



Pages from teachers' diaries



A puzzle a week keeps boredom away!

Mokhtar Zaman

Every Monday, I write a simple, but thought-provoking math puzzle on the whiteboard next to the entrance gate of our school. These are not from the textbooks. For example, a snail climbs 3 steps up a wall each day but slips back 2 steps each night. The wall is 5 steps high. How many days will it take for the snail to reach the top?

This is a reasoning-based question that even students of classes I, II and III can attempt. Sometimes I also choose puzzles that focus on patterns, shapes, or simple numbers to keep things fun and easy for children.

I observe how children respond to these. At first, there is curiosity. A few students stop by and read the question carefully. Some whisper guesses to their friends, while others pull out their notebooks and write down to solve later. I have also seen students from classes II and III trying to read the puzzle and discuss it with students in higher classes. And the best part? The senior students do not just give the answers; they also try to explain to them how to think step by step.

By lunchtime, the puzzle becomes a topic of discussion. Some students confidently claim that they have solved it, while others wait to check their answers before submitting. A locked box in front of the staffroom awaits their responses. They treat this fun activity very earnestly. Each one scribbles their answer and notes their name on a piece of paper, folds and drops it into the box.

A week later, I unlock the box and go through the answers – some right, some wrong. As I separate the correct ones, I imagine the students' eager faces, waiting to see if their names will be displayed – names of all the students who get the answer correct are displayed on the board.

Activities like this create opportunities to take mathematics outside the classroom. They also create an environment of excitement and curiosity. Some other important things happen:

- Students think. Instead of memorising formulas, they learn to approach problems logically, step by step. They learn to split big questions into smaller parts and think logically.
- It creates a culture of learning. Younger students get guidance from seniors, and discussions happen outside the classroom, making learning effortless.
- It builds patience – the waiting period before the results are revealed teaches students to be patient.
- It gives a sense of achievement. When their names go up on the board, their confidence grows. They feel motivated and ready for the next challenge.
- It makes school exciting. Instead of just following a routine, students look forward to something unexpected, something that sparks curiosity.

Week after week, a new puzzle appears, and the cycle goes on. Gradually, it becomes a part of the students' everyday life, where, together with excitement, they take up the challenge, discuss and try to solve it. This makes their school day a little more interesting.

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Teaching beyond the boundaries of subjects and languages

Dron Sahu



The new session of the year had just begun. I was given the responsibility of teaching Hindi to class III. When I read through the textbook, I found that a few new lessons had been added. They looked less like Hindi lessons and more like lessons in Environment Studies (EVS). I was to work with the students on *Lesson 3: How Many Legs?* I decided to have an oral discussion with the students about the lesson.

I began by talking about human legs. I asked the students to name creatures with two legs. They named quite a few: peacock, eagle, humans, etc. While giving these examples, some students also began naming animals with four legs. Seeing their growing interest in the discussion, I became curious to see how many different animals they could name. So, I asked them to name animals based on the number of legs they have.

Saying this, I drew a few columns on the board. I told the students that we would categorise creatures by the number of legs they have. Everyone enthusiastically agreed with the idea.

The students began naming creatures, and I wrote the names in the appropriate boxes on the blackboard. Some students knew the names only in their own languages, so they were hesitant to name them. Sensing their dilemma, I told them they could name the creatures in any language they knew. And then there was no stopping them—one by one, they began calling out all kinds of new names for creatures. Many of these creatures I had not even heard of myself. I would ask the students about the creature's size, colour, and where it lived, and they would describe it with great enthusiasm. For example, when I asked what a '*bitta-nappa*' insect was like, the students explained that it moves on leaves and on the ground in the same way we move our hands while measuring a span (*bitta*). From this, I understood that the students were talking about loopers (inchworm caterpillars). They offered similar descriptions for many other insects and creatures, too. Their descriptions were enough for me to understand which creature they were referring to.

The discussion kept moving forward, and our list kept growing, organised by the number of legs. Many students also knew the names of some creatures in English. During the discussion, they would use the English names too, and we included those in our conversation. I repeated those English names aloud so that the students could hear them properly.

As I said earlier, we had begun with two-legged creatures. After that came four-legged creatures, then six, eight, and even ten. There also came a moment when, for creatures like the centipede (*kankhajoora*), we simply could not settle on a definite number of legs. So together we decided that we should make another box on the blackboard, one for creatures with countless legs. And so, another category was added. In the same way, a category had to be created for legless creatures, too.

