



Nelson Mandela ✿ Queen Rania
Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie ✿ Paulo Coelho
Ishmael Beah ✿ Devli Kumari
Dakota Blue Richards ✿ Michael Morpurgo
Rowan Williams ✿ Beverley Naidoo
Desmond Tutu ✿ Alice Walker
Natalie Portman ✿ Angélique Kidjo
Mary Robinson

Stories in support of education

This storybook was created by the Global Campaign for Education. A compilation of short stories from influential figures around the world, *The Big Read* tells remarkable tales of education and the struggles of those who are denied the chance to learn. By reading this book and then writing your name at the end, you can help everyone have the chance of an education.

www.campaignforeducation.org/bigread

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How you can be part of the Big Read:

1. Read or listen to a story from this book
2. Write your name on the last page
3. Send the message on the last page to your government
4. Let us know you have taken part
(either online or using the back of this book)

You are taking part in the **Big Read** with people from all over the world. This book is being distributed in more than 100 countries.

This same book can be read online or downloaded from our website. Sign up here to receive updates on the **Big Read** around the world:
www.campaignforeducation.org/bigread

The **Big Read** events are happening throughout the Global Campaign for Education's Action Week, 20th - 26th April 2009. All your names will be added to this book and delivered to world leaders and the United Nations. Make sure you add your name by 8th May 2009.



Kailash Satyarthi

Dear Reader,

One in five people around the world cannot do what you are doing right now – reading.

Close to a billion illiterate people are missing out on more than this great book. They are missing out on an education – and that means the world's poorest will stay poor. Unable to read or write, they will be trapped in a lifetime of poverty and will struggle to survive, to look after their relatives, to feed their families, and to put their children through school. Most of them are women.

It's a simple fact that can be fixed. Everyone can be given the chance of an education. Nearly every government has promised to provide its citizens with free and quality education by 2015. They have even agreed how to do it, but sadly these promises are being broken. Education is not only a right, but it's also one of the cheapest investments that a government can make.

We hope that you enjoy reading one or all of the excellent stories in this book. Whether it's Mandela's speech about the importance of education in South Africa or the short stories written especially for the Big Read by the award-winning author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie or leading education advocate Queen Rania, there is something for everyone.

Once you've finished reading, please write your name at the back of this book, for the millions who cannot. In doing so you'll be adding your name to millions of others in demanding that everyone has a chance to learn.

This year we are campaigning for youth and adult literacy and lifelong learning. We will be delivering the list of names to leaders around the world and demand that they put the policies and finances in place to enable everyone to have an education, to shape our present and future for generations to come.

Let us now make a journey toward 'Education For All' together.



Kailash

 **President of the Global Campaign for Education**

Dakota Blue Richards

Dakota Blue Richards was born in London on 11th April 1994. In primary school she took weekend drama classes and enjoyed acting, but considered it a hobby and not a career choice.

From an early age Dakota read Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* series, and she loved the books, particularly the character of the wild girl Lyra. When she heard that the books were being made into a movie, she jumped at the chance to audition and won the role of Lyra Belacqua in *The Golden Compass*. Richards has been nominated for several awards including a Critic's Choice Award. She plans to continue acting, but would like to combine it with being a substitute teacher.



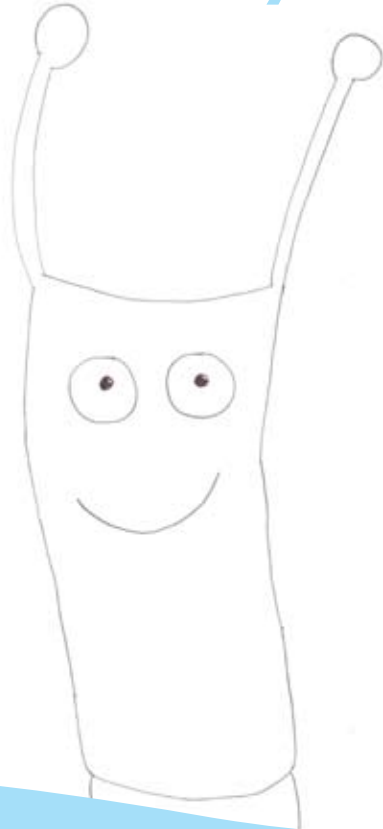
Ed and his friend Cassidy

✿ *written and illustrated by Dakota Blue Richards*

Ed the Stick Insect is a very special Stick Insect. He is about as long as a small stick and as fat as a small stick, and... Ed can talk.

This is Ed →

Ed likes to watch the children through the school window and this is how he taught himself to read and write. Ed loves to read books and learn



things. His favourite book is The Hobbit by J.R.R. Tolkein.

Ed's greatest ambition is to go to school, but unfortunately, there aren't schools for Stick Insects. This is the story of how Ed achieved his dream.

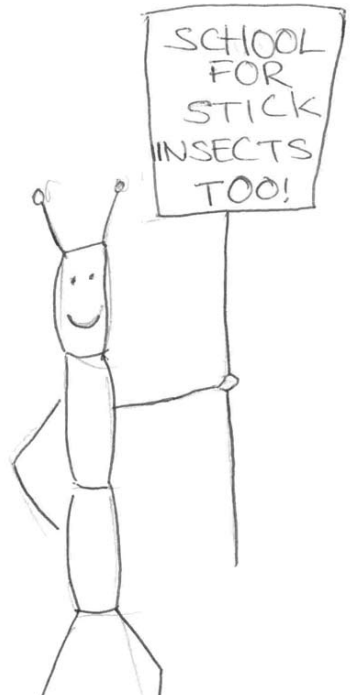
One day, Ed decided to start a protest, so he worked very hard and made a sign. Then he went to stand outside the school.

But nobody seemed to notice him. Some people nearly squished him. Ed decided it was no good protesting alone. So he made another sign advertising his campaign. It said:

STICK INSECTS SHOULD GO TO
SCHOOL TOO!

MEETING - HERE FOUR O' CLOCK
TODAY

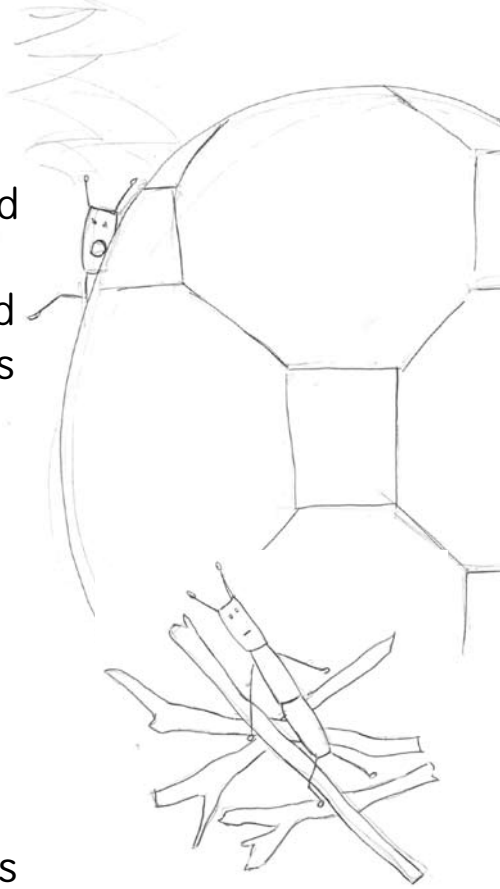
Ed waited but nobody arrived, and



just when he was about to go home, he heard a voice behind him. "Hello" said the boy. "Are you here for the meeting?" said Ed (hopefully). "Yes. My name is Cassidy" smiled the boy.

