and the sky started becoming a prettier blue.

Standing in the balcony of the house I was renting here, pleasant scents and sounds of nature filled my senses. Then as the sun sank, I heard laughter. A few meters away there were a few people under a mango tree. This was an enormous mango tree and it was circled by a cemented platform. There was a group, some sitting, some standing,

under the tree. As human beings we accept sadness as an integral part of our transient lives. We are more curious about ‘what makes one happy?’ Their endless laughter triggered my curiosity. I could not sleep very well that night.

The next morning I was woken up by a sound that went “khatt khatt khatt”. Having been a city dweller for so long, it took me some time to realise that this sound was typical of harvest season. After my morning ablutions I went to meet a local whom I had befriended. His name was Param.

As soon as I reached his home, we exchanged greetings. He invited me to have breakfast sitting on the bed watching morning news. My mouth full of parantha, I questioned him.

“Last evening I saw a group of people laughing madly under the mango tree. What happened there?” I could still imagine the sound of their raucous laughter.

“Oh!” Param laughed. “Your face looks like a big question mark!”

Taking a leisurely sip of his chai, he said, “That must have been the newspaper aunty.”

“Newspaper aunty?” I asked, confused.

“Now I will have to tell you the whole story,” he smiled and I nodded eagerly.

“Bindu kaki, also known as newspaper auntie, is the one person in our village who has the news of every person

in and outside of the village,” he began. “She’s about 50-years-old. She has the gift of the gab! She can convince people of the truth of anything! Her juicy gossip takes the form of rumours that can drive people hysterical. If she doesn’t like someone - God forbid - then rumours are crafted to make that person look like a buffoon or a villain, whichever would serve the person worse. You will never find her at home; she is always roaming around, picking up news to sustain her position as the newspaper aunty, a true gossip-monger. You will find her under the mango tree in the evening where she shares the news of the day. She is a creature of some other ‘Fake News Universe!’” I couldn’t tell if Param disliked Bindu kaki or found her amusing. It seemed to be a mix of both.

“Her house is right next to the one you are renting, and I know you won’t rest, mostly from your anticipation of something fishy to come out of this!” He laughed.

My zeal to know more made me finish my breakfast quickly. I went home. I observed Bindu kaki from my balcony. I could see a black earthen face fixed at the top. I knew that this was to avert bad luck. In villages like these, superstitious symbols are common. People might follow shallow Godmen and women and succumb to the misguidance of those who claim to be Messengers of God!

I could see a few people sitting and standing in the veranda, chatting. Their overenthusiastic host, I guessed,

was Bindu kiki. She was regaling them with her stories, bringing forth shocked oohs and ahhs every couple of minutes.

Her personality was intriguing enough to send my mind into overdrive. My instinct told me I could expect a great surprise in the coming days. I lay in bed again that night, sleepless until late, and then finally drifted off.

After some time, I heard some disturbing voices. Thinking it to be a dream I kept my eyes closed. I tried to go back to sleep but the voices grew louder. I looked at my clock. It was two in the morning. Rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I went to the balcony to see what the matter was.

To my surprise, by the light of kerosene lanterns and a lone tube light, under the mango tree was a lady sitting in lustrous clothes with a halo around her head. About a dozen villagers were crouching before her, praying. They were reverently offering fruits, flowers... and money.

I would certainly have gone to get a closer look, but my head had begun to spin. It was perhaps the heat of the previous day, perhaps a lack of sleep, perhaps even the shock of that unearthly sight before me. I was forced to go back to bed.

The next morning when I went to the neighbourhood shop to get some milk, I observed a few people holding a discussion on the previous night's incident over cups of tea. I enquired from the shopkeeper and his explanation was dramatic.

“Last night the village Devi Maa came down from the mango tree!”

I flinched, thinking the people here are so foolish! Is it superstition or is it their ‘religious sentiments’ which have turned them into ignorant fools? But who was the midnight visitor to the mango tree?

While returning home, I visited the mango tree. The woman was nowhere to be seen. All there was was a mat decorated with marigold flowers. A mat which had to make do for a humble village goddess or a fraud, whatever she was. The mat lay all alone waiting for some miracle to lift it up into the sky or into the mango tree. If she was truly a miraculous woman, she would get her own throne embedded and dazzling with diamonds rather than a mat adorned with humble flowers! This realisation made me laugh out loud.

The next few days were spent trying to find out the origin of the Devi Maa, as the “celestial being” was termed by the naive and illiterate villagers... but then Trump is the President of the USA! How can we expect intelligence from people, even educated ones? Summing up my observations I realised that Devi Maa prefers to appear after dusk, as if she has tan issues! Or was she a vampire who was scared of daylight?

Devi Maa appeared one more time a couple of nights down the line. I had been warned by Param not to join the group of worshippers. My cynical attitude would not

go down well with them. So I watched from the balcony. Once they had finished worshipping, the group would wait till Devi Maa walked away into the night. Then they would disband. The offerings of money and fruit remained on the mat. By morning they would be gone.

Some nights later I hid in the bushes right beside the mango tree waiting for Devi Maa to leave. She left and then so did the worshippers. I remained behind. It was pitch dark and eerily silent, making me shiver from time to time. Becoming more and more sleepy, wrapped in my blanket I nodded off. The bushes started pricking me as if they were warning me of some unforeseen danger. At around 3 am Devi Maa returned out of the dark and carefully collected all the money in her shawl. I jumped out of the bushes, surprising her.

She tried to be quick and run away. However, she lost her balance and fell. Her divine clothes became stained with dirt. I wanted to be a gentleman and help her up, but she righted herself and quite as I had expected, didn't let a single coin fall! I don't like Godmen and women. The money spent on temples in a land where millions are hungry always makes my heart ache.

I tried to grab hold of her, but as if on cue, the group of worshippers appeared. They held me back.

“Don't you dare touch our divine mother,” they threatened. I was even dealt a couple of slaps as a warning. To my irritation, Devi Maa walked away into the night, her

shawl full of money.

The very next day I was sent to cover a disaster that took place in Uttarakhand causing thousands of deaths, where people were now scared of ‘God’s fury’. As expected, no one blamed encroachments and illegal constructions, the real reason behind the choked drainage system and change in the course of the rivers culminating into floods.

I got busy with a series of projects and after a few months when I got a chance to visit Handi village, saw no sign of Devi maa! I went to Param’s house to gather information about her but almost before I could greet him, he started telling me about how they discovered that Devi maa was actually Bindu kaki. I grinned with satisfaction. I had suspected so, just from the similarity of their builds and from the fact that she was a troublemaker to begin with. Anyway, Param continued, “After a few sessions of this drama, she was exposed by her husband, a retired army officer. When he came to know about it, he busted her plans!” We couldn’t stop laughing.. but I insisted on reminding Param that he too had believed in Devi Maa!

“Rs.1,00, 000 was discovered stuffed into her pillow. This was divided between the temple and the gurudwara in the village.”

I didn’t know how to react to this. I held my tongue lest I hurt his or anyone else’s religious sentiments. As you know, I’m not too keen on blind faith.



Finding Mummy

by

MUSKAN DHARWAL, GRADE VII

It was a hot and sunny day in June. Mummy and I decided to visit the carnival in Delhi. I was looking forward to visiting the carnival as I had never gone to one before. Everyone said that a carnival was being organised in our city after many years. In fact, Mummy was even more excited than me to visit the carnival. She had loved the carnivals of her childhood.

Mummy and I went to the carnival at around eleven in the morning. When we reached there I was shocked and could not believe my eyes. The carnival area was as big as a palace ground where I could spend my entire life!

It was so crowded that there was no space even to stand. Mummy and I managed to find some space and rushed towards the food stall. I love food, a fact that is



Illustration by Anshika Sharma, Grade V

obvious from my plumpness! While Mummy placed an order for my favourite pizza, I saw a tall and handsome man relishing the yummy and tasty looking golgappas at the next stall. He had a little moustache which suited him well.

Tears rose to my eyes and I rushed up to the man. He was Uncle Raftaar!

One year ago...

I would like to reveal a bitter truth here. Mummy is not my real mother. My real mom and dad lived in Shimla and I lived with them there. My dad was an army officer and my mom was a home maker. As my dad was in the Indian

National Army, I rarely saw him.

But one fine Sunday morning I saw my tall, dark father standing beside my bed. His beard had grown.

“Papa!” I shouted and hugged him. To be very honest, dad was looking ugly and funny, but I realised later that he had been out at the border on a secret mission.

I wondered about the sudden arrival of my father.

“Kelly, I have had news that your Uncle Raftaar is admitted in hospital as he is suffering from blood cancer and is in his last stage. I have come here just to meet him and to help him survive this battle,” Papa told me. Uncle Raftaar was his younger brother.

I did not want to go to the hospital as I hate seeing people in hospital, tubes emerging from their heads and arms. I decided to pray for my uncle from home. My parents agreed that I was old enough to stay alone.

I enjoyed those hours by playing video games and gobbling tasty sweets that dad had bought. Suddenly I realized that it was as late as 9 pm, but mom and dad had not returned from the hospital.

I phoned them many times but neither picked up the call. Then within 2 to 3 seconds came a call whose number was not familiar to me. It was from the police station. The officer told me that my mom and dad had met with an accident and were no more. I dismissed it as a prank. I ignored it and went to bed.

The next morning I heard the doorbell and thought it

was mom and dad returning after a night at the hospital, but to my astonishment, there were people from the orphanage who had come to take me. I realized that the phone call had not been a prank. I rushed into the washroom and cried a lot there.

It took me two months to stop crying every night in my bed in the orphanage. I must not have been the only one to cry. This place was full of sad and angry children to whom life had dealt a hard blow.

“Hello, my child. How are you?” I heard a gentle voice say from behind me one day when I was sitting in the shabby living room of the Orphanage.

The lady was Mira Ghai, a middle-class single lady.

She hugged me and asked me all about myself. I told her.

One month later she came back, made me pack my belongings and leave with her. “Where are we going?” I asked. “To my house, as you don’t have parents and I don’t have a child, so I have adopted you,” she said.

I was surprised. This lady who doesn’t even know me well has decided to adopt me. I remembered each and every moment spent with my family and found it very difficult to settle into a new life without them.

We moved to Chandigarh where she showered me with so much love. I started calling her Mummy. It took me a few months to settle, but I finally managed.

Back to the present..

Everything was going on fine until the day I went to the carnival with Mummy. Here I met uncle Raftaar.

“Hey, Raftaar chacha!” I shouted.

He looked like he had seen a ghost and almost choked on his golgappas. When he has recovered, “Hey champion, wher. . . where are mo. . . mom and da. . . dad?” he asked.

His words and weird behaviour confused me and I finally asked, “Why are you stammering, chacha?”

