

Inculcating Active Citizenship Through Stories

Richa Pandey

Children across the world love stories. Whether they are narrated by their grandmothers or by voiceover artists in animated cartoons or movies, stories remain the windows to a world unseen by children. They connect people across time and space. A period film on the life of Akbar definitely makes Social Science classes more interesting because it transforms Akbar from being a historical figure engaged in wars and battles to a human being who children, as well as adults, can relate to at an emotional level. It becomes important, however, to examine how the stories can be utilised effectively to inculcate life skills necessary for active citizenship.

As a Social Science teacher, I remember discussing the famous Hindi poem, *Khoob ladhi mardani woh to Jhansi wali Rani thi* by Subhadra Kumari Chauhan with my class VIII students while discussing the British Raj. Knowing the stories of people who lived during colonial times was certainly a more powerful experience than reading about colonial laws as stated facts. The students were more involved and engaged that day and some of them started singing the poem in chorus. This made me wonder what more I could do, given sufficient time and autonomy, which would encourage my students to question the status quo and inspire them to take agency for change. What kind of activities could be designed to inculcate the skills and values like empathy, critical thinking and inquiry?

The National Curriculum Framework (2005) discusses the need to provide a 'positive experience of democracy and democratic participation to children in order to realise the vision of participatory democracy' (p 84). This article explores how a curriculum based on stories can be designed to provide such an experience to students. The insights are based on my personal experience of engaging with an experiential and inquiry-based curriculum. As a volunteer for *Simple Education Foundation*, a Delhi-based NGO, I interacted virtually with two adolescent girls (11 and 13 years old), using voice calls for a period of three months. We used

workbooks designed by the organisation to explore concepts like resources, livelihoods and migration while simultaneously developing basic literacy (reading and framing simple sentences in Hindi and English) and numeracy skills (data analysis and interpretation). In the process, we also explored the range of emotions each of us is capable of feeling on a daily basis. All of this was done using two workbooks (mathematics and equity) designed using stories as the starting point.

Examples of stories

The article shares specific examples of the kind of stories that can be used to inculcate life skills essential for active citizenship. A brief overview of each story is followed by a list of activities that can be designed around these to achieve desired outcomes.

1. **Title of the story:** *Karuna aur doston ki mazedaar sair* (Karuna, her friends and a fun trip)

Category: Fiction

Overview of the story:

A group of teenagers visit a campsite near their homes and meet people engaged in different occupations, including cab drivers, campsite managers, cook, cleaning staff and guide for rafting. The children interact with them and ask questions relating to the challenges and experiences unique to each, thereby developing an understanding of how every profession is important for the smooth functioning of the social system.

Follow-up activities

Reflection questions:

The questions that encourage children to reflect upon what they have read go a long way in developing key life skills. Sample questions could be:

- How do you think Ravi Bhaiya/ Gunjan Didi feel about their job at the campsite? Give evidence for your response.
- What would have happened if one of the people was absent from the campsite? How would it affect other people at the campsite?

Exploration

As part of these activities, students get an opportunity to enter the story and be a part of it. For example, they can be asked to assume the role of the campsite manager. They would be assigned to do the following tasks:

- There is a shortage of cash inflow in the campsite due to lack of tourists this time. You have to revise the salary of different people. How would you make these changes?
- As part of cost-cutting measures, you have to eliminate certain roles from the system. Which role would you eliminate? Why? How would your decision impact the different people in the system (the ones who got eliminated and the ones who did not)?

2. Title of the story: The Marketplace

Category: Fiction

Overview of the story:

A young boy visits a marketplace where he encounters people from different occupations including vegetable sellers, ice cream vendors, chemists, potters and cobblers. His treatment of

different people is seemingly based on the work they do. For example, He talks politely to the chemist and pays the amount asked. On the other hand, he not only bargains with the cobbler and potter but is rude to them because of the work they do.