From that moment on, Ed and Cassidy became the best of friends. They had a lot of fun together. They played football in the park. They played 'fetch' with the dog (although this game made Ed a bit nervous). They played hide and seek (this was Ed's favourite).

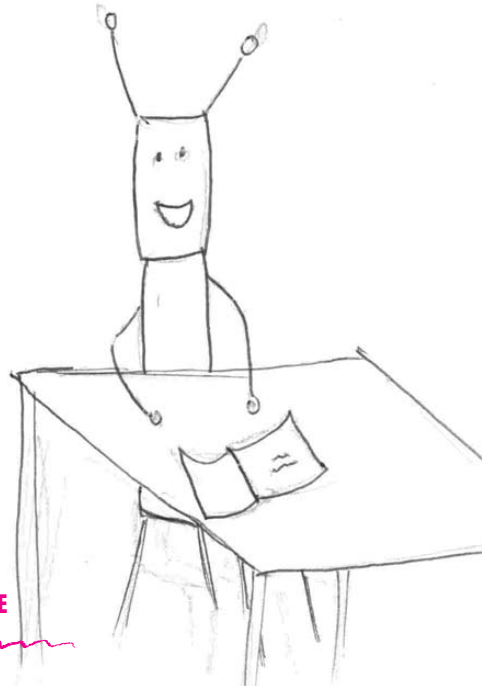
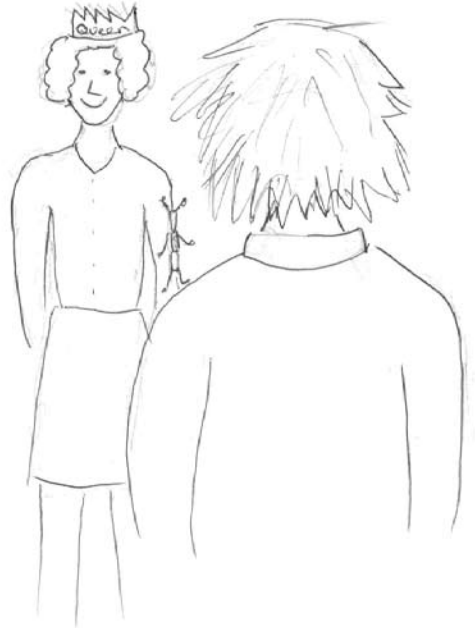
Ed and Cassidy read books together...and of course, they protested outside the school together. But the teacher always made Cassidy come inside and he was forced to leave Ed protesting alone.



Finally, Ed and Cassidy decided that protesting outside the school was not enough. So they went to see the Queen.

“I completely agree” said the Queen, “Everyone should be allowed to go to school”. So she talked to some very important people and made some very important arrangements. Now Ed goes to school every day, and learns lots of new things.

The most important thing that Ed has learned is that if we work together we can change the world. The only problem Ed has now is that the teacher doesn't believe him when he tells her the dog ate his homework!



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Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie was born in Nigeria. She is the author of two novels, *Purple Hibiscus*, which won the Commonwealth Writers Prize and the Hurston/Wright Legacy Award, and *Half of a Yellow Sun*, which was nominated for the National Book Critics Circle Award and won the 2007 Orange Prize. Chimamanda's fiction has been published in *Granta* and *The New Yorker*. She was a 2005/2006 Hodder fellow at Princeton University and holds a master's degree in African Studies from Yale University.




“CHINASA”

By Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

I think it happened in January. I think it was January because the soil was parched and the dry Harmattan winds had coated my skin and the house and the trees with yellow dust. But I'm not sure. I know it was in 1968 but it could have been December or February; I was never sure of dates during the war. I am sure, though, that it happened in the morning – the sun was still pleasant, the kind that they say forms vitamin D on the skin. When I heard the sounds – Boom! Boom! – I was sitting on the verandah of the house I shared with two families, re-reading my worn copy of Camara Laye's *THE AFRICAN CHILD*. The owner of the house was a man who had known my father before the war and, when I arrived after my hometown fell, carrying my battered suitcase, and with nowhere else to go, he gave me a room for free because he said my father had been very good to him. The other women in the house gossiped about me, that I used to go to the room of the house owner at night, that it was the reason I did not pay rent. I was with one of those gossiping women outside that morning. She was sitting on the cracked stone steps, nursing her baby. I watched her for a while, her breast looked like a limp orange that had been sucked of all its juices and I wondered if the baby was getting anything at all.

When we heard the booming, she immediately gathered her baby up and ran into the house to fetch her other children. Boom! It was like the rumblings of thunder, the kind that spread itself across the sky, the kind that heralded a thunderstorm. For a moment I stood there and imagined that it was really the thunder. I imagined that I was back in my father's house before the war, in the yard, under the cashew tree,



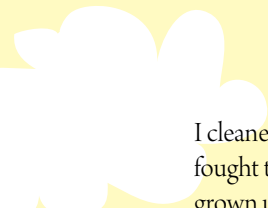
waiting for the rain. My father's yard was full of fruit trees that I liked to climb even though my father teased me and said it was not proper for a young woman, that maybe some of the men who wanted to bring him wine would change their minds when they heard I behaved like a boy. But my father never made me stop. They say he spoiled me, that I was his favorite and even now some of our relatives say the reason I am still unmarried is because of my father.

Anyway, on that Harmattan morning, the sound grew louder. The women were running out with their children. I wanted to run with them, but my legs would not move. It was not the first time I had heard the sounds, of course, this was two years into the war and my parents had already died in a refugee camp in Uke and my aunt had died in Okija and my grandparents and cousins had died in Abagana when Nkwo market was bombed, a bombing that also blew off the roof of my father's house and one that I barely survived. So, by that morning, that dusty Harmattan morning, I had heard the sounds before.

Boom! I felt a slight quiver on the ground I was standing on. Still, I could not get myself to run. The sound was so loud it made my head throb and I felt as if somebody was blowing hot custard into my ears. Then I saw huge holes explode on the ground next to me. I saw smoke and flying bits of wood and glass and metal. I saw dust rise. I don't remember much else. Something inside me was so tired that for a few minutes, I wished that the bombs had brought me rest. I don't know the details of what I did – if I sat down, if I ducked into the farm, if I slumped to the ground. But when the bombing finally stopped, I walked down the street to the crowd gathered around the wounded, and found myself drawn to a body on the ground. A girl, perhaps fifteen years old. Her arms were a mass of bloody flesh. It was the wrong time for humor but looking at her with mangled arms, she looked like a caterpillar. Why did I take that girl into my room? I don't know. There had been many bombings before that – we were in Umuahia and we got the most bombing because we were the capital. And even though I helped to clean the wounded, I had never taken anyone into my room. But I took this girl into my room. Her name was Chinasa.



I nursed Chinasa for weeks. The owner of the house made her crutches from old wood and even the gossiping women brought her small gifts of ukpaka or roast yam. She was thin, small for her age, as most children were during the war, but she had a way of looking at you straight in the eye, in a forthright but not impolite way, that made her seem much older than she was. She pretended she was not in pain when



I cleaned her wounds with home made gin, but I saw the tears in her eyes and I, too, fought tears because this girl on the cusp of womanhood had, because of the war, grown up too quickly. She thanked me often, too often. She said she could not wait to be well enough to help me with the cooking and cleaning. In the evenings, after I had fed her some pap, I would sit next to her and read to her. Her arms were still and bandaged but she had the most expressive face and in the flickering naked light of the kerosene lamp, she would laugh, smile, sneer, as I read to her. I had lost many of my things, running from town to town, but I had always brought some of my books and reading those books to her brought me a new kind of joy because I saw them freshly, through Chinasa's eyes. She began to ask questions, to challenge what some of the characters did in the stories. She asked questions about the war. She asked me questions about myself.