Mummy caught up with me. She found that there was something fishy about my uncle. As Mummy knew everything about my mom and dad, she even knew everything about uncle Raftaar and about his being in the last stages of blood cancer. How had he survived?

You know how clever my Mummy is. When Raftaar chacha could not answer, she politely took down his address and later, when we returned home, called up the police.

The police made inquiries. Uncle Raftaar protested to them that he had survived by a miracle. Police also asked him about mom and dad but he refused to say anything. After the police insisently enquired, he confessed that he had fixed the accident that had killed my parents because he wanted to inherit all the family ancestral property. The police arrested him.

I cried that entire night thinking about how Chacha could do this to me and suddenly a question rose to my mind which was not about uncle but about Mummy.

The next morning Mummy came into my room, with a cup of milk.

“Are you okay, Kelly?” she asked me, worriedly.

“Yes,” I said, sadly.

“I want to ask you something, Mummy. But promise that you will reply honestly,” I said.

“Now that I have an uncle related to me by blood, and my parents’ property in my name, will you send me away?”

Mummy’s eyes filled with tears. “I was afraid of losing you, Kelly. I was afraid that you would want to leave me and go away. But will you continue to stay with me? I love you.”

I hugged Mummy tightly and she hugged me back. That particular day I pledged that I would never speak about my past to anyone and lived happily with my Mummy for the rest of my life.



Illustration by Janvi Sharma, Grade VII

BREATHE

by

MANVI LONGIA, VII

Breathing from the world

Breathing the salty smell

from the Sea

Breathing the leaves

from the mango tree

Breathing the moisture

from the clouds.



HINDI POETRY

Illustration by Ananya Sharma, Grade VII



ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

Rhyming comes naturally to children and more so in their mother tongue, it being Hindi for this talented lot of bright middle graders. The children did some warm up exercises of just plain rhyming, writing about the ordinary mundane things of life to special people to unusual experiences and hilarities of life. I read out humour poetry in Hindi by various poets to get them into the groove. And make them think crazy, naughty and funny stuff .

We then picked what they deemed as their best and fine tuned it with metaphors, infusing it with more imagery and even dosing it with more naughtiness ormasaledaarmasti as I term it.



LOVLEEN MISHRA

Lovleen Misra is an actor, story teller and writer.

As an actor, she is best known for her role as Chhutki in India's first soap opera Hum Log, but her acting sweep extends across films, radio plays and theatre.

She has worked under stalwarts such as Habib Tanvir, Naseeruddin Shah, Sunil Shanbag in theatre, and under directors such as Govind Nihalani, Mani Ratnam, Zoya Akhtar, Anurag Kashyap in films.

As a writer she has been behind the dialogues for feature films and distinctive TV serials like Kitty Party, Jassi Jaisi koi Nahi etc.

Her uncommon bilinguality—she is equally fluent in Hindi and English—her liveliness and her sense of humour make her a much sought-after story teller and drama coach for children. Over the last 20 years, she has done kids' workshops all over India—notably, at the Bookaroo Children's Book Fest, the Chandigarh Children's Lit Fest and Prithvi Summertime Theatre.

Her stories for children have been published by Puffin and Scholastic India. Pratham books is publishing her first collection of poems in Hindi for children.



रक्षा बन्धन

by
DIPTI MITTAL, GRADE VII

मेरा भाई, मेरी जान,
तुझ पे जान कुर्बान
झगड़ा बहस सब करे
प्यार भी मुझी से करे।

राखी का रहता इंतजार,
ताकि मिलें गिफ्ट हज़ार
सिर झुका, तिलक लगवाता,
अच्छे से राखी बंधवाता
स्नेह से भरा हमारा संसार
जल्दी आये राखी का त्यौहार।

Illustration by Kriety Sharma, Grade IX



कलम

by
VARDHA VERMA,
GRADE VII

बक्से से जैसे मैं निकली
मज़बूत, लम्बी और पतली
तुमने मेरा गला दबाया
घिस-घिसकर मुझे चलाया
मेरी मेहनत पे पानी फिराया
मोटी-मटमैली रबड़ से मिटाया
मेरा दिल कितना दुखाया
जब मुंह में डाल चबाया
कभी गिराया, कभी गुमाया
परीक्षा में
घोड़े जैसा दौड़ाया
चला-चलाकर
मुझे बूढ़ा बनाया !!



चम्पकलाल

by
DRISHTI, GRADE VII

टाई पहन चले चंपकलाल,
बुलाया था उन्हें बंगाल।
राह में डरे देख कंकाल ,
लगा पहुंच गए पाताल।
जुबान पर था बस एक सवाल,
'कब पहुंचूंगा मैं बंगाल?'
चलते-चलते घिस गए ताल।
मन में था एक सवाल
'कब पहुंचूंगा मैं बंगाल?
और खाऊंगा मुरी और झाल?'



एक सीधा सवाल

by

KHUSHI KANSAL, GRADE VII

पंजाब केरल हो या बंगाल,
करूँगी हर उन सब से सवाल ,
जो हैं कालेधन से मालामाल,
देश का क्या किया ये हाल
बुना है हमारी बर्बादी का जाल
इसकी होगी जांच पड़ताल
करेंगे तुम्हें शर्म से लाल।



ऐलिना (मेरी गुडिया)

by
SWATI BHATT,
GRADE X

खूबसूरत सी प्यारी सी
है एक राजकुमारी सी
मलाई से मुलायम गाल
चांदनी सा दमकता चेहरा
बड़े नाजों से उसे संभाला
घने लंबे उसके बाल
खेलती खाती मेरे साथ
एक बिस्तर पर दोनों सोये
मीठे सपनों में संग खोये
दुःख सुख की भागीदार
गुडिया कम
है वो मेरी रिश्तेदार.

क्यों?

by
GURNOOR,
GRADE VII

क्यों माँ
जल्दी है उठती
जानती नहीं वो
मुझे रात नींद नहीं आती?

क्यों माँ
जल्दी है उठती
दिन भर खुमारी है छाती
कक्षा में नींद है आती
पानी छींटा मार नहीं जाती
पता नहीं पर
स्कूल की घंटी सुन
नींद फुर्र क्यों हो जाती?



Illustration by Mehakdeep Kaur Virk, Grade X



Breathing is Magical

by

MUSKAN DHARWAL, GRADE VII

Breathe in sea
in a room
Breathe in hill
full of bloom
Breathe in sky
with the clouds
Breathe in room
thinking things around.

JOURNALISM



Illustration by Siddhant Kapoor, Grade IX

JOURNALISM

Writing a report is what middle grade children are fairly adept at. But this workshop was more about picking an angle to view the subject from. It was about sifting through the available information to focus on what made them “wonder”, and then gathering more information on that aspect of the subject. After getting some practise in how to actually interview a person, the children went out in cars and vans to different parts of tricity to meet the heads of four non-profits. They came back with answers to their questions, discussed their experiences with the group, researched online and wrote their pieces. It was a rigorous, fairly cerebral process, and some of the children have developed a genuine liking for it!



CHATURA RAO

Chatura Rao is a journalist and an author whose books for children and adults are published by Bloomsbury, Penguin, Scholastic, Tulika and Harper Collins Kids. Her article, *Women and the Trouble Within/ Without Homes*, won the Laadli National Award 2017 (Best Web Feature) and her picture book, *Gone Grandmother*, won the Hindu Good Books award 2018 (Best Picture Book). Her latest is a picture book called *Music for Joshua*.

Chatura is the Director of the Chandigarh Children's Literature Festival.

She teaches story-making so that children and young people can create magic from the ordinary, well into adulthood.



Ignite. Catalyse.

An inspiring encounter with Shruti Poonia of the NGO, Bhumi

by
JASLEEN KAUR. GRADE XII

“Hi everyone! It’s strange to see you here in your uniforms. You remind me of my school days... it hasn’t been more than 5 years since I passed out of school!”

This made me wonder just how young the lady who had greeted us, was. “I’m 22 years old,” she answered with a smile.

Shruti Poonia is associated with a non-profit organization called Bhumi, which has centres in over 10 states in India. Bhumi, one of India’s largest independent youth volunteer non- profits, is a platform which enables over 12,000 volunteers in more than 14 cities across India to contribute in sectors like education, environment and community welfare.

I was accompanied to the interview by a few friends

and by my English teacher, Miss Aanchal. Poonia led us to her drawing room, invited us to sit and asked us to go ahead and ask her whatever we wanted to. But I still wondered how someone like her, so young and with little experience of the world, manages to mentor and teach children who are hardly five years younger. I began the interview with this very question.

“Youth, in India, plays a major role in enhancing the already-presiding conditions in the country,” Poonia said. “I feel that today’s youth are the future of this nation and constitute a large chunk of the enlightened population.”

Bhumi’s centres all over the country are operated by college students. “The children whome our organisation helps, face problems related mainly to adolescence and education. Their problems can be understood best by high school and college-going student volunteers as they have recently been through the same phase and are a part of the same generation,” Poonia explains. These students have been helping the children learn basic concepts, she says, since kids who study in government schools are often not clear with fundamentals of language, Maths and Science.

Aside of their studies, the children are introduced to issues which concern their future. The girls are taught about menstrual health and both boys and girls are taught how to differentiate good touch from bad touch. This comes under a program named ‘Sensitization of Boys’

since boys too may become victims of molestation. The challenges faced in the world are a direct result of people's disagreeable habits and unacceptable daily life practices. It would be fair to say that boys and men who have gone through these circumstances would have many of the feelings and reactions experienced by female survivors of sexual assault. They may face additional challenges due to social attitudes and stereotypes about men and masculinity. So, is it not correct to say, rape has no gender?

Every Christmas, Bhumi conducts an event by the name 'Joy to the World', where the children are told to write down their wishes on pieces of paper and put them in a box. These wishes are then fulfilled. This made me wonder how they fund their programmes and events. Did they receive support from the corporate sector? The answer was "yes". Bhumi is funded through CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility, the funding and grants programme of companies.

Bhumi runs two educational programs. These are called Ignite and Catalyse. Ignite is Bhumi's auxiliary educational programme for underprivileged children. The programme is delivered on weekends by trained volunteers and tutors of Bhumi. Over 10,000 children are benefitting from the Ignite programme, across the country. This programme comprises of English, Mathematics, Science, Computer Science, Robotics, Mentoring, Arts, Sports and Life Skills support.

The Catalyse programme consists of Bhumi's civic initiatives that engage volunteers in causes like animal welfare, community welfare, disability, environment, health, etc. The programmes consists of one-off and regular volunteering activities that engage over 10,000 volunteers each year in over 15 cities across India.

I was impressed by these programmes and all the hard work put in by young people for social causes. Many of these youngsters are still college-going students, pursuing courses of study. "Does all this not make it difficult for them to find time for themselves and their families?" I asked Poonia.