Follow-up activities

Experience

This activity allows the children to recognise their subconscious biases. As part of the activity, the children have to suggest one occupation to their friend. To do this, children have to make 'occupation' cards based on their interaction with people who are engaged in these jobs, each listing the challenges, remuneration, unique aspects, superpower and importance of that occupation in society, showing what might happen if that occupation is eliminated from the village. The children are asked then to pick one card from the deck for their friend (a job that they would want their friend to do). At every stage, the occupation that they select gets eliminated. This process is repeated till there is only one occupation left. Generally, children pick options like

L1 - अनुभव B

1

सबसे खास चीज़

एक कमजोरी

सुपर पावर

इसके बिना गाँव का क्या होगा

मासिक आय

2

सबसे खास चीज़

एक कमजोरी

सुपर पावर

इसके बिना गाँव का क्या होगा

मासिक आय

3

सबसे खास चीज़

एक कमजोरी

सुपर पावर

इसके बिना गाँव का क्या होगा

मासिक आय

4

सबसे खास चीज़

एक कमजोरी

सुपर पावर

इसके बिना गाँव का क्या होगा

मासिक आय

5


सबसे खास चीज़

एक कमजोरी

सुपर पावर

इसके बिना गाँव का क्या होगा

मासिक आय



आपको कार्ड्स बनाने में कितना मज़ा आया होगा! सारे कार्ड्स को अपने सामने रखो/रखिये। अपने buddy से जानिए की क्या उन्होंने बचपन में क्या कमी इस तरह के कार्ड्स का इस्तेमाल किया है? यदि आपके पास whatsapp है तो इसे पाठशाला whatsapp ग्रुप पर भेज सकते हैं।

doctor, engineers, teacher first and occupations like electrician, plumber, sweeper etc are not picked or saved till the last. The reflection questions based on this exercise can help children uncover the biases that exist in society about certain occupations. This also encourages them to be conscious of their decisions and choices.

3. Title of the story: Palayan karne walo ka wapis lautna (Reverse migration)

Category: Non-fiction

Overview of the story

Parvez had migrated from his village to work in a factory in Delhi. Due to the lockdown, he lost his job and after failing to get another job, he decided to return to his village.

Follow-up activities

Data analysis and interpretation:

Children are given a bar graph depicting the cost of train tickets to Dehradun from Delhi, Mumbai, Chandigarh and Jaipur. Children had to solve the following problem:

- If a family of four has to travel from Mumbai to Dehradun, how much do they need to pay?
- During the nationwide lockdown, some migrants were charged for the train tickets. Suppose four such migrants wanted to return from Delhi and collectively had Rs 1000/- with them. Look at the bar graph and tell if they had enough money to return to their state. If not, how much were they short of?


4. Title of the story: Badlaav ki Kahani (Story of change)

Category: Non-fiction


Overview of the story:

A young girl called Divya Rawat quits her well-paying job and returns to her village with an intention to empower her community. She uses the locally available resources (physical and human) and helps the women around her cultivate mushrooms. With grit and determination, she manages to generate employment in her community. She is awarded the Sanjeevani Ratna Puraskar by the State of Uttarakhand.

अनुभव F



अनुभव F
Challenges और Aspirations



हमने इस workbook में पढ़ा resource के बारे में। की कैसे दिव्या ने और तिलोनिया से आरती जी, हनुमान जी और रामी बाई ने अपने पास से कुछ चीजों की सहायता लेकर अपने गाँव के लिए कितना कुछ किया। यह कहानियाँ हमें प्रेरित करती हैं की कैसे हम बदलाव ला सकते हैं छोटा या बड़ा। कैसे हम अपने गाँव की समस्या समझ कर उसके लिए कुछ कर सकते हैं और अपने समाज के लोगों के लिए सकारात्मक (positive) बदलाव ला सकते हैं।

A. इन सभी कहानियों में पहचानिए की हमारे किरदारों ने कौनसी समस्या (challenge) का समाधान किया/ या कौनसी ऐसी चीज़ की जो उनके गाँव के लिए अच्छी हो (aspirations) यह की।

उदाहरण : रामी बाई ने महिलाओं के तरफ़ हो रहे जुल्म को रोकने में काम किया
दिया :

आरती जी :

हनुमान जी :