I told her about my parents who had been determined that I would be educated, and who had sent me to a Teachers Training College. I told her how much I had enjoyed my job as a teacher in Enugu before the war started and how sad I was when our school was closed down to become a refugee camp. She looked at me with a great intensity as I spoke. Later, as she was teaching me how to play nchokolo one evening, asking me to move some stones between boxes drawn on the ground, she asked whether I might teach her how to read. I was startled. It did not occur to me that she could not read. Now that I think of it, I should not have been so presumptuous. Her personal story was familiar: her parents were farmers from Agulu who had scraped to send her two brothers to the mission school but kept her at home. Perhaps it was her brightness, her alertness, the great intelligence about the way she watched everything, that had made me forget the reality of where she came from.

We began lessons that night. She knew the alphabet because she had looked at some of her brother's books, and I was not surprised by how quickly she learned, how hard she worked. By the time we heard, some months later, the rumor that our generals were about to surrender, Chinasa was reading to me from her favorite book THE AFRICAN CHILD.



On the day the war ended, Chinasa and I joined the gossipy women and other neighbors down the street. We cried and sang and laughed and danced. For those women crying, theirs were tears of exhaustion and uncertainty and relief. As were mine. But, also, I was crying because I wanted to take Chinasa back with me to my home, or whatever remained of my home in Enugu; I wanted her to become

the daughter I would never have, to share my life now emptied of loved ones. But she hugged me and refused. She wanted to go and find which of her relatives had survived. I gave her my address in Enugu and the name of the school where I hoped to go back to my teaching. I gave her much of the little money I had. "I will come and see you soon," she said. She was looking at me with tearful gratitude, and I held her close to me and felt a keen sense of future sadness. She would find her relatives and her life would intervene in this well-meant promise. I knew that she would not come back.





It is now 2008 and yesterday morning, a morning not dissimilar to that one forty years ago, I opened the Guardian newspaper in the living room of my house in Enugu. I had just returned from my morning walk – my friends say that my daily walk is the reason I do not look like a woman in her seventies – and was filled with the optimism that comes with the briskness, the raised heartbeat of walking. I had followed the recent national news about the government appointing new ministers, but only vaguely because after watching this country careen from one inept leadership to another, I no longer find much to be passionate about. I opened the paper to read that an education minister had been appointed, a woman, and she had just given her first interview. I was mildly pleased: we needed more women in government and Nigerians had seen how well the last female minister did in the ministry of finance. Then the face of the new minister, in a black and white photograph that took up half a page, struck me as familiar. I stared at it and before I read the name, I knew it was Chinasa. The cheeks had filled out, of course, and the face had lost the awkwardness of youth but little else had changed.

I read the interview quickly, my hands a little shaky. She had been sent abroad shortly after the war, with one of the many international agencies that helped young people who had been affected by war. She had been awarded many scholarships. She was married with three children. She was a professor of literature. My hands began to shake furiously when I read about the beginning of her love for books: 'I had a fairy godmother during the war,' was all that she said.

I looked at her face for a long time, imagining the life she has had, playing with the idea of contacting her, realizing that I had never before in my life felt quite so proud, before I closed the newspaper and put it away.

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Queen Rania of Jordan

Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah of Jordan is an international advocate for universal education. Convinced that education is the key to breaking the cycle of poverty, Her Majesty campaigns for more investment in girls' education. She focuses much of her energy on creating opportunities and encouraging innovative public/private partnerships to increase access to, and quality of schools. In March 2008, Queen Rania launched her "Madrasati" (which means "my school" in Arabic) Initiative to renovate at least 500 of Jordan's most dilapidated public schools, to make sure that all young Jordanians have access to bright, safe, well-equipped classrooms and playgrounds.



Maha of the Mountains

A Short Story by Her Majesty Queen Rania Al Abdullah

✿ (This story is set in the Middle East.)

The boys threw stones at her, shouting and jeering. "Ya a'lylet al d'ab! You have no morals!"

Just a few more steps and she would be home. "Ma btistahi! You have no shame!"

Maha struggled to hold back the tears from insults that stung more than stones. At last! Her family's small clay house. Gratefully, she closed the door behind her. Outside, the boys kept up their taunts. "Maha, ha ha! Girls don't belong in school!" One threw a heavy rock, hard, against the door. They all cheered loudly and ran.

Maha sighed. It wasn't even her first day. Imagine when she had her books. Imagine when she actually left the village to walk to school for the first time.

"They'll be waiting for me. They'll throw more stones and Allah knows what else. But going to school is my decision. And I won't let them scare me."

Maha flopped on her bed and drew a deep breath. At least today was Friday. No need to sew or sell embroidery. She curled up and tried to rest.

The last few months had been exhausting. Fights with her father. Ridicule from her brothers. Now the other village boys had joined in. It seemed everyone was against her.

Except for Mama. Thank God for Mama and her reassuring hugs. Mama had never been to school herself, but she had supported Maha, insisting to Baba that even a daughter deserved the chance to learn.

"Maha, why do you never stop?" her father had barked over dinner. "Why all of

this nonsense of going to school? You know we can't afford it."

"Yes, but Baba..."

"Well, then why won't you stop? We wasted so much money on your brothers. Only one of seven stayed in school. One! We could have bought more meat. Or a better plough. Or fixed the water tap."

"But, Baba," she'd begged, "I can work at night. I'll still sell my embroidery. And just think, when I can read I can earn more money! I'll help take care of the family. Please, Baba. I promise, I promise."

Maha's father had closed his eyes, suddenly looking tired. His gaunt face was long and somber beneath his graying hair.

"Alright, Maha," he'd said with a sigh. "But you *have* to pay your own way. I can't give you any money for books..."

Maha had flown across the table to throw her thin arms around him. "Thank you, Baba." She buried her face in his neck. "Thank you so much. I promise I'll make you proud."

"That's enough," he'd said gruffly. But even so, he'd held her tightly too.

Word that Maha was going to school had spread quickly in their small village. It wasn't long before the whispering started behind her back. People pointed, stared, and sneered. One old man spat in her path. "Maha, ha ha!" the village boys jeered. "Girls don't belong in school."

The night before her first day of school, Maha helped her mother chop okra for dinner. "Mama, I don't understand," she said sadly. "Is it wrong to go to school?"

Mama gently took Maha's hand. "It's not you, *hyati*, my life. It's just... well... people just don't think it's right for a girl to go to school."

Maha frowned. "Why not?"

"They think girls should help at home, not bother with school. You know I never learned to read. And neither did your aunts or your grandmothers."

"But, Mama, that doesn't make any sense. Why should that stop *me* from learning?"

Maha's mother shifted.

"Well, people also think," she let go of Maha's hand, "...they think it is a dishonor for a girl to walk alone. It's dangerous, you *know* that. Who knows what could happen? School's an hour away."

Mama's face clouded with worry.

"But, Mama, I'll be careful. You know I will. I don't care what they say. I can't wait to go to school. I can't wait to read and write. I want to be a teacher. And someday, Mama, I'll teach you to read as well! Tell me, what do you think of that?"

