

We are aware of the significance of children's literature in the development of linguistic skills in the primary classroom. Poems, stories, illustrations, references, a variety of characters, etc. are all included in good children's literature, depending on the learning level of the children. Children's literature of today contains references to diverse social, economic, and environmental contexts. As a result, its application is not confined to particular objectives; it allows us to apply it in a variety of ways. In a way, it is a method of comprehending the world.

While teaching primary classes, creative teachers make use of stories, anecdotes, poetry, and situations to build curiosity, inspire and discover new things, and encourage children to pursue their curiosity. However, viewing children's literature merely for the development of linguistic abilities diminishes its significance. If any literature or book is included in the classroom teaching process, it creates opportunities not only for the development of linguistic skills but also skills inherent in other subjects. We can generate opportunities for such development of the aims and abilities inherent in Environmental Studies (EVS) in our class by using the situations, events, and characters provided in any narrative or poem.

Specific example

I would like to illustrate my point with the example of a book published by *Eklavya*, as part of the Avehi-Abacus Project.ⁱ The title, *Balti Ke Andar Samandar*ⁱⁱ (Ocean in a Bucket), explores many water scenarios in a very interesting way. It depicts not just the consumption of water, but also the entire journey of water.

Let us try to understand why this book is such an important resource in the teaching of EVS.

The water narrative begins with the character, Sonu's, bucket. It explores where the water in Sonu's bucket comes from – starting from the sea and continuing with the sun, clouds, mountain, river, lake, pipe, and ending with the tap. Then, it continues with the cycle of water seeping into the ground from Sonu's bucket and, finally, rejoining

the sea. It is tough to envision such a subject in a poetic and imaginative way. Often, the way such themes are presented in our classes is formulaic, where the subject matter is limited to specific points such as definition, importance, process, and so on. This is where the book stands out and shines. As the narrative continues, other characters are introduced. The story flows well with the pages and lines well connected. We can understand it better with an example:

*This is the river
that flows into the lake,
whose water is still
and gets into the pipe
drips from the tap
and fills Sonu's bucket.*

*This is the mountain
from where the river runs into the lake,
whose still water
enters into the pipe
drips from the tap
and fills Sonu's bucket.*

This sequence is reflected not just in the words but also in the illustrations. The images in the book are diverse and engaging – whether it is Sonu's house or the course of water flowing across several locations. The surroundings, landscape, and activities have been meticulously captured in the pictures. The picture sequence also depicts life in many settings. The life cycle is not confined to humans; also seen are animals, trees and plants, workers, the structure of dwellings, and other settings. The visuals appear to progress along with the story in the book.

Using the book for EVS

As previously stated, we can create possibilities for skill development and achievement of the objectives of teaching environmental studies with the help of this book. Let us look at it this way: the EVS syllabus incorporates water as a theme. Many lessons about water can be found in the NCERT or any other state textbook from classes III to V. It is

envisaged that the activities and exercises included in these lessons will familiarise the students with the sources, uses, importance, cleanliness, conservation and value of water, as well as make children sensitive to these concerns around them. We can support this process by using children's books in our classrooms.

We will try to comprehend this in a few steps with the help of this book.

Discussion

The teacher can begin by asking about the title of the book, *Balti Ke Andar Samandar* – is it possible that an ocean can fit into a bucket? Many children may be unfamiliar with the ocean. Children will be able to grasp the idea of an ocean by means of classroom interaction on this story. Similarly, dialogues can be utilised to help them understand the new terms presented in the book. Talking about the illustrations in the book will be of use to children in making connections with the text. The teacher could try to make the conversation relevant to the children's contexts and provide examples as well as give them opportunities to imagine and understand new contexts.

Observing and connecting

This book not only explains the voyage of water, but it also connects to other concepts. The book has a wide range of illustrations, including those of animals, plants, trees, ways of living, activities, clothing, and so on. Children could be assigned the activity of sorting and generating a list of various items while looking at the pictures in the book. In addition, differences and similarities in other environments might be discussed with the children.

Relating events to their surroundings

One of the primary goals of teaching EVS is to help children understand the world by understanding

the content via their surroundings. They can use what they already know to move towards new knowledge. In such a case, while teaching children, it is vital to foster processes that aid in the construction of new information. For this story, this can involve understanding the nearest water sources, observing and comprehending the changes that are occurring in them, as well as knowing about other new sources that are not present in their area, for example, understanding rivers and seas through water tanks and lakes.

Project work

Project work can be assigned to children in groups or individually. For example, discovering nearby water sources, gathering information on domestic and other uses of water and determining where the water comes from in their village, locality, or town, are some subjects that can be explored. To collect related information, the teacher can work with students on skills such as questionnaire preparation, interaction with others and observation. Finally, the children's findings could be documented and presented in class. These types of assignments allow children to comprehend the topic by relating it to their own experiences.

Other resources

This is an example of a single book. Other books explore similar events and topics relating to the environment and the world around us in a more comprehensive manner. For example, *Beej Boya* (Eklavya Publications), describes the order in which a plant and fruit emerge from a seed. In contrast, *Mor Dungri* (Jugnu Prakashan) depicts the exodus from villages to cities as well as the bond between humans and animals with tremendous sensitivity. It is essential that, in addition to the textbook, such resources be included in the classroom.

Endnotes

- i AVEHI ABACUS PROJECT (AAP) aims to strengthen the quality and content of education in primary schools. <http://www.avehiabacus.org/>
- ii *Balti Ke Andar Samandar*. Avedi-abacus. Illustrator: Deepa Balsawar. Eklavya. <https://eklavypitara.in/products/balti-ke-andar-samandar>



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