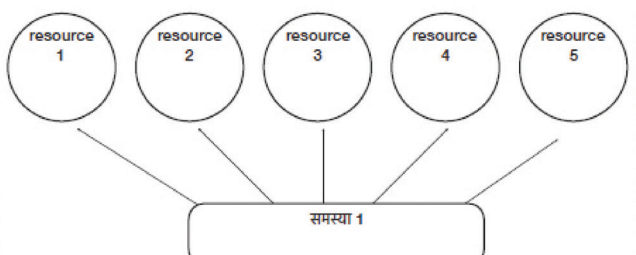
रामी बाई :

B. जैसे इन सभी लोगों ने कुछ resource का इस्तेमाल करके इन challenges का समाधान किया या अपने गाँव को बहतर किया (aspirations) वैसे ही हम भी कुछ ऐसा ही करने की कोशिश करते हैं।

अपने गाँव के बारे में सोचिए, आपको क्या लगता है 3 ऐसी कौनसी समस्या (challenges) या (aspirations) हैं जिन पर आप काम करना चाहेंगे? क्या वो लिंग से जुड़ी हुई हैं, पर्यावरण से जुड़ी हुई हैं, विकास से जुड़ी हुई हैं या शिक्षा से या कुछ और?

1
2
3

C. अब आपने जो resource अपने गाँव में चुने थे, सोचिए की उनको इस्तेमाल कर आप कैसे इन समस्या का समाधान कर सकते हैं या अपने गाँव को बहतर कर सकते हैं। आप इसमें और भी resource जोड़ सकते हैं जो आपको लगता है



Follow-up activities

Reflection questions:

The children could be asked to reflect upon the following:

- What kind of resources did different characters use to bring a change in their community?
- What kind of challenges did they face in doing so?
- Identify some of the qualities that helped them succeed despite those challenges.

5. Title of the story: Main chhoti hoon par badlaav la sakti hoon (I am young but can bring about change)

Category: Fiction

Overview of the story:

Four children were playing near a river when they decided to go swimming. They realised that the river was polluted and decided to fix the problem. They approached a doctor in their village who guided them with the possible ways of doing so. They then approached the panchayat members who helped them generate community-level support for fixing

the situation. The children decided to launch programmes for community awareness, install separate dustbins for dry and wet waste and ensure responsible conduct by community members.

Follow-up activities

Exploration:

Identify a problem in your community that you would like to address. List the resources that might help you address that problem. Try to imagine the possible challenges that might come your way in doing so. Devise ways in which you could address these challenges. With the help of your teacher, chalk out a month-long plan to achieve your ultimate goal. Share your experience with your friends and family by writing a poem or letter or by drawing a poster.

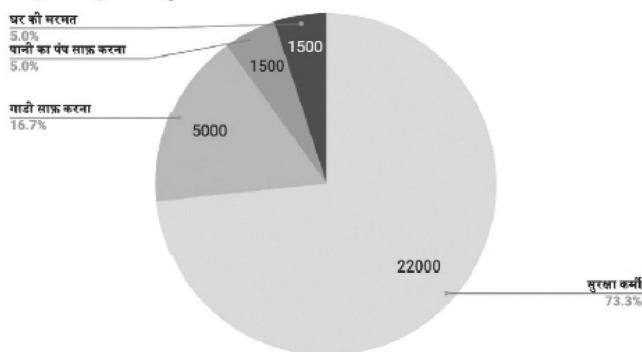
Why do stories work?

These stories worked primarily because they allow the readers to relate to the experience of other people. What matters, however, is the treatment given to these stories. Following are some of the insights that I gained while discussing these stories with children.

6. आपने मैजिक वर्कबुक में गोपाल सिंह की कहानी पढ़ी होगी। गोपाल सिंह सुरक्षा कर्मी होने के साथ-साथ खाली समय में कई अन्य नौकरियाँ भी करते हैं।

नीचे पाई-चार्ट में दर्शाया गया है की वह इन विभिन्न नौकरियों से एक महीने के दौरान कितना कमाते हैं।

Gopal Singh की महीने की तन्खा



(a) एक महीने के दौरान गोपाल सिंह कुल कितना कमाते हैं?

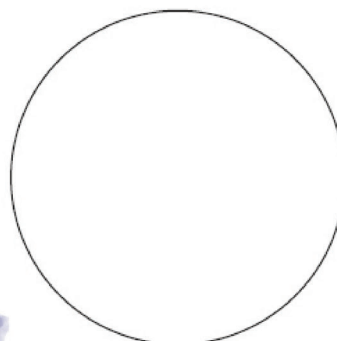
(b) क. गाड़ियों को धोने से वह कुल कितना कमाता है?