Mama's eyes suddenly sparkled with tears. "I think we'd better finish dinner first." She held out her arms. "Now give me a hug, *habibet ghalbi*, love of my heart."



The seasons passed. Summer cracked the earth; passing rain healed the scars. Cold evenings returned to the highlands. A new school year was days away.



And Maha learned. She kept a diary. She read the newspaper headlines to her father. She taught her little sister how to count all her fingers and toes. Her eyes often hurt after many hours of schoolwork, homework, and sewing. But the harder she worked, the stronger she felt. The more she learned, the more she wanted to know.

Still, it wasn't easy. She dreaded the walk, which began at 6 a.m. The journey took an hour or more. Not one part of the barren desert road was paved. By the time she reached school, her aching feet were caked with dust. And that wasn't even the worst of it.

On her first day, no one she'd passed had said a word. Now, the insults were relentless. Villagers tried to shame her. "How can you do this to your family? School is no place for a girl!" The spiteful taunts echoed in her ears -- "Maha, ha ha! Girls don't belong in school!" -- long after she was safely back home.

Maha sat on her bed, pulled her blanket around her shoulders, and tried to focus on her book.

Suddenly, the door slammed shut with a bang. It was her father, and he was angry.

Her mother rushed past. "What's the matter, *habibi*?"

Baba stamped his feet in fury. "What's the matter? What's the matter? *She's* the matter!" he roared, pointing a shaking finger at Maha as she emerged from her bedroom, book still in hand.

"I can't walk ten feet in this village without somebody making some rude remark about my daughter and the disgrace she's bringing on this family. The women are talking. The men are talking. The village elders are talking. They came to me today to say they don't approve of Maha going to school alone. Like I don't know! They've been saying nothing else since all this school foolishness began. She brings shame on the entire village, they say! We can't live with that kind of disgrace. No one does business with me anymore. It's like we're outcasts in our own community."

His voice dropped. "Maha, I know what I said, but you can't go to school anymore."

"But, Baba!"

He had tried to hold her back before when the villagers complained. Some mornings he would say she should stay home that day, and she would agree and busy herself in the kitchen, only to run over the hill to school after Baba left for . . . But this time, she knew it was different.

"No, Maha!" Baba's dark eyes flashed. "Girls do *not* belong in school. That's my final word." He slapped his hand on the table. "Now, where is my dinner?"



Maha's life returned to what it once was.

Boys still pointed at Maha; their sniggers hung in the air. Maha pretended she couldn't hear. In truth, she barely cared. Her world felt as though it had been

reduced to the scraps of fabric she embroidered with beads. She sold what she could to other women in the village. Her stitches hemmed the hours.



Salaam aleikum.

Wa aleikumu salaam.

"May I ask, is this where Maha lives? Do you have a daughter called Maha?" Neither Maha, who had come out to see who it was, nor her father, who had answered the door, knew what to make of the tall woman before them.

As was customary, Baba invited her in and gestured toward the worn floor cushions. Mama offered her sweet tea.

They could see years of learning in the woman's eyes and hear the sound of the city in her voice.

"I have come from the capital city. I have come to see Maha."

"See me?" Maha stepped forward. "Why do you want to see me? How do you even know who I am?"

"What a pleasure to finally meet you, Maha. I've heard so much about you. I've been told you were one of the brightest students Al Isra school ever had." The woman held out a small cloth bag. "And I've brought this for you.

"Go ahead, take it!" She pressed the bag into Maha's surprised hands.

Maha wasn't used to such attention. The village children scarcely spoke to her now. Tentatively, she reached into the bag. There was something hard and smooth at the bottom. Her fingers traced the edges, feeling for clues.

It was a pen. Her first.

"*Il hamdallah.*" She cradled the pen in her palms, glanced at her father, then shyly at the lady. "Are you sure this is for me?"

"Yes, you'll need it," the woman smiled.

"But, why?"

"I've been looking for you for months, Maha of the Mountains! After all, how could I not? A little girl from a tiny village way up in the highlands, walking to school all by herself? Oh yes, Maha, your name is well known, even in the capital city!"

Maha's face flushed.

"No, don't be embarrassed. Your name is known for all the best reasons. Maha of the Mountains, your name stands for courage, determination, and success! We heard how you walked miles each day, enduring so much disapproval, and how you managed to work at night, and still be the best in your class. Your teacher was so proud of your progress. She thought you had so much potential. When you stopped coming, she asked everyone where you were; she looked everywhere to find you. Her search, your story, reached us in the city."

"Really?" said Maha.

"Yes. It even reached our organization. We work with mothers and girls. We give them small loans, help them start businesses... whatever it is they need. And

Maha, we think that what you need is help getting to school."

"How will you help?" Maha's mother asked, her hand protectively on her daughter's shoulder.

"Well, if you agree, each and every morning, one of us will be at your door to take Maha to school. And every afternoon one of us will be at her school to accompany Maha home." She turned back to Maha. "You'll be safe. No one will talk." She smiled, "How does that sound?"

Maha couldn't quite believe her ears. The city was so far away. For the lady to come to her village would take hours, and then the walk as well. Maha's mouth widened, but her eyes softened. She clutched her new pen to her chest.

"Are you sure? Really? Every day?"

"Of course I'm sure! Girls have just as much right to education as anyone else. Why should boys be the only ones in school? School is good for *everyone*. Once you've been to school you can help support your family; you can help your village grow strong. But going to school also gives you a voice! An opinion that people will listen to."

The woman looked her in the eye. "Would you like that? Would you like some company on your way to school?"

Maha raised her gaze to her father, who was staring out the window in silence. "It is for Baba to decide. If Baba gives permission, I will go."

At first, her father did not speak.

Then, slowly, thoughtfully, he turned. "No one can tell me that I do not love my daughter as much as my sons. Yes, my Maha can go back to school. If she is safe, then she can go."

There was a sound at the door. Maha's father got up and opened it to find his doorway filled with all the young girls of the village.

"Really? She gets to go to school?" squeaked one.

An older girl stepped forward. "We're sorry. We didn't mean to listen, but we saw that other lady arrive in the village. She asked all over for Maha and we were curious." She poked her toe in the dirt. "But is it true? Will Maha go to school?"

With a raised eyebrow, he replied, "Yes, she will."

The girls gave a deafening cheer and the boys watching nearby stood shocked. After shouting a few congratulations through the door to Maha, they each ran off back to their own parents.

The next day, Maha stepped outside with her bag and new pen to see that her companions to school had multiplied. It was no longer just the kind and generous lady from the city. Other girls had persuaded their fathers to let them go to school, as well.

Maha couldn't help it when a smile crept across her face.

While the boys had stuck their tongues out at her, the girls had watched with envy as Maha walked to school on her first day a year ago. From that moment, they

had all wanted in secret to go, too.

Only when the lady from the city promised to accompany Maha were they brave enough to ask their families.

Three days later, as she hurriedly ate bread and *foul* before heading off to school, a swell of noise caught her attention.

She opened the door. A crowd larger than her entire village was waiting outside. There were cars, lights, cables, cameras, and a sea of faces she'd never seen before. Suddenly, they all turned their heads and lenses at Maha!

She froze to the spot as the kind lady from the city rushed over. "Maha, Maha, can you believe it? Maha, have you heard?" She hadn't. "Maha, they heard about you. Your story made its way to some really important people! Then, the Minister of Education was told. And now..."