"My parents are cool about what I do," she smiled. "Of course every parent is concerned about his or her child's safety and well-being, definitely invested in how he or she spends his or her time. No doubt my lifestyle and the lifestyle of Bhumi volunteers like me is rather different. We have to balance and manage our activities, including making time for our parents and setting some time aside for ourselves. I feel that making time to volunteer requires both dedication and personal discipline. Special days are selected for our programmes. On the rest of the days we manage our studies. Co-curricular activities and being socially conscious are very important in today's scenario." Poonia's answer was positive, practical and inspiring.

My friends asked questions which Poonia answered confidently, without hesitation.

We thanked her for her precious and valuable time. As we walked to the door, she asked to take a picture with us. “I’m so happy to see you kids asking me questions about serious issues and matters of concern in our society. I would like to keep this as a memory!” she said. We were happy to oblige.

I learnt humility from Poonia. Being a part of underprivileged people’s lives and sharing wisdom is a privilege in itself. This, among many other things, was what I learnt that day from Poonia.





Should They Carry Bricks or Books?

The struggle of choosing the path to the
school or the factory

by

KHUSHPARNEET KAUR, GRADE XII

“Child labor and poverty are inevitably bound together and if you use the labor of children as the treatment for the social disease of poverty, you will have both poverty and child labor till the end of time,” commented Grace Abbott, an American activist and the erstwhile director of child labor division of the U.S. Children’s Bureau.

The struggle faced by underprivileged children - whether to earn or to learn - preoccupied me as I entered the Panchkula residence of Shruti Poonia. She is a member of Bhumi, a prominent national-level non-profit organization. I was here to interview her, to get better acquainted with the work Bhumi has been doing since its inception in August, 2006.

An organization started as well as operated by college

students, Bhumi has approximately 12,000 volunteers across the Indian subcontinent.

Poonia made us conversant with the working of Bhumi and two of its flagship programmes, which work to bridge the gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged groups. These programs are known as Ignite and Catalyze.

The Catalyze programme includes civic initiatives that engage volunteers in causes like animal welfare, community welfare, disability, environment, health, etc. The programs, consisting of one-off and regular volunteering activities, engage over 10,000 volunteers each year in over 15 cities across India. The Ignite program involves imparting education to destitute children during weekends by over 2000 trained volunteers and tutors. Over 10,000 children across India benefit from the programme which consists of English, Mathematics, Science, Computers, Robots, Mentoring, Art, Sports and Life skills support. Some other acclaimed programs undertaken by Bhumi include Kanini, Speak-out, Lakshya, e-Lakshya, Little Einsteins - Mathematics, Little Einsteins - Science, Yantra and Nakshatra.

Poonia being an industrious college student as well as a high-spirited and passionate teacher mentors the children, otherwise deprived of academic guidance. Mentoring is a process that involves close and regular communication, and I realise that Poonia, with her youthful manner and thinking, would connect well with children.

Does our education system need reform, I ask Poonia, eager to know her opinion. “Education today is simply a platform to launch young people into white collar jobs,” Poonia shakes her head. “Education readies them for conventional employment. Vocational programs must be run alongside academic curriculum in order to teach the children different skills. This will ensure a means of livelihood which they can pursue while getting a higher education and if they so choose, they can continue earning via these vocational skills after completing their education.”

How does Bhumi raise funds for their activities? “The organization has collaborations with different corporates, mainly in Chennai and Hyderabad where Bhumi took birth,” Poonia explains. Then asked about the ways by which non-profits might gain the confidence of underprivileged children and parents and convince them to opt for education rather than earn wages to augment family income, Poonia explains, “Bhumi holds meetings, rallies and speaks one-on-one with people to persuade them to educate their children.”

“Why don’t you provide meals to the children? This will lure them to Bhumi for education,” I suggest.

“We do not believe in any practices that will entice the children to come to us for anything aside of education. If we do, children will come for that, rather than for education,” says Poonia, with determination.

However, I personally believe that enticing as such is

neither immoral nor unbeneficial. These poor kids are, day in day out, toiling for meals, sacrificing their education and future. If we provide them with food, even if this entices them to bracket time for their education, the struggle of choosing the path towards a school rather than to a factory, will to some extent cease.

In the 1960s, while on a visit to a town in Tirunelveli district in Tamil Nadu, the then chief minister K. Kamaraj noticed a boy herding cattle and asked him why he was not in school. The boy replied, “If I go to school will you give me food to eat? I can learn only if I eat.” His response gave birth to the Mid-day Meal scheme. Today it is the largest school child feeding program in the world, covering 110 million students in 1.2 million schools.

The Planning Commission’s Approach Paper for the 12th Five Year Plan 2012-14 indicates that for the age group 6-14 years in rural India, the percentage of children not enrolled in schools has dropped from 6.6% in 2005 to 3.5% in 2010 because of introduction of the Mid-day Meal scheme.

In another interview, a rag picker, on being asked why he did not seek help from the government to ameliorate his poverty, answered that the last time he participated in a rally (shouting slogans the whole day), it did not cause the government to effect measures for his welfare. Instead he had had to suffer hunger pangs that night, as he had not worked that day.

Staying alive stands first in the priority list. Education might make a distant second.

Bhumi is one of the most celebrated non-profit organizations of India with the striking feature of being operated by youth. It won the 'Leader of Volunteer Engagement' award, 2013. Bhumi has put in 12 years of intensive work, capitalizing and directing the volunteer force of Indian youth towards a better tomorrow. Every effort that goes into bridging the gap between rich and poor and encouraging children to get an education, is an effort to appreciate and celebrate.

Today there are many non-profit organizations working and government schemes formulated to proffer subsidized or free education to such children, oblivious of the actual question facing them: whether to earn or to learn. As citizens, each of us needs to understand what it takes to work on the premise that 'children are the future of the nation.'

I wish to reignite the flame of the question: 'Should have-nots be made to work for survival today or given education so that they thrive tomorrow?'





Live, Love and Care

A mother and the founder of NGO Samarth speaks!

By

SAMYA ARORA, GRADE VII

“It is difficult, but when you have a strong will, you can do it!” says Ms. Pooja Ghai, a dignified lady in her 50’s, whom I had the opportunity to interview at her home in Sector 22, Chandigarh.

Ms.Ghai’s own child, now a grown man of about 30, is disabled.

Ms.Ghai is the head of a non-profit called Samarth, run by parents of disabled children. Today, almost 500-600 children are serviced by the NGO. “I began this NGO in order to help disabled children and to raise awareness about their challenges in our larger, uncaring society. Before I began, I too was as ignorant of the needs of the disabled,” Ms.Ghai shares candidly.

She started her work in 1999.”In the beginning, I did



not know anything about the disabilities children may face. When my own child didn't grow at a speed that is considered "normal", I wasted three years simply waiting for him to grow. When I took him to the doctor, he said that my child is mentally disabled. His brain hadn't grown completely. He said that my son would never be normal," Ms.Ghai recalls.

"When I started Samarth in 1999, there were many societal prejudices and stereotypes. People thought that

if somebody is disabled, he/ she is useless. Supportive resources were really in short supply, which made a caregiver's life very difficult.”

“Since 1999, the life of disabled people has improved a lot. Earlier the state didn't recognize mental retardation and other mental disabilities as an actual disability .They just considered physical disabilities as real disabilities. But nowadays all disabled people are treated as deserving of support. They, for instance, get 25% discount on railway and bus tickets,” Ms.Ghai informs us. “Still, to make their lives more convenient, other measures need to be taken. For example, if they are issued a travel discount card, they are given 50% off, but only when they are travelling within that state. If a person is disabled, she and the person travelling along with her should be given 100% discount, all over the country. Secondly, they should be provided a barrier-free environment and special facilities at religious and public places to accommodate their needs.”

Ms.Ghai, for me, is a very brave lady. “In the beginning,” she narrates, “people criticized my interest in these children. They said that these children are useless. Why are you wasting time on them? But when my work started gaining importance in public, and more people started joining my organization and started donating resources, the number of detractors came down.”

Ms.Ghai also told us that in the beginning, even the parents of disabled children were not ready to believe that

they could bring a change in the lives of their children. They used to say that no matter what they do, society will never accept their children. She tried really hard to make these parents understand that their children were capable of doing other things. She showed them that their children could cook, knit, do handicrafts etc. After this, they agreed to help and support her in her work. “Even while parents were cynical, the disabled children in my care started feeling comfortable with me,” she smiles.

She tells us that her son brought a great change in her life. “When I went to PGI for my son’s treatment, I was expecting sympathy. I was urging the doctor to examine my child. I was telling him that my child has got a severe disease and he must be checked first. Then I saw a woman coming in with her child on a wheelchair. Her daughter couldn’t walk, and she couldn’t speak or eat properly. I realised that my child was much less disabled: he was not able to read and write, that was the only problem! From that day on I stopped complaining and expecting sympathy.”

Ms.Ghai is trying really hard to make this world a better place for disabled children. After meeting her I too felt inspired to see the possibilities in a situation that seems impossible. I do believe we should help disabled people make a place for themselves in this beautiful world. We should try to make them feel comfortable.

Breathe

by
ANUSHKA SHUKLA, GRADE VII

I felt myself
I ate sea
I drank mountain
I touched tornado
I breathed rain
I ran waves
I walked thunderstorm
I felt myself



HISTORICAL FICTION



Illustration by Jashnoor Kaur, Grade X

HER STORY: HISTORICAL FICTION ON WOMEN

My workshop was entitled *Her Story: Historical Fiction on Women*. It focused on making the participants understand the aspects involved in the writing of good historical fiction--on the importance of accuracy and readability as paramount criteria, for instance. At the same time, it underlined the need for highlighting the presence of women in the historical past. On the first day of the workshop, we discussed these two key aspects while surveying my two works of gender-based historical fiction, *Harsha Vardhana* and *Queen of Ice*, through a presentation and interaction. The students came up with ideas for stories that they would write. On the second day, the students wrote their individual pieces focusing on women in history and then read them out to the group. Extensive inputs were provided for each of the stories shared.



DR. DEVIKA RANGACHARI

Dr. Devika Rangachari is an award-winning children's writer whose book, *Queen of Ice* (Duckbill), was on the White Raven list of the best children's books from around the world in 2015. It also won the Neev Young Adult Book Award in 2018. Her other books include *Tales of Love and Adventure* (Scholastic), *Swami Vivekananda—A Man with a Vision* (Puffin), *Harsha Vardhana* (Scholastic), *The Merry Mischief of Gopal Bhand* (Scholastic), *The Wit of Tenali Raman* (Scholastic) and *Growing Up* (Children's Book Trust; on the Honour List of the International Board on Books for Young People in 2002). Devika conducts book-related/ creative writing sessions in schools on a regular basis, and has also presented papers on various aspects of young adult literature in several national and international conferences. In addition, she helped to run the Habitat Children's Book Forum at the India Habitat Centre, New Delhi, for several years. Devika has just completed her post-doctoral research on gender in Indian history at the University of Delhi.



