

Miracle on the Mountain

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To the teacher: “How to” tips and ideas

Intercultural awareness

You may encounter confusion and laughter when you start working with this story, or at certain points along the way, such as if you play Indian music in class. This is a normal human reaction to the unfamiliar. If you do not have students with Indian or Pakistani heritage in your class, many students will never have heard names like the ones in this story before, although they are normal Indian names. Meet these reactions with understanding, and let them laugh a bit, as long as they don't become disrespectful. Then steer the class towards the discovery that what is well-known in one culture may seem strange to other people who hear or see something for the first time. It was interesting to experience how my students stumbled over the names at the beginning of the story, and were reading and speaking them fluently by the end.

Students may also ask why they are reading a story about India. Point out that English, along with Hindi, is the official language in India. As such, it can even be included in the list of English-speaking countries. You may also touch on the history of why this is the case, or indicate that they will learn more about this the upper school.

Act and speak before reading

This is a reader for grade 6, although in some cases it may also be appropriate for a grade 7, depending on how it is used. In grade 6 it is still a big help when the chapters are acted out together with students, or told by the teacher with helping gestures, before the class reads from the book. Try to keep close to the text, even reading the text directly from the book. This doesn't mean you can't add spontaneously, but hearing the words as they appear in the book creates familiarity which will help the whole class to read and understand the text as a next step. Students who have taken on roles can be “fed” the lines you want them to repeat in shorter or longer chunks, as necessary. For this part of the lesson, it is important that the books are closed, or ideally even in students' bags.

For acting out scenes in this way, a spirit of lightness and experimentation is important. Humour is essential, but aim to capture different moods. Using simple props can be very helpful. Below are a some ideas for each chapter, but please use your imagination and the opportunities which present themselves in your classes and classrooms!

Chapter one – Urvashi

A lot of this chapter is better told/read aloud by the teacher rather than acted out. But the

lesson with the maths teacher can be made into a nice little scene. The maths teacher can wear a cloth wound around his head as a turban. Urvashi can kneel and wear a long skirt that goes right to the floor, so she looks like a little girl with short legs. If she keeps her elbows by her sides and wears a cardigan backwards, it makes her arms look short, too. Whilst telling the rest of chapter one, you can ask students to take on the roles of the father and of grown-up Urvashi, simply standing up the lines from their places.

Chapter two – Akbar and Birbal

For this chapter I sketched mountains and a lake on the blackboard. Two students can walk up and down and talk, as Akbar and Birbal. Someone can wave a large sheet of cardboard for “a cold wind began to blow”.

Chapter three – Poor Anil

Two students can take on the roles of Poor Anil and Birbal. The six hungry children can simply be a group of children sitting together, who don't even have to leave their seats, apart from the child who brings water. This child can fetch water from the classroom sink in two beakers. Poor Anil and Birbal can sit on the floor, with the water beside them, and talk. It is a good idea to choose a place where everybody can see them, perhaps the middle of the classroom. Alternatively you can let students at the back sit on their desks.

Chapter four – The night on the mountain

Make the classroom darker, if possible, and cover the teacher's desk, or one of the students' desks with a white sheet as the snow. A student can sit cross-legged on the desk and 'meditate', while you tell the story. A tealight in a glass jar at the opposite end of the classroom can be the tiny light in the temple, down on the lakeshore.

Chapter five – Prison

There are lots of roles in this chapter: The two guards, Birbal, Poor Anil, Shakti, Akbar and perhaps servants. Use your imagination: The scene could start at the back of the classroom, where the two guards can be waiting, and a student's skateboard can be the cart on which Poor Anil is transported to the front of the classroom, to the royal palace. Here Akbar can be sitting on his throne - a chair on top of a desk, with another chair in front as a step up. A servant may wave a large sheet of paper, folded as a fan. Our prison was the corner of the classroom behind the teacher's chair which had bars as the backrest, so Poor Anil was able to kneel behind the chair and look out at the class through the bars.

Chapter six – Urvashi's plan

The first part of this chapter is a fairly straightforward dialogue between Urvashi and Birbal, and can be spoken by two students. For Mariam's rose garden it is lovely to have some

plants, which may already be present in the classroom. Some real roses are a very effective touch. But be spontaneous – I forgot to bring in the roses for one group, and whipped a pink tulip from a vase on the teacher's desk, to stand in as the damask rose that Mariam shows to Urvashi. Everyone knew it was a tulip and not a rose. Sometimes using what is there, often with a bit of humour, can really engage the class and anchor the story in the classroom.

Chapter seven – Very, very soon

For this chapter it can be quite entertaining to have Akbar and Birbal sitting on a carpet with a couple of cushions in angry silence. See if you can really get a bit of silence. For example, for half an hour you can get a student to time half a minute of total silence before the servant then comes in. When Urvashi plays the harmonium, some real harmonium music with a woman singing is a nice idea. Two recommendations:

A field recording from 1987 of very traditional Indian singing:

<https://soundcloud.com/pittriversound-1/mowat-1993-56-10-17?in=easyjammer/sets/not-here>

A bhajan, or devotional song, played by modern musicians. It could be watched in class as a separate activity. It zooms in on the harmonium player and shows several Indian instruments being played. If it seems too long, start at 5 minutes:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w1M15on7cQ8&list=PLUF0f6tPglwioduOohRYrN9ggYk3Aij6h&index=9>

Of course there are many Bollywood style recordings and videos available with catchy, modern Indian music which students might find interesting, but at least as a starting point something traditional is needed to make the connection to Urvashi's singing.