The lady had to catch her breath from the excitement of the news.

"And now... the President is here!"

Maha blushed as the cameras whirred and lights flashed. "I told you your name has travelled far and wide," whispered the lady in her ear.

Before she could work out what the lady had said, a man's hand had reached out to her.

"So you're Maha of the Mountains? You're the little girl who fought to go to school? Who inspired a village?" He didn't wait for an answer.

"Maha, your courage and determination have impressed me greatly, and I want you to help me get more girls into school."

He crouched down.

"Will you help me?"

Maha looked at the girls around her who had heard the question. Their eyes were wide as plates and their heads were nodding wildly. Microphones recorded the deafening silence as they waited for her decision.

In a little voice, she said, "Yes, of course."

The girls screamed with delight.

"I don't want to make you late for class, Maha. How about I give you and your friends a ride to school? We can talk on the way there."

Maha beamed. School bag in hand, her mother kissed her gently on the forehead.

The President waved to everyone as the cameras captured the girls climbing into the cars. As they pulled away, the hills rang with the cheer, "Maha, hur-rah! Girls belong in school!"

The End



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GLOBAL CAMPAIGN FOR

EDUCATION

www.campaignforeducation.org

Devli Kumari

Devli has become the voice of children deprived of education due to poverty, exploitation or slavery.

Three generations of her family had been slaves in the stone quarries of Haryana, India, living and dying without ever seeing the outside world until she and 112 others were rescued in 2004.



Devli is now 11 and lives in Jodhpur with her family. She recently represented deprived children at the launch of 'Education for All: Class of 2015' at the United Nations in New York. She silenced the gathering of some of the world's most powerful people when she told them how she had managed to get 15 children from her village to attend school, and threw out a challenge:

“If I, as a girl, could enroll 15, is it not possible for all the world leaders to enroll all children into schools?”


As a result the leaders pledged resources to ensure that the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) in education is achieved and to help educate over 15 million children around the world.

I am Devli. I was born in a stone quarry in Haryana. My parents were also born there. Our entire family worked in the stone quarry as we were bonded labourers. It was only when we were rescued by Bachpan Bachao Andolan that we understood what it means to be free.



I started working at the age of five. I used to break bigger rocks into smaller ones. My sisters and I used to load rocks into trucks along with everyone else. We had never seen a banana or any fruit. When we were first given a banana after being rescued, we ate it without peeling it off. We had never seen paper and didn't know anything beyond the stone quarry and the work there.

After rescue we were given homes in Jodhpur, our native place, in a colony, where I stay now. I went to Balika Ashram, a centre of BBA in Delhi where I learned to read and write and also received training in how to use computers. After staying there for a year, I went back to my parents and now study in the school in my village.

I also enrolled 15 children into school in my village. I am now in class five. I like going to school, studying Hindi and English and playing with my friends. I want to be a teacher when I grow up.

 Devli's story in her own words (translated by Sandya Ch)

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Paulo Coelho

The Brazilian author was born in 1947 in the city of Rio de Janeiro. Before dedicating his life completely to literature, he worked as a theatre director and actor, lyricist and journalist. His novel, *The Alchemist*, published in 1988 became one of the best selling Brazilian books of all time. He has subsequently published a string of bestsellers and sold more than 100 million books. His work has been translated into 67 languages. In 1999 France's government awarded him with its most prestigious title "Chevalier de l'Order National de la Legion d'Honneur". Since September 2007 the author is also Messenger of Peace for the United Nations.



The story of the pencil

🌸 By Paulo Coelho (Translated by James Mulholland)

The little boy was watching his grandfather writing a letter. At a certain moment he asked:

"Are you writing a story that happened to us? And is it by any chance a story about me?"

The grandfather stopped writing, smiled and said to his grandson:

"I'm writing about you, that's true. But the pencil I am using is more important than the words I am writing. I hope you are like it when you grow up."

The boy looked at the pencil with curiosity, but did not see anything special about it.

"But it's just like all the other pencils I have ever seen in my life!"

"It all depends on how you look at things. There are five qualities in it that if you can

manage to keep in yourself will make you a person always at peace with the world.

The first quality: you can do great things but you must never forget that there is a hand that guides our steps. This hand we call God, and He must always guide it according to His will.



The second quality: from time to time I need to stop what I am writing and use a sharpener. This makes the pencil suffer a little, but in the end it becomes sharper. So, learn how to bear some pains, because they will make you a better person.

The third quality: the pencil always lets you use an eraser to rub out what was wrong. Understand that correcting something that we have done is not necessarily bad, but rather something important to keep us on the path of justice.

The fourth quality: what really matters in the pencil is not the wood or its outer shape but rather the lead that is inside it. So, always take care of what happens inside you.

Lastly, the pencil's fifth quality: it always leaves a mark. In the same way, know that everything you do in life will leave traces, and try to be aware of each and every action."

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Ishmael Beah

Ishmael Beah was born in Sierra Leone. He is the "New York Times" bestselling author of "A Long Way Gone, Memoirs of a Boy Soldier". His work has appeared in the "New York Times Magazine", "Vespertine Press", "LIT" and "Parabola" magazines. He is a UNICEF advocate for Children Affected by War and a member of the Human Rights Watch Children's Advisory Committee. He is a graduate of Oberlin College, Ohio with a B.A in Political Science.

FLYING WITH ONE WING

By Ishmael Beah

It was the first time she had seen her father weep. His body trembled as he walked onto a piece of land that was now consumed by grass. A tall cement pillar still stood on the far end of the land, bearing residues of smoke, rain, dust, and scars from sharp metals that had left visible holes of dark moments. He looked back at his daughter and managed to conjure a smile. He kicked in the grass to reveal some part of the remaining foundation.

"This is where I use to sit, this was my classroom." He placed his fingers on the ground.

"This was my school. I can still hear our voices reciting the alphabet, greeting our teacher, 'good morning Mr. Kanagbole!' and running outside during break, screaming our desired positions for the football match that we played everyday." He continued and sat on the ground. His daughter sat next to him. She was accompanying her father back to his home where he had always said the core of his heart still lived. They sat quietly and listened to the wind that sailed

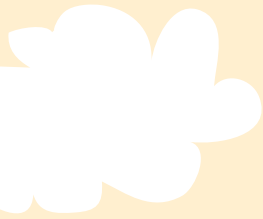


through the leaves of the nearby mango trees. Her father had never spoken much about his home. However, he had now started speaking in a voice that belonged to the past.

“My heart is not familiar with the joy of celebrating birthdays. It is however deeply intimate with the happiness of walking to school and learning to read. The discovery of language intrigued my childhood years. The ability to read and learn new things infused my childhood with possibilities and added more magic to my environment and activities. After I started school, the leaves on the side of the road to school were no longer just medicine; I also knew how they absorbed sunlight and water. These moments of learning were some of the happiest in my early childhood and they continued with exceptional vigor and meaning that followed every discovery of my own mind. This journey to discover my own mind allowed me to find the very necessity of my humanity and with that came an awakening to live my life for others, not just for myself. The seed of this awareness was planted in me right here, on this land.”

He closed his eyes raised his head sideways so that the sunrays rested on his face and then continued.