HER REVENGE

By

Krietty Sharma, Grade IX

“Come here, Boxi!” shouted Emma, while stuffing a loaf of bread in her mouth. It had been a long weekend and now school had finally started. She was extremely excited at the thought of meeting her two most precious friends, Donna and Marie.

“Emma, hurry up or you’ll be late for school again.”

“Oh yes, mother, I remember that. By the way, where is Boxi?”

“Well, you know he went out for a ‘walk’, like always,” said Emma’s mom making a face.

“That stupid dog! He comes and goes like a king! Anyway, I am late for school,” Emma sighed. “I’ll catch that idiot on my way.”

“Ok, calm down and go now!” exclaimed Emma’s mother.

“Alright, mother, I will see you later!”

“Okay, sweetheart, see you later.”

Emma was thrilled about school. She had been promoted to the 6th standard! She was so excited that she did not notice the heat and the fact that she was sweating. The road was hot and the sun was shining bright. Several



Illustration by Krietty Sharma, Grade IX

dogs were on their early morning walks with their precious masters. This scene reminded her of Boxi. She thought of the bond of love they had with each other. The birds were singing a melodious song and the flowers were in full bloom. The air was filled with the scent of roses. While walking down the street, she crossed a chocolate shop, which was a very well-known establishment. Its heavenly smell of chocolate and cocoa could be perceived from meters away!

As Emma was walking down the street, someone ran towards her so fast that they crashed into each other and Emma almost flew. When she opened her eyes, she saw a girl with shiny brown hair, wearing a pink shirt and brown skirt with brown boots.

“Donna, what are you up to this time? The school is that way, not at my home.”

“Emma, it’s about Boxi! Come, hurry!” Donna was panic-stricken.

“WHAT--?”

“No time to explain. Let’s go!”

“Donna, wai...”

Emma’s mind teemed with the possibilities of danger. She was terrified by the thought of something horrible happening to Boxi. It could be anything! Then she heard a loud whine. A very unusual whine. She broke off from Donna, ran straight towards the sound and entered a lane. Beer bottles, candy bars, and sticks were lying around. An

Alsatian was being brutally attacked with beer bottles and every time it was hit, it cried louder. The dog was bleeding from its mouth, and its fur was covered with glass pieces and blood.

“BOXI!” cried Emma, tears running down her face.

She was greeted by a terrifying glare from a boy in a black jacket. He looked at Emma’s collar.

“Oh, look! Another star. You, yes, you. Is this dog yours? Here, take these 5,000 marks, people like you need money anyway, right, friends?”

“Right!” The other boys who were standing around laughed.

“I. Don’t. Need. Money.”

“So what do you need then?”

“Let Boxi go or else...”

“Or else what? Just take the money and leave!” laughed the boy.

“You’ll regret it,” said Emma in a shaky tone.

She quickly looked around. She knew that if she dived for the beer bottles, the boys would figure her intent out within seconds. There was no other choice, so, filled with determination and anger, she dived for a candy bar, her heart pounding like a hammer, bearing it all for dearest friend, Boxi.

“HA! Look, I told you that Jews are greedy for money all the time. It is exactly as the Fuhrer said it would be!”

This made Emma even angrier. She quickly flashed

down towards the stick, picked it up and hit it on the head of the boy who was taunting her the most.

“Aaaargh!” he screamed. “You...you ...you filthy JEW, how dare you hurt me? HANS, WALTER, GET HER!”

The boy turned his head to see where his friends were. They were running for dear life now. The boy had nothing to do but retreat. He was begging for his life now.

“Oh, please leave me. I promise I’ll never do something like this again.”

“You better not!”

Emma saw Donna watching the whole scene from nearby. They both exchanged looks. Their friendship was so close that even without any reactions on their faces, they read each detail present in their minds. This time, they exchanged a grin but that did not last long. Emma rushed towards the helpless dog lying on the road.

“BOXI! BOXI! WAKE UP! WAKE UP!”

But Boxi did not stir. He had gone to sleep in order to wake up in another life.

“No...no...no...no...no...no...no...no...no...no...no...” Emma murmured.

She felt as if she was crumbling, as if the world was tearing apart in front of her own eyes. She trembled with sorrow. Yet a sudden power moved her body and made her run towards her home. Donna ran behind her.

Emma slammed the door of the house shut, weeping. She went upstairs with a quaking heart. The slamming

of the door shocked her mother and made her follow her upstairs. She saw her daughter suffering a complete breakdown. Never had she seen her in such despair. She did not know how to react.

“Donna, what happened?” she cried.

Donna explained the entire situation.

Her mom fell to weeping. She remembered the time when they had brought the little puppy to their home.

It was the era of the great depression when youths were playing cards on the streets. There was an Alsatian puppy on the road, going from place to place looking for food. In return, he got pushed away and sometimes stoned by the unemployed. He growled, which was no more than a very weak whine. Emma was drawn to him. She got out of her father’s car and went running towards him. The dog ran away in fear but later read the look on Emma’s face. He saw everything. He developed a very strong bond of trust with her. That is what a true bond of love is—without exchanging a single word, you feel close to each other.

xxx

It was late. Sitting in class, the end of the pencil in her mouth, Marie was waiting for her two dear friends. She couldn’t imagine any reason for their not coming to school today.

The teacher entered the room. Marie became excited. It would have been so much better if her friends had been there. The teacher made a sudden announcement that

every Jewish child was to sit on the floor.

“Hey, Marie!”

“Uh, yes, Sir?”

“You, sit on the floor.”

“Um, why?”

“Just do it.”

“Excuse me? What?”

“Marie, sit on the floor or you’ll be in huge trouble.”

Marie had no choice but to sit on the floor.

If this was not enough, her books were filled with hatred towards her very own kind. Not just in Science or in German but in mathematics as well! Her Aryan bullies started to get even more aggressive than usual and instead of punishing them, the teacher praised them. The day was rough for Marie.

xxx

Meanwhile, at home, Emma was in a dreadful condition, neither dead nor alive. She was barely breathing. She was neither sad nor happy but completely numb. It was as if she was in a coma.

xxx

After school, Marie ran to Emma’s house. Her eyes were heavy and her heart felt like it was shrinking. Emma and Donna were the only two people whom she could talk to and share her feelings with. She could do nothing without them. While she sulked, she was also in disbelief about how mean people were and the world could be

when no one was on your side.

Marie opened the door to Emma's house. Her feelings of anger suddenly vanished and were replaced by confusion. She felt her heart beating fast. She saw the dining table with a half-eaten slice of bread on it. She went upstairs and saw a bag with books in it lying open. The next thing she saw totally terrified her. She saw a stick tipped with blood. Marie grew scared and felt her hands shake. She dashed towards Emma's room and saw her friend lying on the bed with Donna and Emma's mother crying next to her. She asked Donna what had happened. Donna explained the whole scene. Marie shook her head, first in despair, then in anger. She wanted revenge for herself, her friends and for her kind.





THE SPEECH

By

SIDDHANT, GRADE IX

On the morning of 15th August 1947, I was sitting in my shop in Chawri bazaar in Delhi where the bright sunlight shone directly on the streets. I, tired from the trade venture in Egypt, leant back in my leather chair and looked onto the streets through the glass window. Not a soul was visible there. I got perplexed by the utter silence. Suddenly I could see some people with bags moving in the direction of the sun. My curiosity grew into unease. I stood up from my chair and started walking along the street. I had not gone far when the murmurs on the street penetrated my ears. What was feared by all had happened! Hindustan was partitioned. I was terrified.

I ran home directly. I could see the streets stained with



the blood of the people. I could see dead bodies. Wives were getting widowed and children orphaned. I traversed the great turmoil and finally reached my home.

Meera, my wife, a 23-year-old with lustrous hair and (usually) a pleasing smile, stood anxiously waiting for me. She held a 3-yr-old child in her arms. I was just going to ask her who this was when she said, “I saw this infant crying in his dead mother’s lap. I could not leave him there. So I brought him home.” I tried to convince Meera to leave the infant as

it would only be a burden to us in these troubled times, but Meera was determined to save the child and provide him with a good future. Soon people came rushing along the street as if a huge herd of sheep was approaching.

I grew terrified. I quickly hid behind the cupboard but Meera was not a coward. She ran to the trunk and took out our ancestral sword and held it in her hand. I could see her hands trembling but I could also see the courage and determination in her eyes. We were Sikhs, so we were not at risk but just in case of any mishap, Meera was prepared. She stood with her sword, with courage in her eyes and her face glowing with the sunshine reflecting on her face.

That day left an impression of Meera in my mind which I would otherwise never have developed. She came from a humble background but had the courage of a warrior. She was truly wise beyond her years.

The infant slowly started becoming a part of our daily routine. Meera named him Abdul. Soon he started talking. He, unknowing of his real parents, accepted us as his parents. We, especially Meera, cared for Abdul as if he was her own son. Meera loved him. She would teach him Hindi in the evening. He was a fast learner and started to write at the age of 4. Soon we had a child, Gurpreet. Abdul grew very protective of Gurpreet.

Everything was going well but the people never accepted Abdul. They would frequently talk ill about him and Meera. Abdul was slowly going into depression but Meera saved him.

She declared, “Abdul is my child and will always be my child. Anyone who wants to harm him will have to deal with me first.” When she openly declared this, our community started to accept Abdul. He made a lot of friends.

Soon Abdul started going to school. Time went by fast and soon it was time to send Gurpreet to school. Meera and I decided to send him to the same school as Abdul. This way, Gurpreet would never have to go through the early problems of school life that Abdul had to endure.

Abdul was a good child, both in academics and sports. He won medals. His education from the 5th grade onwards was through a scholarship. He began to respect all religions because of Meera’s secular ideology.

Another instance where Meera’s ideology helped Abdul was when, in 3rd grade, some rude classmates started marginalizing him. Meera advised Abdul to say that all humans eat the same food, drink the same water and wear the same clothes, so how are we different? This perfectly solved Abdul’s problem while giving him an insight into Meera’s great ideology.

Days passed by and so did the years. Meera went from being a young woman to a lady in her 40s. Abdul completed his 12th grade and won a scholarship to the U.S.A for higher studies. He took Meera’s permission and her blessings and departed.

Now time seemed not to move at the same pace as it earlier did. Meera became sad. Although Gurpreet always

tried to alleviate her mood, she missed Abdul. He called her once a month, which kept them in close contact and would cheer Meera up for some time. In January, though, Abdul's call did not come. Meera grew worried.