ख. अगर गोपाल हर महीने 10 गाड़ियों (cars) को धोता है, तो क्या आप पता कर सकते हैं की उसे एक गाड़ी (car) कार के लिए कितना कमाता है? मान लें कि वह प्रत्येक कार के लिए समान राशि ही लेता है।

(c) यदि वह एक महीने में किराने के सामान के लिए 3500 और मकान किराए के लिए 3600 खर्च करता है, तो उसके पास कितना पैसा शेष बचेगा ?

(d) मान लो की गोपाल सिंह केवल दो ही नौकरियाँ करने लगे। एक तो सिक्किमिटी गार्ड, और दूसरी कार धोना। उसे दोनों ही नौकरियों से 15000-15000 रुपये मिलें।

तो क्या तुम इसके लिए एक नया पाई चार्ट बना सकते हो? ऊपर दिए गए पाई चार्ट की मदद लेकर कोशिश करें।



- a) The stories used as part of these workbooks were based in the context of the children. This was reflected in the names of characters and places used for the stories. While some of the stories were adapted from different sources, like Pratham Books and PARI, most of the stories were designed specifically for the target group. The content design team included a person from the local community, which allowed the stories to be authentic and relatable. Interestingly, the stories progressed from children's own village (Gular) to a town near their village (Rishikesh) and then, the capital city of their state (Dehradun) and country (Delhi). It was much later that the stories reached a similar village (Tilonia) in another state (Rajasthan) of the country. This progression followed the basic principle of teaching-learning, that is, moving from known to unknown.
- b) The important element in these stories was the scope to identify with the characters emotionally. The characters were either of the same age group as the children (readers)

or were presented as people that the children could relate to. For example, the characters were referred to as Sukhram Chacha or Rahim Chacha and that made a significant difference in how children perceived the problems or questions related to these characters.

- c) The stories were used as the basis of the different problems presented to the children. Mathematical as well as language problems were designed around the main characters of the stories. This allowed the children to stay with the characters for longer and experience the world in their company. The use of integration and interdisciplinary approach justified the holistic nature of knowledge itself.
- d) Follow-up activities were designed in an innovative way to enable children to recapitulate the important events in the story. For instance, children were asked to make timelines of the life of the central characters so that they could revisit their lives again. Similarly, mind maps were used to chalk out the different characters

B. जैसे हमने दिव्या के मूल्य/सोच के बारे में बात की थी वैसे ही हम इन तीन लोगों के मूल्य और सोच की बात करेंगे जिससे उन्होंने अपने सपने पूरे किए।

नीचे कुछ ऐसे ही मूल्य और सिद्धांत लिखें हैं। आपको क्या लगता है कि इनमें से दिव्या में कौनसे मूल्य /सोच हैं, उन पर टिक लगाएं। यह भी लिखें कि उसने कैसे और कहाँ इन मूल्यों को दर्शाया?

दृढ़ निश्चय (grit) (हार ना मानना)	सहानुभूति (empathy) (लोगों के लिए हमदर्दी)	सेवा भाव (service) (लोगों की सेवा करने की इच्छा)	जिज्ञासा (curiosity) (कुछ जानने की इच्छा)
आरती जी			
हनुमान जी			
रामी बाई <u>उदाहरण</u> ✓ वह एक ऐसी स्थिति में पली-बढ़ी, जहाँ महिलाओं को काम करने के लिए प्रोत्साहित नहीं किया जाता था फिर भी उन्होंने हार नहीं मानी			