“The biggest celebration in my house was at the end of the school term when my brother and I brought home our report cards. My father’s words still remain deep inside my ears. ‘Birthdays are just reminders that you will become your parents. But celebrating education is guaranteeing your existence forever, is evoking the spirit of possibilities, is



finding the strength of your spirit to easily swim against any tide.' His face became tense, the veins filling with blood when he said such things. 'One day you will understand, my child.' He would rest the palm of his hand on my right cheek. I have come to understand"

He turned his face away from the sun, his eyes still closed. He sighed heavily that his body heaved before settling again on the ground.


"I remember learning how to spell my name right here where we are now sitting. I had a slate in my hand and a chalk. The teacher came by and sat on the ground next to me. We didn't have benches then. He wrote my name at the top of my slate. I.B.R.A.H.I.M, I repeated after him. 'Continue reciting the letters and copy them on your slate as many times as possible,' he said and walked to the next pupil and soon enough, the chatter rose higher in the classroom, each boy and girl reading out loudly the letters of their names. On that day, I waited anxiously for the school bell, a long iron that hung in the branches of the mango tree, to be rung. As soon as one of the older boys rang the bell to signal the end of the school day, I ran home reciting the letters to each contact that my feet made with the ground. My mother was home waiting with a cup of water. I was ecstatic and told her every detail of what had happened in school. I had a piece of chalk in my pocket so I wrote down my name on the door of the bedroom my older brother and I shared. Although the letters, in retrospect, seemed crooked, I could see the joy on my mother's face when she cupped my little face in her

hands and lowered herself to meet my tiny eyes. There were tears of joy in her eyes. Not long after that, I was writing the names of every member of my family on various doors in the house. My father encouraged this by buying me more chalk. Soon enough the entire house was covered with not only names but every other sentence that I had learned in class. My father knew this would get out of hand so he bought me a notebook along with a pencil and asked me to copy everything I had written on the walls and doors of the house. The scent of that first new book is still lodged in my memory and I would never forget those moments with my father reading the sentences and names I had inscribed on the wall to me as I re-wrote them in my notebook. I knew then that something about my life had changed forever. I could feel it in the elation of my spirit and that of my father as we went around the house cleaning the walls.”

A bird flapped its wings to quickly fly past where they sat. He wiped the clusters of sweat that had emerged on his forehead. She was still, only her watery eyelids shook. He placed his right hand under his chin to hold his head upright.

“Years later when I was in class six in primary school and knew how to read and write, I became the young boy in this small town who knew the secrets of almost everyone. I wrote and read letters for the older people from their children who had moved away. I learned about the fears, hopes and dreams of many people. This role also provided me with some money that I used to buy books that I read while walking home after school.





Once, on my way back from school, I was reading a book about a boy who had gone to the city on his summer vacation. I was so enthralled with the book that I forgot to keep my eyes on the road. I walked off the tiny bridge that had no bars on either side and fell into that river and my book was soaked and useless. I never saw my father laugh as hard as he did on that day when I arrived home in my soaked uniform. He advised me though to sit and read instead of walking.

We didn't have any electricity so I read by the lamp at night and sometimes near the fire especially when the evening air was colder. There were a few times when it seemed even the fire from the lamp or the fireplace was envious of my reading and licked the side of my books with its flames. My father said that the fire was testing my awareness. It wanted to see if I had gained anything from all of that reading."

He opened his eyes and looked at his daughter. She clasped her hands in his beckoning him to continue when he was ready. He smiled a bit before his face tensed and went to recounting.

"Things changed though when the sounds of nature were replaced with those of guns, of wailing, of chaos. This is why we are sitting in this ruin of what used to be my school. During the time of that madness, I forgot to dream of a future as there were no longer schools to go to. But the memories of those early schooldays stayed with me and will never depart.



They are the times I remember fondly before everything changed. They are the times that were reborn when the guns ceased emitting their terrifying and destructive noises.”

Ulaimatu put her arms around her father. He had become quiet perhaps thinking of what to say next or perhaps exhausted from remembering. This is the most her father had said about his past and she now realized why he never bought her presents for her birthdays but only when she did well in school. They sat quietly for a while until the air was filled with sounds of bells that signaled lunchtime. A horde of boys and girls in their uniforms emerged from a nearby building, chattering like birds and making their way to various parts around the school building to sit and have lunch. Simultaneously, another horde of boys and girls the same age came running to the school compound with trays of food and water to sell. Ulaimatu’s father’s body trembled again.

“The future is only half bright, or in my father’s words, this country is a bird flying with one wing. It cannot soar for long.” He said as he looked on toward the school grounds.



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Alice Walker

Poet, short story writer, novelist, essayist, anthologist, teacher, editor, publisher, feminist and activist, Alice Walker was born on February 9, 1944 in rural Georgia, USA. Walker grew up in a loving household near the end of the Great Depression. While poor, the family was rich in love and perspective. After graduating from high school, Walker enrolled at Spelman College in Atlanta where she became involved in the civil rights movement.

Alice Walker's fiction has established her as a major figure in the renaissance in African American women's writings of the 1970s as well as a canonical figure in American letters. In 1982 Walker became the first African American woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction for her novel *The Color Purple*.

Walker's writings have been translated into more than two-dozen languages. A best-selling author, her books have sold more than ten million copies.

Alice Walker gave permission to use excerpts from one of the world's favourite books, saying:

"It's a wonderful effort. Reading is the biggest window there is, next to just looking at trees."

Love, Alice

✿ Extracted from

THE COLOR PURPLE...

By Alice Walker

Dear Celie,

*** I remember one time you said your life made you feel so ashamed you couldn't even talk about it to God, you had to write it, bad as you thought your writing was. Well, now I know what you meant. And whether God will read letters or no, I know you will go on writing them; which is guidance enough for me. Anyway, when I don't write to you I feel as bad as I do when I don't pray, locked up in myself and choking on my own heart. I am so lonely, Celie.

The reason I am in Africa is because one of the missionaries that was supposed to go with Corrine and Samuel to help with the children and with setting up a school suddenly married a man who was afraid to let her go, and refused to come to Africa with her. So there they were, all set to go, with a



ticket suddenly available and no missionary to give it to. At the same time, I wasn't able to find a job anywhere around town. But I never dreamed of going to Africa! I never even thought about it as a real place, though Samuel and Corrine and even the children talked about it all the time.

*** In the morning I started asking questions about Africa and started reading all the books Samuel and Corrine have on the subject.

Did you know there were great cities in Africa, greater than Milledgeville or even Atlanta, thousands of years ago? That the Egyptians who built the pyramids and enslaved the Israelites were colored? That Egypt is in Africa? That the Ethiopia we read about in the bible meant all of Africa?

Well, I read and I read until I thought my eyes would fall out. I read where the Africans sold us because they loved money more than their own sisters and brothers. How we came to America in ships. How we were made to work.

I hadn't realized I was so ignorant, Celie. The little I knew about my own self wouldn't have filled a thimble! And to think Miss Beasley always said I was the smartest child she ever taught! But one thing I do thank her for, for teaching me to learn for myself, by reading and studying and writing a clear hand. And for keeping alive in me somehow the desire to know. So when Corrine and Samuel asked me if I would come with them and help them build a school in the middle of Africa, I said yes. But only if they would teach me everything they knew to make me useful as a missionary and someone they would not be ashamed to call a friend. They agreed to this condition, and my real education began at that time.

They have been as good as their word. And I study everything night and day.

*** Your sister, Nettie





Dear Celie,

It has been a long time since I had time to write. But always, no matter what I'm doing, I am writing to you. Dear Celie, I say in my head in the middle of Vespers, the middle of the night, while cooking, Dear, dear Celie. And I imagine that you really do get my letters and that you are writing me back: Dear Nettie, this is what life is like for me.