Suddenly, one evening, Abdul appeared out of nowhere. He had completed his course and had also stood first in his group of colleges. Meera was the first to hug him and they hung out together and chatted till midnight. I had not seen her as happy before. I could not help smiling too. Later that day, Abdul gave us new clothes to wear and took us with him to his conference.

As we entered the hall, we saw many famous personalities. Many people gave speeches and now it was Abdul's turn.

He, in his speech, said, "What I am today is only because of Maa. Had she not rescued me by taking me from my dead mother's lap, I might have died at the age of three. Maa is no less than a messiah for me. She has fashioned my past, present and future. Her ideals, which I have imbibed, make me what I am. Thank you, Maa, for all that you have done."

A huge round of applause was given to Meera. She had never felt as respected in her life as she did that day. She hugged Abdul and gave him a kiss.

Abdul, thereafter, moved back to India. He took up a good job. Meera lived happily with Abdul all her life.

Today, on the day of her funeral - the funeral of a good human being - I have narrated the story of Meera to you all.



War of Kalinga - A Mother Speaks

by
Soha, Grade VIII

My son, Ashoka, was crowned the king of Magadha after many clashes with his brothers where he emerged as the winner. According to Ashoka's father, my husband, he was the rightful heir. Ashoka started ruling his kingdom and with the passage of time, was able to earn the respect and love of the people of his kingdom. I was delighted to see his brave achievements. Many times, Ashoka would come to me when he was stuck with problems or confused about taking certain decisions with regard to the welfare of his kingdom. He had a great bond with me.

As time passed, he became more caring towards the common people of his kingdom. He treated all his people with utmost love and care as one treats their parents. He usually sent messengers and ministers to the villages

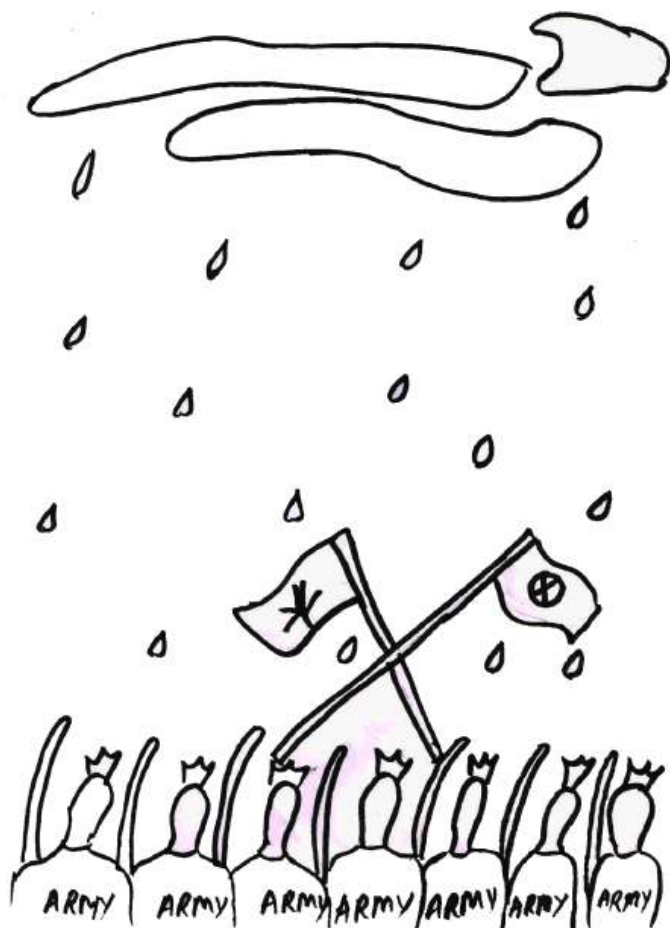


Illustration by Simrandeep Grade, VIII

to announce that the villagers were free to approach him whenever they wish to and at any time in case they were facing any kind of problem or difficulty. He also instructed his gatekeepers to not stop the villagers from coming to the court and talking about their problems to the ministers, who were ordered to help the people of the kingdom. I always appreciated the way in which Ashoka handled his kingdom and its affairs. Sometimes it made me think that my son handled his kingdom more efficiently than his father ever did. He conquered many empires and became a great ruler. He fought many wars and expanded his empire to faraway lands.

Whenever he visited me, he asked whether I was happy with his extraordinary accomplishments. I assured him of my happy state of mind but the only thing that bothered me, I told him, were his brutal killings. He seemed to be a little confused by my answer but his achievements were as overpowering as a drug which did not let him focus on my concern.

One day, a messenger of Ashoka came back to his kingdom with details about Kalinga. Ashoka was impressed after gathering information about this prosperous kingdom and decided to conquer it without thinking of the consequences. After days of discussion with his ministers, he attacked Kalinga. Thousands of men went to the war because their king wanted it. Once the war started, they faced unprecedented resistance from

Kalinga. There seemed to be no end to this war. It seemed to be the most difficult empire that he had attempted to conquer. His stress was building up and hurting his pride, at the same time.

Ashoka wanted to conquer Kalinga at any cost. He wanted to rule an empire that stretched to distant shores. He had fought many wars with other empires and had been successful. The ruler of Kalinga died fighting after some days but the war continued, challenging Ashoka's power and conviction.

At last, after a horrific amount of bloodshed, Ashoka was able to win Kalinga. In the history of ancient times, no war was fought as brutally as this one. Thousands of men perished. The rivers of blood that I heard of traumatized my soul. And men from both sides were killed in large numbers. Ashoka sank into grief. He began lamenting the fact that it was all of no use, and that all this bloodshed and destruction was now responsible for turning thousands of women into widows and children into orphans.

His victory brought him no joy. Ashoka's ambition to expand his empire blinded him towards the killing of innocents. After watching all the devastation, I was dismayed. At the same time, to see my dearest son in such pain and anguish tore my heart apart.

This war made Ashoka lose his peace of mind and the sadness started changing him. My son had a change of

heart. The next step taken by him due to the consequences of this war created history as he became the only ruler to take such a measure after winning a battle that was so crucial to his dreams of having a larger empire. It was a momentary shock but also a solace to know that he would never go to war anymore. He decided to give up wars forever.

Ashoka also decided to walk on the path of Lord Buddha and to follow the path of peace. He started carving meaningful messages of Buddhism on pillars and walls. He was completely transformed and became a torchbearer of peace and simple living. He sent various messengers to spread the message of peace in different regions to make the common people understand the importance of peace and harmony. He devoted his time to this noble cause and till the time I was alive, I saw him just as a person who was into Buddhism and had broken his relation with the outer selfish world. During my last days, I was able to see peace around me and spent my last breath in peace. I was proud of my son.





THE STORY OF REGRET

by

PRANCHAL, GRADE VIII

There is a dark story to my life that I do not even want to remind myself of, which is why I have not told it to anyone until now. It was 1857. Once again, it was a dreadful day for the kingdom of Jhansi. One of the guards came into the court and said calmly, “The Governor-general has come to talk to you, Raniji.”

“Send him in,” commanded Rani Laxmibai.

The governor came in with a superior attitude and stood in the middle of the court.

“What are you here for?” asked Rani Laxmibai. “The English East India Company has introduced a new policy called Subsidiary Alliance and we want you to accept this policy,” said the governor.

“So what will our kingdom get in return?” Rani

Laxmibai asked, regally.

“Not much but as per the Subsidiary Alliance, you will have to keep British forces in your territory and pay for the upkeep of troops. A British officer called a Resident will stay at your court and the English East India Company will take command over all the foreign trade of Jhansi. If you are not able to make the payments, you will have to cede your territory to the British and in return, your kingdom will get the Company’s protection,” described the governor. “Please leave my court before I say something distasteful to you,” said Rani Laxmibai, barely in control of her anger.

The governor left the court and Rani Laxmibai went to her chambers. She summoned me urgently. I went as soon as I heard the command. She was pacing up and down. She said, “Ramdas, come in. I have to talk about something very important and urgent.”

“What is so urgent, Raniji?” I asked.

“The Company rule is expanding slowly and steadily, and soon the English East India Company is going to conquer our whole country. Today it is the Subsidiary Alliance, tomorrow it will be something else. Somebody will have to take a step forward and fight for our rights and freedom!” exclaimed Rani Laxmibai sadly, but confidently.

“You are a great ruler and I believe that you, with your bravery, courage, and wisdom, will come up with some plan to save Jhansi from the Company,” I said.

A maid hurriedly came in. “Your son has started crying,” she said. “He reminds me of the wonderful Queen you have been. I have seen you from the day you first entered our kingdom as a child of eight, bride to our wise Rajaji. It still seems like yesterday when you gave birth to the next heir of Jhansi but, unfortunately, he died after four months.

We were all trying to recover from this tragic situation when there came the news of the death of our prudent Rajaji and the responsibility of the entire kingdom came on your shoulders. But you handled things adequately and did not let anyone even feel the absence of our Rajaji. While showing your care towards the kingdom, you even adopted your brother-in-law’s child after a few months. He will inherit the throne of Jhansi,” I said with appreciation for her courage and farsightedness.

“Those were difficult days but right now, there is a problem on our hands. The problem is the English East India Company... Anyhow, I think I should go to the child now. I can’t leave a 2-month-old child constantly with the maids!” And Rani Laxmibai left.

After a few weeks, there was another policy called the Doctrine of Lapse initiated by a British governor named Lord Dalhousie. It claimed that if a ruler died without any natural heir to the throne, his territory would lapse or pass into British hands. This was one more act of greed by the Company to conquer more and more areas, and

expand its rule. Some kingdoms like Nagpur and Satara were already annexed by the Company and it was now the turn of Jhansi. There was sadness in the air and the person who was the most disappointed was Rani Laxmibai. She was feeling really upset and remorseful for this was not the way she wanted to rule. She called for an urgent meeting in the court that very night. Everybody had a slight idea of what this meeting was about. She started talking to the council of ministers: “Our kingdom is going to fall apart due to this new policy. We better do something now, and quickly! This is not the time to just sit around. This is the time when we should ready ourselves to face the force of the English East India Company and not let them capture Jhansi, even if it means sacrificing our lives.” Thus, she encouraged the court.

“So should we get our army ready with a proper setting and plan to be able to defeat the English East India Company?” I asked.

“I think that we should not just train the army but also encourage the common people to fight for their mother nation!” exclaimed Raniji.

“Yes, you are right. I will send fifty of our soldiers right away to the villages of Jhansi to talk to the common people,” said one of the ministers with confidence.

I stood up and explained that if we were going to send soldiers to people’s houses for help, it might inspire them to fight but we are inviting them to a battle that most of us

already know we are never going to return from.

