

DEVELOPING READING THROUGH PICTORIAL STORIES

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Ms Niketa Vyas has been working as a primary teacher for about 20 years. She is credited with developing the concept of “Reading skill development by picture stories”. She observed that most of the students in her school were migrant children having migrated with their parents from the Hindi heart-belt, from states such as Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan. The children, therefore, found it difficult to follow Gujarati, the language of education in the schools in this region.

Ms Niketa began her career, teaching children of class 5 that had on roll 37 students. Many of these had been readmitted to the school under the provision for out-of-school children, as mandated under the right to education (RTE). So when Ms Niketa began teaching, she found that only three out of 37 children could read Gujarati. The rest could not even identify the Gujarati alphabets. She then came up with the idea to create teaching aids such as flash cards, line bars, and paragraph cards to bring the class up to date with the language.

She would draw pictures on the blackboard for each alphabet. For example, for G in Gujarati she drew Ganesha, Gajar (Carrot), and so on. She would change the letters every day and by and by these students began to recognize the letters. The next step was to form words by combining the alphabets. Here, Niketa made sure to write the Hindi version of the word so that they could connect with it. From words, the classes gradually learnt to form short sentences, again prodded on with drawings on the board as illustrations. She then prepared photocopies of all the drawings and the associated letters/sentences to distribute amongst the children. They could color the drawings, and in the process, learn the Gujarati language. Needless to say, the children loved it. In the next step, Niketa would ask the students when they completed the coloring to make a sentence using a word beginning with alphabet in the drawing. She would help them along in making sentences.

Niketa then built on the activity to include stories. For example, she drew a “Nagada”



Students reading comic book



Group activity on comic book



Books by Niketa Vyas

(Drum) and asked the students to write a short story around it in a maximum of six sentences. Alternatively, she would draw a story in pictures and the students would then have to translate into words. She worked tirelessly and about eight months later, her efforts bore fruit – the students were more regular in attending classes and were soon able to read and write.

The students discussed their activities with their parents and friends, who too were captivated with the idea. Students belonging to other schools also took these photocopies to build on their knowledge.

Ms Nikita then came up with the concept of writing comics as supplementary reading material, and these were also published in a local magazine. She also prepared stories using only a fixed number of alphabets and words. In all, there are about 60 such stories in Gujarati and six in English. These stories are of great use to the students who find them engaging and immersive, and a great source of learning. As an added incentive, students performing well have their names displayed on the class blackboard, along with stars. Her teaching aids have also won the favour of her colleagues and many teachers

have borrowed the material to use it for teaching classes 1 and 2.

In order to take feedback on this activity, Ms Nikita organizes events such “Read the News Paper”, to gauge students’ reading abilities. Educational supervisors also pitch in to evaluate the students. The children have also won prizes in drawing competitions.

Gujarat State Textbook Mandal's Balsrishti Magazine has been publishing Ms Nikita's work over the last two years. Parents were so enamoured by the teaching methodology that they transferred their wards studying in private schools to this government school. One girl, Priya Saroj, did not know how to read, but this was soon rectified when she joined the school. Today she is familiar with three languages Gujarati-Hindi-English. Inspired by this, her mother was instrumental in encouraging other parents to send their wards to her school. As a result of her efforts, 36 children from her area are now studying in Ms Nikita's school.

All the stories, along with their pictures, which Nikita has created have taken shape of books, "Gujarati Sikho Part-1" and "Gujarati Sikho Part-2". Two other books have also been published, Pragna vanchan mala and Picture Story Series Part 1 to 2.

Ms Nikita then went on to teach standard 2, and found the same issues with the students she encountered in class 1. She took the same route to teaching, enabling students gain proficiency in the language.

Ms Vyas has received a number of awards, including Chitrakoot Best Teacher Award 2018 of Gujarat State Primary Teachers' Association, Innovative teacher award from IIM Ahmedabad, an award at the International Conference on Innovation at Grassroots Level in Education for the innovation of "Reading Skills Development by Making Picture Stories Without Conjoint Consonants".



QUESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

1. What should be done to encourage children to attend school regularly?
2. What can be done to help children develop their reading ability?
3. How can children be taught about different books?

QUESTIONS FOR TRAINEES

1. What are the fruits of reading picture stories?
2. How are picture stories useful in developing children's observation skills?
3. What activities should children do to increase their reading ability through self-study?