The conversation was flowing along in a lively atmosphere when suddenly a problem arose. One group of students said that a monkey is a two-legged creature, while another insisted that it is a four-legged animal. Both groups were offering all kinds of arguments, each in their own way. One group said that a monkey uses all four of its limbs while walking, while the other argued that when eating, it uses only its hands. It became difficult for me to decide which group was correct and in which category the monkey should be placed. Both sides had valid points. The most heartening thing about this exchange was that even those students who never usually came forward in class and who never liked to speak were

sharing their opinions. Finally, after a great deal of back-and-forth, both groups agreed to place the monkey in the box for two-legged creatures, because it looks like a human. Similar arguments happened regarding kangaroos, frogs, and crocodiles. For the kangaroo, I even had to pull out a video on my phone!

In the middle of all this, some students showed an interest in knowing about creatures with one leg or three legs. I asked them to find out about such creatures at home and come back with their findings. Some students, gazing at the boxes on the board, volunteered to find out about creatures with 8, 10, and even more than 10 legs. I also suggested they could look for this information online.

And just like that, the 90-minute class passed by. The very lesson I had felt half-hearted and uncertain about before teaching had brought my classroom alive today. I could see so many possibilities in this lesson. The students were using their own language, learning new words, and, because of what the lesson was about, getting opportunities to participate and express themselves. My own vocabulary was also growing. This was possible only because the lesson was rooted in their world, their immediate surroundings, their environment.

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Emotional safety in the classroom

Poonam



We were discussing the story titled *The Bee and the Elephant* in class 1. At the end of the discussion, students were expected to answer a few questions, for example, the name of the story, its characters, and the plot, etc. Before beginning, I had given them instructions and written the title, names of characters, etc., on the blackboard.

I narrated the story while the students followed it in their printed copies. Then, the students came forward one by one to answer questions on the story. Some struggled with reading difficult words and identifying the plot, so I briefly explained these again.

Then I was called for some urgent matter, and I had to step out of the class. After less than 10 minutes, when I returned, I saw 10-15 students gathered around Sunita's seat. Two or three students ran towards me and said, 'Ma'am, Sunita is crying!' I immediately asked, 'Why is she crying?' but no one knew.

When I approached Sunita to ask what had happened, she remained silent for a while and denied being hurt or teased. Before leaving the class, I had asked the students not to discuss the story any further and had assigned Sunita to maintain discipline. Another student was meant to assist her, but as she did not take an interest in the task, Sunita had to handle the responsibility on her own, which left her under pressure.

Finally, she spoke, '*Mein bacchon ko bol rahi thi ki sab log chup ho jao, koi chup hi nahi ho raha tha. Fir mujhe ekdam se gussa aya aur maine apna scale lekar apne hath par mara.*' (I was telling the children repeatedly to be silent, but they just did not listen. In a rush of anger, I struck my own hand with the scale.)

I: Why did you do this to yourself?

Sunita: No one was listening to me, and they just wouldn't stop talking.

I: So, did they listen to you after that?

Sunita: (Shook her head) No.

I: Sunita, tell me, did your solution solve your problem?

Sunita: No.

I: 15 minutes back, we were discussing this in the story – the bee was in trouble, and someone helped the bee to find her forgotten house. Was the bee just crying, or was it trying to find its house?

Sunita: The bee was searching for its house.

I: Did the bee hurt itself?

Sunita: No.

I: Have you found the correct solution in the story?

Sunita: Yes, the bee asked for help, and the elephant helped it.

I: So, if the bee had just sat in one place crying and hadn't asked for help, would it have found its home?

Sunita: No.

I: I think you are smarter than the bee. You can find the solution to your problem instead of crying or hurting yourself.

Sunita: (nodded her head) Yes.

After the discussion, Sunita felt relaxed and spent the rest of the day actively participating in the activities. As a teacher, I considered it my duty to inform her parents, so I called her father and explained the situation. He was very supportive, emotionally connected to his daughter, and shared that similar incidents had happened in the past when Sunita became upset—sometimes leading to self-blame or even self-harm.

Over time, with consistent guidance, Sunita became more confident. After seven months, she happily manages responsibilities during assemblies. Her father shared that even at home, she talks about how comfortable she feels handling these duties. She has also learned that if she is not comfortable with doing a task, she can take on some other responsibility. This realisation has given her both confidence and a sense of belonging.

Working with sensitive children requires careful choice of words and thoughtful planning of activities. Such experiences should help them understand real-life problems and find solutions. Most importantly, they should know that if they cannot manage a situation alone, it is alright to seek help from a trusted person. They can also let some problems remain without solutions, but never cause self-harm.

This experience shows that classrooms must nurture not only academic skills but also emotional growth. Through storytelling, open discussions, and supported dialogue, teachers can help children manage emotions, solve problems constructively, and seek help when needed—preparing them not just for tests, but for life. Creating a classroom and home environment where children feel safe to talk, ask questions, and share their problems is one of the most valuable support we can give them.

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