We are up at five o'clock for a light breakfast of millet porridge and fruit, and the morning classes. We teach the children English, reading, writing, history, geography, arithmetic and the stories of the bible. At eleven o'clock we break for lunch and household duties. From one until four it is too hot to move, though some of the mothers sit behind their huts and sew. At four o'clock we teach the older children and at night we are available for adults. Some of the older children are used to coming to the mission school, but the smaller ones are not. Their mothers sometimes drag them here, screaming and kicking. They are all boys. Olivia is the only girl.

The Olinka do not believe girls should be educated. When I asked a mother why she thought this, she said: A girl is nothing to herself; only to her husband can she become something.

What can she become? I asked.

Why, she said, the mother of his children.

But I am not the mother of anybody's children, I said, and I am something.

You are not much, she said. The missionary's drudge.

It is true that I work harder here than I ever dreamed I could work, and that I sweep out the school and tidy up after service, but I don't feel like a drudge. I was surprised that this woman, whose Christian name is Catherine, saw me in this light.

She has a little girl, Tashi, who plays with Olivia after school. Adam is the only boy who will speak to Olivia at school. They are not mean to her, it is just - what is it? Because she is

where they are doing 'boys' things' they do not see her. But never fear, Celie, Olivia has your stubbornness and clear-sightedness, and she is smarter than all of them, including Adam, put together.

Why can't Tashi come to school? she asked me. When I told her the Olinka don't believe in educating girls she said, quick as a flash, They're like white people at home who don't want colored people to learn.

Oh, she's sharp, Celie. At the end of the day, when Tashi can get away from all the chores her mother assigns her, she and Olivia secret themselves in my hut and everything Olivia has learned she shares with Tashi. To Olivia right now Tashi alone is Africa. The Africa she came beaming across the ocean hoping to find.




Dear Celie,

Tashi's mother and father were just here. They are upset because she spends so much time with Olivia. She is changing, becoming quiet and too thoughtful, they say. She is becoming someone else; her face is beginning to show the spirit of one of her aunts who was sold to the trader because she no longer fit into village life. This aunt refused to marry the man chosen for her. Refused to bow to the chief. Did nothing but lay up, crack cola nuts between her teeth and giggle.

They want to know what Olivia and Tashi do in my hut when all the other little girls are busy helping their mothers. Is Tashi lazy at home? I asked.

The father looked at the mother. She said, No, on the contrary, Tashi works harder than most girls her age. And is quicker to finish her work. But it is only because she wishes to spend her afternoons with Olivia. She learns everything I



teach her as if she already knows it, said the mother, but this knowledge does not really enter her soul.

The mother seemed puzzled and afraid.

The father, angry.

I thought: Aha. Tashi knows she is learning a way of life she will never live. But I did not say this.

The world is changing, I said. It is no longer a world just for boys and men.

Our women are respected here, said the father. We would never let them tramp the world as American women do. There is always someone to look after the Olinka woman. A father. An uncle. A brother or nephew. Do not be offended, Sister Nettie, but our people pity women such as you who are cast out, we know not from where, into a world unknown to you, where you must struggle all alone, for yourself


So I am an object of pity and contempt, I thought, to men and women alike.

Furthermore, said Tashi's father, we are not simpletons. We understand that there are places in the world where women live differently from the way our women do, but we do not approve of this different way for our children.

But life is changing, even in Olinka, I said. We are here.

He spat on the ground. What are you? Three grownups and two children. In the rainy season some of you will probably die. You people do not last long in our climate. If you do not die, you will be weakened by illness. Oh, yes. We have seen it all before. You Christians come here, try hard to change us, get sick and go back to England, or wherever you come from. Only the trader on the coast remains, and even he is not the same white man, year in and year out. We know because we send him women.

Tashi is very intelligent, I said. She could be a teacher. A nurse. She could help the people in the village.



There is no place here for a woman to do those things,
he said.

Then we should leave, I said. Sister Corrine and I.

No, no, he said.

Teach only the boys? I asked.

Yes, he said, as if my question was agreement.

There is a way that the men speak to women that reminds me too much of Pa. They listen just long enough to issue instructions. They don't even look at women when women are speaking. They look at the ground and bend their heads toward the ground. The women also do not 'look in a man's face' as they say. To 'look in a man's face' is a brazen thing to do. They look instead at his feet or his knees. And what can I say to this? Again, it is our own behavior around Pa.

Next time Tashi appears at your gate, you will send her straight home, her father said. Then he smiled. Your Olivia can visit her, and learn what women are for.

I smiled also. Olivia must learn to take her education about life where she -can find it, I thought. His offer will make a splendid opportunity.

Goodbye until the next time, dear Celie, from a pitiful, cast-out woman who may perish during the rainy season.



*Your loving sister,
Nettie*



 **Read Alice Walker's world famous book: The Color Purple**

*** Text Omitted

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Michael Morpurgo

Born in 1943 in Hertfordshire, UK, Michael was evacuated to Cumberland during the last years of the war, later moving to Essex. After university and a brief spell in the army, Michael worked as a teacher for ten years, before leaving to set up 'Farms for City Children' with his wife Clare. The charity, which now runs three farms, aims to provide children from inner city areas with experience of the countryside. In 1999 the couple were awarded MBEs in recognition of their services to youth.

Michael now lives on a farm in Devon and describes himself as "oldish, married with three children, and a grandfather six times over."

Michael Morpurgo is one of the greatest storytellers for children writing today and has written over one hundred books, including "The Wreck of the Zanzibar", "The Butterfly Lion", "Kensuke's Kingdom" and "Private Peaceful", all of which have won major literary awards including the Smarties Book Prize, the Whitbread Award, the Writer's Guild Award and the Children's Book Award.

From 2003-2005, Michael was the Children's Laureate, a role designed to reward a lifetime's contribution to children's literature and to highlight the importance of children's books. In 2006, he was also awarded an Order of the British Empire (OBE), in recognition of his services to literature.



I Believe in Unicorns

by Michael Morpurgo (short-story version)

My name is Tomas Porec. I was seven years old when I first met the unicorn lady. I believed in unicorns then. I am nearly twenty now and because of her I still believe in unicorns.

My little town, hidden deep in its own valley, was an ordinary place, pretty enough but ordinary. I know that now. But when I was seven it was a place of magic and wonder to me. It was my place, my home. I knew every cobbled alleyway, every lamp post in every street. I fished in the stream below the church, tobogganed the slopes in winter, swam in the lake in the summer. On Sundays my mother and father would take me on walks or on picnics, and I'd roll down the hills, over and over, and end up lying there on my back, giddy with joy, the world spinning above me.

I never did like school though. It wasn't the school's fault, nor the teachers'. I just wanted to be outside all the time. I longed always to be

running free up in the hills. As soon as school was over, it was back home for some bread and honey – my father kept his own bees on the hillside – then off out to play. But one afternoon my mother had other ideas. She had to do some shopping in town, she said, and wanted me to go with her.

“I hate shopping,” I told her.

“I know that, dear,” she said. “That’s why I’m taking you to the library. It’ll be interesting. Something different. You can listen to stories for an hour or so. It’ll be good for you. There’s a new librarian lady and she tells stories after school to any children who want to listen. Everyone says she’s brilliant.”

“But I don’t want to listen,” I protested.


My mother simply ignored all my pleas, took me firmly by the hand and led me to the town square. She walked me up the steps into the library. “Be good,” she said, and she was gone.