C. नीचे दिए प्रश्नों का उत्तर लिखें :

1. What were the challenges faced by Rami bai after she joined full-time at barefoot? रामी बाई को बाएरफूट से जुड़ने के बाद क्या समस्याएँ आई?
2. What do you mean by this statement "by the people, for the people and of the people". आप "लोगों के लिए, लोगों द्वारा और लोगों का" से क्या समझते हैं?
3. Do you think the development of the community was possible without the local people involved? Give reason. क्या आप को लगता है इस समुदाय का विकास हो पता अगर स्थानीय लोग नहीं जुड़ते? अपने कारण लिखें।
4. What enabled Arti Gujjar and Rami Bai to pursue their dreams and eventually, to be successful in their respective career choices, despite having limited or no formal education? आरती जी और रामी बाई की कोई औपचारिक शिक्षा नहीं थी, फिर भी वह अपने सपने कैसे पूरे कर पाई?
5. How did Hanumanji use his knowledge and passion of plants for the benefit of the community? हनुमान जी ने अपनी पढ़ पौधों के ज्ञान को अपने समुदाय के अच्छे के लिए कैसे उपयोग किया?

who played an important part in the lives of the central characters. This allowed children to acknowledge the importance of human relationships. Likewise, Venn diagrams were used to highlight the similarities and differences in the lives of central characters of different stories and for the children to appreciate the idea of common and shared humanity.

- e) The stories were meant to be experienced and not just read. Consequently, detailed activities were designed to let the children enter the stories and rewrite them. The opportunity to rewrite the stories was given deliberately to instil an action-oriented disposition among the children. Sometimes they were made to experience the world around them as a collection of numerous untold stories. For example, children understood the concept of livelihood and migration by conducting interviews. In this way, they got an opportunity to talk to their neighbours and collect stories from the ground. This was followed by a reflection exercise where they 'learnt to learn' from people around them.
- f) The stories were designed to explicitly inculcate the skills and values like equality, empathy, grit and service along with collaboration, curiosity and creativity. The children were asked to share how they felt after reading the stories. They had to use 'emotion cards' to identify and label those emotions. This was an important exercise as, in certain situations, even adults find it challenging to label what they are feeling. Additionally, they were asked to note the kind of qualities different characters possessed and share the evidence for the same. This reiterated the importance of having these values in place for making any change possible. Finally, the scope of questioning the central characters (as mandatory space in the workbook at the end of stories) pushed the children to learn to ask questions, a quality that is rarely seen being developed in the system. I was not surprised when, even after eight weeks of repeated reinforcement, the girls kept asking factual questions. Nevertheless, it is an exercise worth every teacher's time and energy.
- g) Working with a combination of fictional and non-fictional stories helped the children to appreciate the relevance and applicability of what they were reading. For instance, knowing

about a young change-maker from their own state would help them aspire to swim against the currents and bring a change in their own community. Similarly, stories about Bunker Roy (Founder, Barefoot College, Tilonia), as well as Arti Devi and Hanuman Ji (natives of Tilonia village), were included to familiarise the children with the power of community-driven change. Such stories also pushed them to define their own realities and their ideas of success. They were enabled to identify the resources around them and devise plans that could use these resources in addressing local problems. In a way, they were made to relook at their own stories and make a conscious choice to write these as victor or victim.

Stories, skills and active citizenship

Education for citizenship can be understood as the inculcation of a combination of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes required for an individual to become an active citizen (Lawton, 2000). While the knowledge component is covered in the Social Science textbooks, the values, skills and attitudes need to be reinforced through pedagogy. Stories prove to be effective ways of inculcating these attributes provided they are presented fairly. Instead of providing morals at the end of stories, the stories can be used to provide experiences so that children can develop an internalised value system.

The handling of the stories is to be aligned with the treatment of children in a classroom. Instead of treating children as citizens of the future, curriculum developers and teachers ought to look at them as citizens at present (Howe & Covell, 2009). The experiences should be designed to help children see what they can do here and now to bring a change in their own lives and that of their communities. This could be simple things like writing a letter to the gram pradhan for a continuous supply of electricity or democratically organising a Bal Sansad (where teachers guide only when asked). In sum, stories, when combined with powerful experiences, can go a long way in developing empathetic human beings who are capable of compassionate actions towards self, others and communities.

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The concept of equality was known by everyone from classes VI to VIII. They knew that they could not be discriminated against and if it happened, they could seek help. Therefore, an immediate association with this concept was realised across these grades along with the appreciation to uphold the notion of equality. It did not feel like an alien concept given in the textbook but a more concrete and relatable one.

Abhilasha Awasthi, Learning Democracy Through School Practices, p 22.