

Storybook delights!

Bhasyati Sinha and Jayshree Murali

With inputs from Faiqa Mithaiwala and Manisha Ahuja

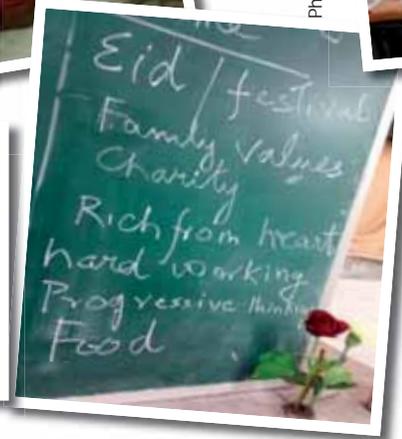
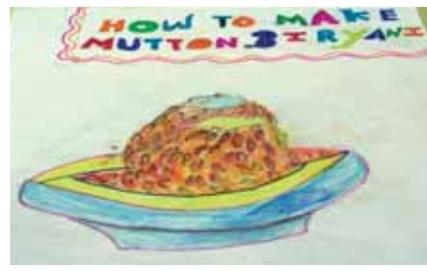
Mazgaon has a very interesting history – be it the name, the Portuguese influence, the port, the mix of cultures, languages, cuisines and the famous Rani Baug zoo. We were delighted to be reading in The Municipal School under the VIDYA Bhavishya Yaan Program.

A Reading Corner on a makeshift table, a separate space for the props, art corners, a beautiful *dupatta*, *burqa* and bangles, a patched pair of jeans hung from a hook, trousers and scissors, colourful printouts of kitchen scenes, a cooking vocabulary on one wall, a beautiful handprint of a mosque with the children's thumb impressions – we were ready to receive the children of classes 7 to 9 with whom we were to read *Ismat's Eid*

An adaptation of a delightful Turkish tale, this Tulika book written by Fawzia Gilani-Williams and illustrated by Proiti Roy is a treat with its lovely illustrations and the simplicity of a well-woven text. Ismat is a happy, contented sort and on the occasion of Eid, decides to buy his family special gifts and is talked by the shopkeeper into buying something for himself. So Ismat takes his gifts home. Eid arrives and with it comes a shock and a surprise. To be able to laugh and to be willing to adjust: these little life-affirming qualities are highlighted with affection and detail.

Amidst the chaotic renovation work, the little VIDYA classroom was a haven and as the children trooped in they were curious and made a beeline to the Reading Corner! What was going to happen?

After a warm up song, "Oolala Oolaa hum hain tere story book (Look look look, look look look, we are your story books)" and a brief introduction, the children drew up a community agreement, agreeing



Photos courtesy: Bhasyati Sinha

to certain rules and behaviour in the classroom during the reading session.

Pre-reading

We began with the screening of a beautiful ad that shows the spirit of Eid: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5_XH1ikNsw

Helping strangers, samosas in the kameez, "bin kuch kahe baatein ho rahi thi", the mother was not angry even if the kameez was soiled were some observations the children made after seeing the ad.

Reading

The connection with Eid having been established, we showed them the book and spoke about the author Fawzia Gilani-Williams, her background as a librarian/educator and the illustrator Proiti Roy and a little about Turkey and proceeded to read the book aloud.

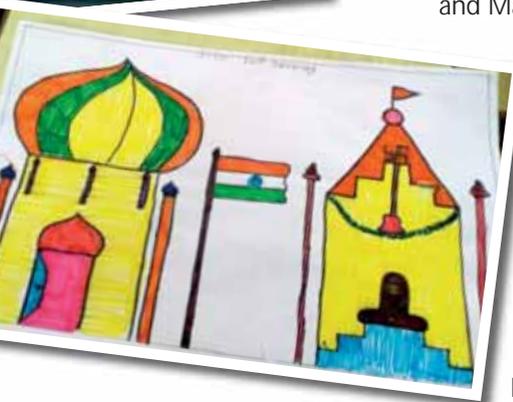
We read with a lot of enjoyment and passion with Jayshree impersonating for Ismat and Bhasyati joining in to play the other characters with the props popping up now and then for attention. The

story was in simple language and the children (from Marathi/Hindi/Urdu mediums) were able to enjoy, understand and appreciate it.

Post-reading discussions

This section was lively with the children completely taking over. We asked what the story was about. The children replied that the story was about festivals, it was about family values, charity, hardworking Ismat, his kind nature and of course food. Eid and feast go together. They loved the characters – Ismat, Habiba, Yasmin and Mahjabeen. 'Do

characters have to be only living things'? They said no, the trouser could be a character too. And there would be no story without the trouser ... hmm...



Some said Ismat was a progressive man, had it been any other man he would have slapped his wife for not doing his bidding; this was reality speaking. Some said that though he was a poor man he bought something or the other for his family, some felt he was of adjusting nature and happy with the stitched pant. One child said that he even gave money to the poor though he himself was poor. The story they felt could have taken place anywhere – village or city.

The text to self connection having been established, we looked at the text to text and text to world connections. The children kept thinking and Faika said she found that *Ismat's Eid* resembled *The Elf and the Shoemaker*, which the children remembered reading.

The children then spoke about festivals and said that everyone should be able to enjoy them. We should not waste food, as so many people go to bed hungry. They spoke of wastage at weddings and festivals which led to us talking about farmers' suicides and why they happen. One boy said that shortage of rain could be one of the reasons, while

another said it could be lack of irrigation facilities. Another theme that emerged was celebrating festivals together. Should celebrating festivals be limited to the community of people following a particular religion? The children were emphatic that festivals were for everybody and that festivals must be celebrated responsibly. They also touched on inter-faith harmony. Mazgaon is a mixed neighbourhood.

Choral reading: A quick recap on pausing at a full stop, a short pause at a comma, expression and changing voices according to characters got the children going and they enjoyed slipping into their story voices!

Post-reading activity

Recipe writing and poster making: This was a group activity. For some it was a festival recipe of their choice and for others it was posters for 'celebrating responsibly'.

Debates, discussions, ideas and colours came out. A group of girls drew a poster of a Shiva temple and a mosque. They read out that all religions should celebrate festivals together. Festivals mean a time to bond with others. A group of boys made a poster on Diwali. They highlighted the pollution that is generated by bursting crackers and about the wasteful expenditure during festivals.

The third group wrote the recipe of grilled sandwich to the minutest of details, including the garnishing and the fourth wrote the recipe of mutton biryani with all the specifications and also spoke of Dalda irritating their throat. The fifth sweetened it with a recipe of Shahi Tukda.

They then presented in groups their recipe/poster. The session ended with a beautiful prayer from *The Koran*, which spoke of unity.

The story, as always, was the hero alongside the children!

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