“I think he is right,” said Rani Laxmibai miserably. “This is our fight, which we warriors will have to fight on our own. Maybe I will lose my throne and have to work under the British, doing each and everything according to them. But by sending common people to fight for their lives is a cost I will never be able to repay.”

“So what should we do now? We do not have a huge army or an effective plan to fight with,” one of the ministers rued.

“I will think about it and we will come to a decision tomorrow.” Saying this, Raniji left the court.

It was midnight and I was on my way back from the royal library, when I heard the sound of a vase breaking. I saw Raniji sitting all alone in the court looking like she was trying to figure out something. I wanted to go and motivate her but I had little comfort to offer so I continued walking home.

The next morning, a group of people from the Company came into the court and said, “As per the Doctrine of Lapse, the kingdom of Jhansi cannot be ruled by a woman and the throne of Jhansi does not have any natural heir, so it will automatically lapse into our hands.”

“We don’t want to give you our kingdom. We will stand together and never let you stake a claim to our motherland!” declared Rani Laxmibai loudly.

“So if that is what you want, then that is what we are

going to do. Remember this, Raniji, your kingdom, your motherland is our next target. Be ready to lose your pride forever.” The British left after saying this.

The behaviour of the governor made Rani Laxmibai a little suspicious and at last, she began thinking that someone in her kingdom was betraying her. She called me to her and said that she suspected someone in her kingdom was with the Company. I started to sweat badly and not even a single word came out of my mouth. I asked her why she had told me before announcing it in the court.

Rani Laxmibai said with poise, “It is so obvious that you are the one I trust most in the entire kingdom. You are the best minister in my court and you have always been the one I approach when I am in trouble; you are like a father to me.”

Tears flowed from my eyes and I said, “No one has ever given me so much respect and importance.”

Just then, a guard came running to tell us that the Company had attacked Jhansi. Rani Laxmibai commanded that they be locked outside the palace. She got dressed in her helmet and armour and to protect her son, she tied him to her back with a soft cloth. Meanwhile, the British had started to come into the palace.

The Rani fought with bravery and courage. She managed to strike down every man who came before her when, all of a sudden, a sword passed through her stomach and she fell. When she turned, she could not

believe her eyes: the one who had run a sword through her and betrayed her was the person she had trusted the most. I was the one. She was in too much pain to speak, but she conveyed everything just with a look.

I said, “The Company officers kidnapped my family members and wouldn’t tell me where they were unless I murdered you along with your adopted son. So today I have done something that is going to haunt me throughout my life. I regret my deed and will hate myself for the rest of my living days.” After this, I covered her with a cloth and went to the Governor, crying, “I did what you wanted me to do! Now tell me where my family is.”

The Governor led me towards one of his office rooms. My family was in a terrible condition, having been kept in darkness without food and water for four whole days.

I took them from Jhansi and left them with my in-laws. I now live like a wanderer, trying to atone for my horrible act of killing the best ruler of all time who had participated so efficiently in the Revolt of 1857.

The result of this revolt might not have been as Rani Laxmibai had wanted but it ended the Company rule and our country came under the British crown. Queen Victoria made many changes, like ordering religious tolerance and promising to maintain ancient customs and traditions. The rights of Indian rulers were recognized and they were assured that their lands would not be further annexed.

Breathe

by
APAAR SINGH, GRADE VII

I ate moon
Saw the world
Read the history
Solved the mysteries
Earthlings are crazy
Rich buy poor
Not so good
Silly they are
Almighty save them.



TEENAGE STORIES



Illustration by Gauri Latta, Grade VIII

TEENAGE STORIES

This having been my first workshop, I was nervous about what to expect, but I can honestly say I thoroughly enjoyed the experience and can't wait for more! The children were so receptive and full of ideas and energy. On the first day, we did some warm up exercises to get their creativity flowing – such as free writing and a story telling chain. We also did some passage comprehension and worked on tips to portray emotion in writing. The second day was slightly more technical and we worked on the differences between story, theme and plot as well as how to describe a setting in a way that the reader can truly feel like he is present there. The day was riddled with games and activities to keep things fun and practical. The participants then each wrote their own stories, and I was amazed by their creativity and the quality of their writing. Overall, it was a great learning experience not just for the students, but for me too, and I had a great time working with them.



NANDHIKA NAMBI

Nandhika Nambi is the author of *Unbroken*, a novel about the difficulties faced by a teenager in a wheelchair (both mental and physical). *Unbroken* is her maiden traditionally published novel which won the Hindu Young World Goodbooks Award for ‘Best book – Fiction’ in 2018. She currently lives in Coimbatore where she is a final year medical student, and is juggling her diverse interests including music, writing, reading and medicine. She is passionate about addressing social issues through her work, and helping more children discover their love of creative writing.



A Lesson Learnt

by

GAURI LATTA, GRADE VIII

Monday morning at 7:30 am was when Alisha was going to start her new journey at the school of her dreams. It was a bright and sunny morning. She was very happy to start her school life at Dikshant from the eighth grade and excitedly anticipated all that was to come.

“Good morning,” a teacher said to Alisha when she found her wandering along the corridor.

“Good morning, ma’am. I am Alisha, a new student, and I have no idea how to find class 8A.”

“Welcome to Dikshant, Alisha! Go straight and turn left. You will be just outside 8A.”

“Thank you, ma’am.”

While she was passing through the corridors, many boys stared at her. Their attention made her uncomfortable

so she hurried along.

During recess, when she was washing her hands, she saw a boy and was dumbstruck. He seemed like the prince of her dreams. She mustered up the courage to talk to him.

The name of the boy, as she later enquired and found out, was Aditya. He was the most handsome boy in school. There wasn't a girl who didn't find him dreamy. Every girl wanted to date him, but he didn't seem interested.

When Alisha went to greet Aditya, he was struck by her beauty. He wanted to talk to her but suddenly the bell rang for all the students to switch to their classes for the fourth period. So, Alisha ran towards her classroom. Aditya tried to stop her but he couldn't. And after that for the whole day Aditya kept thinking about Alisha and Alisha kept thinking about Aditya.

Each of them was deeply infatuated with the other.

At the end of the school day, Alisha went to Aditya's class to talk to him. When she was about to enter the class, she hesitated, wondering if a relationship would affect her studies and decided not to talk to him after all.

When Alisha got back home, although she tried concentrating on her studies, she was constantly daydreaming about Aditya.

The next morning, Alisha went to school and tried to resume her usual routine without thinking about Aditya. But as she was passing through the corridor, Aditya pulled her arm and took her to a corner of the school.

He declared his love for her and asked her to go on a date with him. She couldn't say no to him because of his cute hairstyle and personality and most importantly, the love for Alisha he seemed to have in his heart. From then on, he was her favorite sight, and the sound of his voice was all she wanted to hear. Every time she smelt his deodorant she knew he was near or approaching her class and it made her heart skip a beat and the butterflies in her stomach flutter.

Their relationship was going well, and she was very happy although her grades were dropping. Aditya was a bit self-obsessed, a terrible listener and didn't seem to show much interest in her after a while, but she was blind to all of that. Her friends tried to warn her but she became furious at them for what she saw as bad mouthing Aditya and stopped talking to them entirely. Suddenly, after 6 months Aditya had a change of heart. Aditya's ex-girlfriend, Hina, had rejoined the school.

After hearing this news from Aditya's best friend, Alisha felt totally broken.

Aditya was no longer interested in Alisha and began to date Hina, without thinking about how this would make Alisha feel. It made her feel horrible.

Alisha cried into her pillow night after night. Her eyes were sore and she wore a constant expression of sadness. Tears rolled down her cheeks if she began to think about him. She felt helpless and alone. She had no one to speak

to. She felt that she couldn't tell anyone about it.

After a few months, she heard that Aditya has been suspended from the school because he had tried to molest Hina.

The news came to her like a wake-up call. She had been brooding over someone who was certainly not worth her time or attention. Now Alisha realized that she was foolish to have trusted him and not seen past his bad intentions. She befriended Hina and helped her recover from the trauma he had caused her; she also apologized to her other friends. She felt terrible about the whole thing as they had only been looking out for her, and she had been very rude to them. She was fooled by Aditya's feigned love for her.

She took matters into her own hands. She got her grades back up and became the genuinely happy girl she used to be before Aditya had messed with her mind and heart. She was a lot more careful about whom she trusted and ended up with a very supportive set of friends. Eventually, older and wiser, she met the man of her dreams. He was everything she had ever hoped for, sweet, supportive, caring and very respectful towards her.

Despite the incident having caused so much upheaval in her life, she came to realize that she wouldn't have had it any other way, as it had taught her so much, and made her realize what was wrong, so she could find what was right.



A Black Spot on a White Surface

by

DIPTI MITTAL, GRADE VII

In a village in Goa, there lived a boy named Mark who lived with his family in a small hut barely enough for all of them. He was a very selfish child. He lost his temper easily, especially when people discriminated against him because he was poor. His parents were hardworking. His mother worked in a bungalow as a maid and his father was a labourer. Yet, they were not able to make ends meet.

They grew older and less able to work. Now, Mark had the responsibility of earning money for the family. He was just a teenager though. He had barely finished a few years of school and had no educational qualifications to his name.

One day, he was out looking for work and on his way, he saw some people kidnapping a child. He followed



Illustration by Gauri Latta_Grade VIII

them and saw some more kids inside the place where the child that was kidnapped was taken to. He overheard the kidnappers calling the child's parents to ask them for a ransom. Then they went out and he followed them. He saw the kid's parents giving money and taking their child back from the masked men. After seeing the situation, he decided to start kidnapping kids in order to get some money for himself and his parents. He joined the kidnappers and started kidnapping kids and each time he collected INR 5,000. After taking the money from the kid's parents, Mark took the money home.

His parents asked, "Where did you get this money from?"

"I started working in a shop," lied Mark.

Mamma asked happily, "In which shop, Mark?"

"In a grocery shop, close to the main road," said Mark.

His mother believed him.

After he started buying new clothes and many other things from the ransom money, his parents began to wonder where the money was really coming from. Whenever his parents would ask, he would say that his employer gave him the money.

One day, his neighbour came to know about his involvement in a kidnapping and went to his parents immediately.

"Your son has started kidnapping kids," they were informed.

They didn't believe it and told their neighbour to go away. After a few days, his mother went to the grocery shop to see Mark working. She looked for him but couldn't find him.

She asked the shopkeeper about him.

The shopkeeper told her, "No one by the name of Mark works here."

Mark's mother went home and asked him again where he was getting his money from. She coaxed him to tell her the truth.

Mark said, "What is your problem? I'm earning money. Isn't that all that matters?" He thought it was okay to kidnap children because they were all very rich, while his family was very poor. He never hurt the kids or treated them badly.