Chapter eight - A tiny little light

A lighted tealight under a large pot of water on some kind of grate makes the kitchen scene really tangible. Students can (and will!) dip their fingers into the cold water, which will of course still be cold after the tealight has been burning for the whole lesson.

Chapter nine – Anil the Advisor

The first part of this chapter is probably best narrated, and for the second part the three men can walk and talk in front of the blackboard, which again may have a sketch of mountains and a lake on it.

Chapter 10 – Like a bird

Urvashi and her father can have their conversation on a carpet at the front of the classroom. Serving tea for everyone can be a nice end to the story. Some kind of Indian chai mix with milk is more popular than green tea.

Reading the text

After each chapter has been acted out or told, this chapter can be read from the book. Initially students read the text aloud, a few lines each. Repetition is a cornerstone for developing confident, fluent reading. Of course, just repeating over and over is boring. But there are ways of making repetition more interesting. You can involve all the pupils and still differentiate according to preference and ability.

Listening for verbs: The teacher or another fluent reader reads the text, while the class reads along. Every time a verb appears in the text, everyone knocks on their desk. This can be varied for other grammatical elements such as nouns, adjectives or even pronouns.

Rereading with roles: The various characters are read by different students. A further student can be the narrator and read the rest of the text. The narrator's role can be passed on and shared, as the narrator often has more to say. If you choose a strong narrator and let them read for longer you will likely have more fluent reading which is easier for the class to understand.

Favourite sentences: Have two or three minutes of silent reading. An hourglass is helpful to make this visual, or a student can take on the job of timing the silent period on a watch. The task during this time is for the students to reread a chapter, choose their favourite sentence and practice it in their heads. Then ask some students or possibly the whole class to read/say their chosen sentence aloud.

Do this faster: Get everyone to say their sentence to their neighbour.

Variation: Pupils write their sentence down and then walk around the classroom "greeting" each other by saying their sentence aloud (reading where necessary). The teacher can join in!

Rereading in groups or pairs: Reread the chapter in groups of three-four, or in pairs. Pupils take turns to read aloud, either a small portion of the text with frequent swaps, or by taking on roles as described above. The teacher can determine or suggest how the groups should work, or let pupils decide this within their group for themselves.

Working in pairs: One pupil reads a sentence and the second pupil repeats the sentence without looking at the text. This encourages clear speaking and careful listening.

The telephone game: You can play this in groups of three, four or five. One pupil chooses a sentence from the text and whispers it into their neighbour's ear. The neighbour whispers

what they understood into the next person's ear and so on. The last person speaks aloud what they have understood. The challenge is for the sentence to emerge intact – but the mangled versions that appear can also be funny. This is a fun and relaxed way of enjoying mistakes!

Becoming experts: Choose experts for each chapter. Some chapters will have two experts, or you may split a chapter into even more parts, depending on class size and ability. Pupils practice reading their chapter until they can do so fluently (also at home). You can then have a celebratory reading where the class sits in a circle or semi-circle and reads through the whole story. This is a nice way to round off the reader, but may also take too long if students are still hesitant in their reading. You could also have a celebratory reading where experts read just one or two paragraphs from their part of the story.

Consider how you choose your groups: For group tasks, it is a good idea to vary between allowing pupils to choose their own partners or groups, and determining the groups by chance. Here are two ways of dividing a class into groups “objectively”, which is then more likely to be accepted:

Counting off: If you have a class of 25 and you want groups of three, you can count the pupils aloud from 1 to 8 and then get all the pupils with the same number to find each other. You would then have seven groups of three and one group of four.

The sorting bag: You can also have a bag with different objects such as beans, coins or pebbles, from which the pupils draw an object. They then find their group or partner by finding those with the same object as themselves.

Oral practice

Speaking about the story builds confidence and improves pronunciation, and is also vocabulary and grammar practice. Simple questions (often closed questions) are easier to answer at this stage, and it is easier to keep up the momentum. You can do the questions and answers with a soft ball or bean bag at the beginning of the lesson. Accepting partial answers will get everyone involved and build confidence. However the answers are closely based on the text, so it is a good opportunity to guide pupils into speaking whole sentences. This in turn will increase understanding and improve pronunciation when reading. Here are some examples of questions for chapter one:

Who was an amazing girl? What language did the nurse/the father/the servants/the visitors speak? Who learnt to speak many languages? Where did Urvashi live? Who died when Urvashi was a baby? Who said, “Very big hands?” What did the father understand? What did Urvashi study? What did Urvashi find? What did Urvashi do with the bird? (Collect several answers!) What did Urvashi's father say when he saw the bird? What did the father want for his daughter? Who was the best man for Urvashi? Where did the young couple go to live? Who was very happy?

Many questions can be “recycled” in following lessons, or even in the same lesson. This gives shy pupils the chance to answer a well-known question.

Workbook

An accompanying workbook with a wide selection of activities is available at www.waldorfbuch.de