The thought that her son was involved in such despicable activities saddened his mother terribly, and after a few months, she died of a heart attack. Mark was barely affected by it.

He had an innocent face, an angelic smile, and childlike features, and no one ever suspected him to be a kidnapper because he seemed incapable of doing something so horrible. His neighbour tried to tell other people, but no one believed him. He became a big gangster, and his income grew rapidly.

Many years later, he met a girl in a restaurant. She was so pretty. Mark brought up the courage to ask her name.

She said, “My name is Caroline. Nice to meet you!”

“My name is Mark. Nice to meet you,” replied Mark.

Mark said, “I like your name. Can we be friends?”

Caroline said, “I can’t say. I barely know you right now.”

“I understand,” said Mark. “Can we meet for dinner?”

“Yes, sure,” said Caroline.

In the evening they met and tried to get to know each other.

Caroline asked, “What do you do? Are you studying or working?”

“I am a gangster. I earn a lot of money through kidnapping and other illegal activities,” said Mark, thinking it would impress her.

“Really?” said Caroline, shocked. “No, I could never be friends with a criminal,” said Caroline and she left the hotel in a hurry.

After some days they happened to meet and this time Mark explained that it was because of poverty that he had to become a kidnapper. He admitted that deep within he regretted his actions. After this confession, Caroline agreed to be his friend and they met quite frequently. Over time, Mark fell in love with Caroline but she was engaged to another man called Joe. Mark decided to kill Joe. But when Mark came to kill Joe, he suddenly stopped as his heart was incapable of killing a man. Caroline came to know about his attempt, and was angry at first and then came around, realising that Mark was just a misguided man with good

intentions.

After some days, Mark had a dream in which he saw his parents as kids and his grandparents in the same situation as his parents were with him. He saw that his parents, despite being poor, did not go down the wrong path in order to earn money. They worked hard to earn money to take care of their parents.

The next day he decided to change. He returned all the ransom money to the kids' parents. He left his position as a gang leader. He started to work as a cleaner in a hotel. After working for a few years, he became a hotel manager. He eventually bought the hotel from the owner and opened many branches.

He thanked Caroline for showing him the light and helping him to change. He realised that he should not be selfish and interfere in her relationship with Joe, and wished them a happy married life.

He had learnt a valuable lesson, one that he carried with him for the rest of his life. Once he started earning an honest living, life became much better and he eventually met the woman of his dreams whom he married and settled down with. He started foundations for helping misguided children and gave many speeches in schools. He became a beacon of hope and change, for children who believed they were stuck and had no choice. He inspired them to stay strong no matter what the situation, and to always choose right over wrong.



New Beginnings

by

ABHISHEK NAGPAL, GRADE X

“That’s the last one,” I shouted, emptying a huge bag of trash. “There’s two more, bud,” shouted little Jimmy, our orphanage’s only African American kid, from behind me. “Come on, let’s leave it for another day,” I tried convincing him. He gave me a serious look through his horn-rimmed spectacles and said, “Norman’s gonna kill you.” “Who cares, our life has already gone down the drain. All we do is work, work and work. There is no time for anything else!” I shouted, kicking the trash can in anger. I left the room in a hurry in order to avoid breaking down in front of Jimmy.

“Don’t overthink, James, it’s going to be okay,” I consoled myself. “This isn’t going to last forever; my time will come. Remember the old days, they’re going to be back.” Tears flowed from my eyes. This happened

every time I thought about my mom and dad. The happy memories were no longer happy. They were full of regret. “I should’ve died with them, I should’ve,” I said to myself. I knew that I shouldn’t be beating myself up over the past. It wasn’t my fault I wasn’t in the car with them that fatal night. But I wish I had been.

“James, where the hell are you? Get back here right now or there’ll be no supper tonight,” shouted a harsh voice. I immediately recognized the angry tone. The voice belonged to Norman, the man who owns the orphanage. He makes our lives hell and always makes us feel like he’s better than us. He was nicknamed ‘The Weasel’, because of his miserly nature and selfishness, though nobody said this to his face. At least not anymore, not after what happened last time. The last kid who did, a boy named Frankie, was thrown out of the orphanage for doing so. He hasn’t been seen ever since, though there are rumours of which I would rather not speak.

I fearfully and quietly followed Norman back into the room. After a hard day of work, as always, I took a break. I went up to my dormitory and looked around. I had forgotten the date. Lost track of time, to be honest. When the days are so tedious and monotonous, they tend to blend into one another. I looked at the calendar. Today was 24th of December! It was Christmas tomorrow. I couldn’t believe that I had forgotten Christmas. Oh, how I remembered those Christmas Eve’s. My dad dressing up

as Santa, distributing sweets and gifts to everyone in the family. I thought about the Christmas tree; I closed my eyes and it was almost like I was back there at the dinner table, surrounded by my loving family, every second filled with fun and frolic. Oh, how much I wished for those days to return. With the hope of a better tomorrow, I went to sleep.

“Everybody up, kids,” called a voice that startled me and woke me up in an instant. “Get ready, today is the big day. It is adoption day!” shouted one of the orphanage employees. The word ‘adoption’ woke me up in an instant and I shot out of bed with no difficulty at all. It lit up all our faces immediately. Today, on Christmas, the lives of a few of us would change. A few of us would move to our new homes. The chances were slim, though not impossible. After tidying my room, I put on the clothes that I had washed most recently and smoothened out the wrinkles, trying to look as presentable as possible. Today was going to be a big day, hopefully.

We got ready for the day and started doing our chores. We had to clean up the whole house. The prospect of being adopted kept my spirits up throughout the otherwise menial task.

At 1 pm, a young couple by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Shears arrived. They looked around the place and spoke to all of us. Finally, they decided to adopt little Jimmy. Jimmy was a 6-year-old fun loving kid and everyone’s favourite, so

no one was surprised at their choice. Let down but thrilled for my friend, I went to lead them out and say goodbye to Jimmy. As they were walking, they didn't see the open manhole. I shouted, "Watch out!" but they were unable to hear and little Jimmy fell in. They shouted, "Help" but to no avail. Nobody from inside the orphanage seemed to hear. The sounds of Jimmy's cries reached us. Unable to bear his suffering, I looked into the manhole, saw the convenience ladder and climbed in. It was pitch black. Mrs. Shears shouted at me to come back but I didn't. I only had one motive, getting Jimmy out. I climbed in, but unable to see a thing, I stumbled and fell down. I hurt my knee and my hand. Both began to throb and hurt so badly. My head was spinning from the fall. I looked around. My vision was blurry. I heard someone crying and followed the voice. I saw a shadow. It was Jimmy. His leg was bleeding profusely. He was clutching his leg and crying. "Come on Jimmy, let's go". I carried him and with great difficulty, climbed up. Jimmy was heavy, but I used my strength and my willpower to get him out of there so he could receive some care for his bleeding leg. Each second dragged by until we finally made it outside.

"Oh, thank God you're okay!" exclaimed Mrs. Shears. "Why did you go in, child? You could have gotten badly hurt!" "It was my duty, ma'am," I replied. We started getting medical attention and soon both of us felt better. Jimmy was luckily out of danger. I was about to go back

to my room in the orphanage when I heard a male voice say, “Kid, wait here.”... “Martha, I need to talk to you.” Mr. Shears was speaking to me and to his wife respectively. After a few minutes of serious discussion with her in the corner, he came to me and said, “We’re adopting you both. I really like you, and I believe someone like you would be a great addition to our family. I am truly amazed at your bravery and selflessness.”

I couldn’t believe my ears. This was really happening. I agreed to their offer in a second, with no hesitation. Jimmy and I left with them, hand-in-hand. I walked with excitement and anticipation into my new beginning.

That day I learnt the most important lesson of my life, if you stay positive and stay kind, good things are always around the corner.





I Was Never Unheard

by
VARDHA VERMA, GRADE VII

I am different. Not just different from you but different from most of the world. I can't speak. Never have and never will. People have always labelled me as a burden to my family. However, I believe that it's not important to use our voices to speak, as most of the time my silence



Illustration by Jasmeet Kaur, Grade X

expressed what could not be said in a way that words never could.

My grandma and my father, they were my best friends. My mother was my best friend too but I lost her while I was 5 years old. After that, my father started working hard to support me but couldn't take care of me at the same time, so my brother and I moved in with my Grandma.

'Hey Christina, we need to go,' said my brother through sign language. I could tell that something was wrong by the worried expression on his face. I tried to sign, 'What is wrong?' but he wasn't looking at me at the time. Tears were rolling down his cheeks. I tried to calm him down. He held my hand and started running as fast as he could run, dragging me along with him. I had no idea where we were going, but as we ran down the road, it soon became evident that we were heading towards the hospital where my Grandmother had been recently admitted. My heart was pounding in my chest by the time we reached her room. I already knew what to expect but it still terrified me. I wasn't ready to lose another person. That night, I lost one of the most precious people in my life. My world fell apart.

Grandma died of cancer, we were informed by the doctors. I was so shocked. She never told me about this nor did she let me see that she was suffering from such a serious disease. While she was in the hospital she left a letter for me - 'I know that you are crying but there is no

need to cry because I will always be there with you. Even if my body is not there, my soul will always be with you. Remember that you were never unheard by me and will never be.” Her words comforted me a little, but I couldn’t get rid of the hopelessness I felt. My brother called my father, who was in Mumbai. He came as soon as he could and tried to cheer me up but in vain. I cried day and night in memory of my grandmother, who had been my one constant source of support.

Over time, things gradually went back to normal but there was always a feeling of emptiness. Grandma had written in her letter that I was never unheard by her, but I still hadn’t figured out the meaning behind those words. They were like a mystery to me. I was determined to find out the deeper meaning to her sentence and began to do so over time. We moved to Mumbai with my father and I took the responsibility of taking care of my younger brother.

Thereafter, the financial condition of my father improved a lot. So my brother and I were both sent to school. I had always had a desire to study and it was like a dream come true. I was sent to a small government school and I was happy there. Many people discouraged me and told me that this school wasn’t suitable for people like me, who couldn’t speak. But the principal and the teachers of my school supported me every single day. My father was not able to pay my fees after some time, so when I grew

up, I started a part-time job to fund my studies.

After graduation, I wanted to start a business. I told my father this, but he was helpless and he could do nothing more than verbally encourage me because he was a retired man and did not have the financial resources to help me.

I went to the principal of my school. My principal was my savior and invested in my business idea. Soon I started my business. I really felt proud as I was just 24 when I began. My company was named after my grandma and my mother as they had both inspired me. At first, it was very difficult. No one was interested in joining such a small company. Finally, some people joined me but I struggled to pay them, as all the money I had was used in investing in inventory. But somehow by taking loans from banks, I was able to keep the business afloat.

Everything was smooth sailing after that. I was now supporting my brother's education and was proud of myself for being able to do so. After some time when we were on the right track, we got a big deal which really helped my company. Soon the awards for best businesswoman were around the corner. I wanted this award badly but it seemed like there was too much competition. My name had actually been nominated for the award by my principal but I was completely unaware of this.

Soon I received a letter from the award committee that I had been shortlisted. This news put me on top of the world! I attended the award function along with my

father and brother. I was so thrilled to be considered for the award, it didn't seem to matter if I won or lost. After an hour of speeches, the award distribution began. The name of the best businesswoman was going to be announced. My heart was beating so loudly that I was concerned that the people sitting nearby could hear it. I heard my name being announced. Tears rolled down my cheeks as I was awarded 'The Best Businesswoman in India.' My feelings were clear to everyone present by the light in my eyes as my brother read out the speech I had prepared.

I felt a sudden warmth in my heart then. I could almost sense the presence of my mother and my grandmother in the auditorium. Suddenly the words of my grandma, which were once a mystery to me, flashed before my eyes and yes, those words made perfect sense now.

This was the exact moment when I realized that although I could not speak, I was never unheard... by God and by the Universe... my life too was part of the grand plan. The words which had puzzled me had been the answer to everything. My silence was a statement to those who had said that I was a burden to my family and that my life was useless. I achieved everything when I stopped listening to the people bringing me down. The moment I made my silence a part of my life and my power, the life yielded me success. My silence spoke through my actions. My silence was so special, it was heard and understood by the ones who mattered.

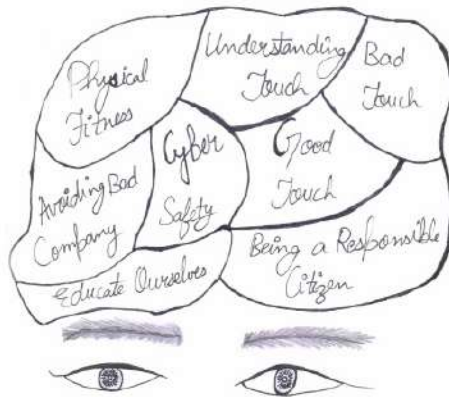


Illustration by Kiranjot Kaur, Grade VIII

Be a Bit Skilly!

by

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This piece is intended to teach teenagers a few of the essential skills that they should know in today's day and age. As a teenager myself, I have had to learn these skills so I have compiled them here, for you guys! I truly hope you find them useful.

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1. PHYSICAL FITNESS

Exercise plays a huge role in our well-being. It improves

mood and increases energy levels. In a world where most teenagers are glued to their gadgets and are total couch potatoes, I encourage you to get up and get moving! Trust me, it will do you a world of good. There are so many ways to stay fit like yoga, aerobics, dance, cycling and other such outdoor sports and physical activities. In our packed schedule of academics and other work, we also have a responsibility towards our bodies and should set aside at least 45 minutes a day, for this purpose. Some benefits of physical fitness are:

- Increased focus
- Better skin
- Keeps your lungs and bones healthy and strong
- Lowers the risk of heart, lung and other organ-related diseases
- Improves self-esteem
- Makes you flexible
- Controls aggression

How do you go about getting active?

- Well, try to get your family involved too! It's fun to have company while working out and you can keep each other motivated!
- Keep activities fun... being active shouldn't be a chore.
- Choose suitable activities and do not strain yourself by doing too much all at once.

- Slowly make it a part of your routine!

2. UNDERSTANDING ‘TOUCH’

What do you understand by good touch and bad touch? It’s okay for your family members to hug or touch you lovingly. But if anyone touches you in a way that is not appropriate or makes you feel uneasy, that’s definitely a bad touch.

When you feel like someone is behaving in a bad way with you in terms of ‘touch’, say “no” at once and call for help. It would be great if you could learn some self-defense to protect yourself.

1. Jab straight in the eyes with the index finger and middle finger of your dominant hand.
2. Use the heel of your palm to strike upwards from under his nose, putting the entire weight of your body on that strike.
3. Clap your open, tight palms strongly against the attacker’s eyes.
4. Hold the fingers straight and tightly together, thumb tucked in and bent slightly at the knuckle and strike the outer edge at the side of the neck or straight and hard at the windpipe.
5. As the entire weight of the body of the attacker is on his knees, you can hit directly at the attacker’s knee.
6. You can also drive your knee into his groin.

3. BE A RESPONSIBLE CITIZEN

Next is the need to become a responsible citizen. We should understand our responsibility towards our nation. We should follow the laws of the land including traffic rules, and know our rights and duties. We should think about how to improve our nation. Some points that we can incorporate to become a responsible citizen are listed as follows:

- Keep all the surroundings clean.
- Try to keep our nation green.
- Keep our eyes open so as to report any wrongdoings around us.
- Do not waste water.
- Contribute in lowering pollution.
- Create awareness regarding the importance of education.
- Help in reducing global warming.
- Try and create awareness among people regarding problems like women empowerment, safety issues, girl child education, etc.
- Finally, we should inspire our friends and motivate ourselves to take part in active politics to improve our nation as a whole.

4. CYBER SAFETY

What do you understand by the world cyber?

It is relating to or characteristic of the culture of computers, information technology, and virtual reality. It is a double-edged sword, being a useful tool but also a medium that people use to exploit other people. More and more people have access to the internet these days, and not all of them have good intentions.

Social media can sometimes tempt children to add dangerous strangers as their friends, which they believe is a harmless thing to do but can lead to serious consequences.

We install games and all kinds of apps in our phones without knowing the risks. We might be giving all permissions to the app developer to access data in our phones like contacts, messages, and calls, which in turn compromises our safety.

We have become so addicted to all these gadgets that we no longer spend time with our families or try to talk to people face to face.

As the number of internet users continues to grow worldwide, governments and social organizations have expressed concerns about the safety of children using the Internet. Safer Internet Day is celebrated worldwide in February to raise awareness about internet safety.

Please try to read up on internet safety and stay out of trouble on the internet. If cyberbullying comes to your notice, immediately tell an adult so they can report it.

5. AVOID BAD COMPANY

Last but not the least, we need to take a stand against peer pressure, when it comes to being forced to do things we know are wrong. We need to educate ourselves on the harmful effects of drugs and other illicit substances, that someone might encourage us to try. Even if it is difficult to say no to your best friends for fear of being teased by them, it is important to take a stand. Eventually, we will attract better company and better interaction around us.

It is important not to be vulnerable, as some of the things teenagers are introduced to can be incredibly harmful and very addictive. Never agree to anything you are not comfortable with, and never accompany your friends to strange places or parties: you do not know what trouble might be awaiting you there!





Ameena's Friend

by
RADHIKA SHAIDA, GRADE VIII

“HURRY UP, AMEENA!”

A loud and strong voice shouted from the parking lot.

‘Ameena, come soon. We will miss the train!’ Repeated her father.

Ameena was a 16-year-old girl, carrying a huge bag of dreams and ambitions with her to the college of her dreams. She was leaving for New Delhi, as the next day was her first day of college. She had to travel over on a train which was scheduled to leave in an hour, and she hadn't left her house yet.

Ameena was a tall girl with curly hair. She was a responsible and an intelligent girl. She was very focussed on her goals. Throughout school, she had been in the good books of her teachers. Some might even call her a teacher's pet!



She had passed her 12th with an aggregate of 96% and had a dream to get admission in IIT, Powai. Unfortunately, this didn't come true but she still made it to another top college in Delhi.

Her family was staying with her for the first few days in order to help her settle in. She was really excited to go to her new college and make friends.

She came running, already late for the train but sparing time to take a selfie with her family and a picture of her house so she could look at it whenever she felt homesick.

When she reached Delhi, she shifted into to her college hostel with the help of her family. She had a roommate named Shaumili. Shaumili wanted to become a judge, so she was still hoping to get admission into a law college, the following year. They both chatted a lot, sharing their likes, dislikes, and stories from their childhoods.

The next day, they had their breakfast together and went to college. Ameena was so happy with the college and with Shaumili, that she wanted to remain there for the rest of her life.

They both were very smart and were liked by all the professors. They were always together. Their parents were also happy with their friendship. They took care of each other and became like sisters. They went to shopping malls, restaurants and movies together. They were recognized as the BFF's of the college wherever they went. They were hardly ever seen without each other. Whenever either of them went to meet their families for a few days, the other felt lonely.

They prepared for their exams together and scored the highest in their class. Ameena was good at Maths and Shaumili was good at Science. They were also very good at dancing and other extracurricular activities. They supported each other's dreams.

However, their friendship was about to be put to the test.

Their first year of college flew by and before they knew it they were getting ready to go home after their second semester.

Ameena re-tried and got admission in IIT, Powai. She was really sad to leave her college and especially her BFF, Shaumili.

When she reached Mumbai, she became lonely. Many people in the class tried to get her to open up and become friends with them but she made it clear she wanted to be alone. She was so depressed that she called her parents and said that she wanted to quit IIT.

“What? Why would you want to do that? You are in the college of your dreams!” her parents shouted. They tried to get her to change her mind but in vain. When they asked her for a reason, she lied to them that she felt uncomfortable in her new college. They had no option but to give in because they were worried about her depression.

When she reached her old college, she was so happy to see Shaumili that she jumped into her arms with joy. Things went back to normal and just like before, they began to spend every minute of the day together.

One day, Shaumili told Ameena that she had gotten admission in the law college of her dreams. She was very happy.

Ameena was devastated.

Soon after, Shaumili left for National Law School in Bangalore. Ameena felt lonely and thought that Shaumili felt the same. But six months later she saw Shaumili's status on Facebook, which was a picture of her and her new friends, laughing and enjoying themselves. It broke Ameena's heart but also opened her eyes. She had closed herself off new experiences and opportunities, all because she had been hung up on the past. She hadn't welcomed change, had resented it instead.

She decided to change. She made many more friends in college, participated in events and graduated as the best outgoing student with an amazing job offer in her pocket.

This experience taught her that your happiness cannot depend on another person or on a particular event. It is within you and can be explored by the way you embrace life. Ameena and Shaumili remained friends for life after she realised that friendship is not always about talking every day, it's about supporting each other throughout the course of life. Despite how rarely they got a chance to meet, every time they spoke it was like nothing had changed. No matter how far two good friends are, they are always close at heart. Having learnt this, she sailed through life with a new acceptance for change, because every amazing event in her life and every person she became close to, remained a part of her no matter where she went.



Breathe

by

JAGMEET SINGH, GRADE VII

Stretch out large
Contrast as you can
Feel like bird
Fly high in the sky

by

NIDHI GUPTA, GRADE VII

Expanding to fullest
Contracting to fullest
Imagination creativity me
Exploring new galaxies
Thinking beyond imagination