I could see there was an excited huddle of children gathered in one corner. Some of them were from my school, but they all looked a lot younger than me. Some of them were infants! I certainly did not want to be with them. I was just about to turn and walk away in disgust when I noticed they were all jostling each other, as if they were desperate to get a better look at something. Since I couldn’t see what it was, I went a little closer. Suddenly they were all sitting down and hushed, and there in the corner I saw a unicorn. He was lying absolutely still, his feet tucked neatly under him. I could see now that he was made of carved wood and painted white, but he was so lifelike that if he’d got up and trotted off I wouldn’t have been at all surprised.

Beside the unicorn and just as motionless, just as neat, stood a lady with a smiling face, a bright flowery scarf around her shoulders. When her eyes found mine, her smile beckoned me to join them. Moments later I found myself sitting on the floor with the others, watching and waiting. When she sat down slowly on the unicorn and folded her hands in her lap I could feel expectation all around me.

“The unicorn story!” cried a little girl. “Tell us the unicorn story. Please.”

She talked so softly that I had to lean forward to hear her. But I wanted to hear her, everyone did, because every word she spoke was meant and felt, and sounded true. The story was about



how the last two magic unicorns alive on earth had arrived just too late to get on Noah's ark with all the other animals. So they were left stranded on a mountain top in the driving rain, watching the ark sail away over the great flood into the distance. The waters rose and rose around them until their hooves were covered, then their legs, then their backs, and so they had to swim. They swam and they swam, for hours, for days, for weeks, for years. They swam for so long, they swam so far, that in the end they turned into whales. This way they could swim easily. This way they could dive down to the bottom of the sea. But they never lost their magical powers and they still kept their wonderful horns, which is why there are to this day whales with unicorn's horns. They're called narwhals. And sometimes, when they've had enough of the sea and want to see children again, they swim up onto the beaches and find their legs and become unicorns again, magical unicorns.

After she had finished no one spoke. It was as if we were all waking up from some dream we didn't want to leave. There were more stories, and poems too. Some she read from books, some she made up herself or knew by heart.

Then a hand went up. It was a small boy from my school, Milos with the sticky-up hair. "Can I tell a story, miss?" he asked. So sitting on the unicorn he told us his story.


One after another after that they wanted their turn on the magical unicorn. I longed to have a go myself, but I didn't dare. I was frightened of making a fool of myself, I think.

The hour flew by.

"What was it like?" my mother asked me on the way home.

"All right, I suppose," I told her. But at school the next day I told all my friends what it was really like, all about the unicorn lady – everyone called her that – and her amazing stories and the fantastic magical storytelling power of the unicorn.

They came along with me to the library that afternoon. Day after day as word spread, the little group in the corner grew until there was a whole crowd of us. We would rush to the library now to get there first, to find a place close to the unicorn, close to the unicorn lady. Every story she told us held us entranced. She never told us to sit still. She didn't have to. Each day I wanted so much to sit on the unicorn and tell a story, but still I could never quite summon up the courage.



One afternoon the unicorn lady took out from her bag a rather old and damaged-looking book, all charred at the edges. It was, she told us, her very own copy of *The Little Match Girl* by Hans Christian Andersen. I was sitting that day very close to the unicorn lady's feet, looking up at the book. "Why's it been burnt?" I asked her.


"This is the most precious book I have, Tomas," she said. "I'll tell you why. When I was very little I lived in another country. There were wicked people in my town who were frightened of the magic of stories and of the power of books, because stories make you think and dream; books make you want to ask questions. And they didn't want that. I was there with my father watching them burn a great pile of books, when suddenly my father ran forward and plucked a book out of the fire. The soldiers beat him with sticks, but he held on to the book and wouldn't let go of it. It was this book. It's my favourite book in all the world. Tomas, would you like to come and sit on the unicorn and read it to us?"

I had never been any good at reading out loud. I would always stutter over my consonants, worry over long words. But now, sitting on the magic unicorn, I heard my voice strong and loud. It was like singing a song. The words danced on the air and everyone listened. That same day I took home my first book from the library, *Aesop's Fables*, because the unicorn lady had read them to us and I'd loved them. I read them aloud to my mother that night, the first time I'd ever read to her, and I could see she was amazed. I loved amazing my mother.

Then one summer morning, early, war came to our valley and shattered our lives. Before that morning I knew little of war. I knew some of the men had gone to fight, but I wasn't sure what for. I had seen on television tanks shooting at houses and soldiers with guns running through the trees, but my mother always told me it was far away and I wasn't to worry.

I remember the moment. I was outside. My mother had sent me out to open up the hens and feed them, when I looked up and saw a single plane come flying in low over the town. I watched as it circled once and came again. That was when the bombs began to fall, far away at first, then closer, closer. We were all running then, running up into the woods. I was first frightened to cry. My father cried. I'd never seen him cry before, but it was from anger as much as fear.





Hidden high in the woods we could see the tanks and the soldiers all over the town, blasting and shooting as they went. A few hours later, after they had gone, we could hardly see the town any more for the smoke. We waited until we were quite sure they had all gone, and then we ran back home. We were luckier than many. Our house had not been damaged. It was soon obvious that the centre of town had been hardest hit. Everyone seemed to be making their way there. I ran on ahead hoping and praying that the library had not been bombed, that the unicorn lady and the unicorn were safe.

As I came into the square I saw smoke rising from the roof of the library and flames licking out of the upper windows. We all saw the unicorn lady at the same moment. She was coming out of the library carrying the unicorn, staggering under its weight. I ran up the steps to help her. She smiled me her thanks as I took my share of the weight. Her eyes were red from the smoke. Between us we set the unicorn down at the foot of the steps, and she sat down exhausted, racked with a fit of coughing. My mother fetched her a glass of water. It must have helped because the coughing stopped, and all at once she was up on her feet, leaning on my shoulder for support.

"The books," she breathed. "The books."

When she began to walk back up the steps I followed her without thinking.

"No, Tomas," she said. "You stay here and look after the unicorn." Then she was running up the steps into the library, only to reappear moments later, her arms piled high with books. That was the moment the rescue began. People seemed suddenly to surge past me up the steps, and into the library, my mother and father amongst them.

It wasn't long before a whole system was set up. We children made two chains across the square from the library to the café opposite, and the books everyone rescued went from hand to hand, ending up in stacks on the floor of the café. The fire was burning ever more fiercely, the flames crackling, smoke billowing now from the roof. No fire engines came – we found out later the fire station had been hit. Still the books came out. Still the fire burned and more and more people came to help, until the café was filled with books and we had to use the grocer's shop next door.

The moment came when there were suddenly no more

books to pass along and we all wondered why. Then we saw everyone coming out of the library, and last of all the unicorn lady, helped by my father. They came slowly down the steps together, their faces smudged and blackened. The unicorn lady sat down heavily on the unicorn and looked up at the burning building. We children all gathered around her as if waiting for a story.

“We did it, children,” she said. “We saved all we could, didn’t we? I’m sitting on the unicorn so any story I tell is true because we believe it can be true. We shall build our library up again just as it was. Meanwhile we shall look after the books. Every family can take home all the books they can manage and care for them. And when in one year or two or three we have our new library, then we shall all bring back our books, and we shall carry the magic unicorn inside and we shall all tell our stories again. All we have to do is make this story come true.”

So it happened, just as the unicorn lady said it would. Like so many families in the town we took home a wheelbarrow full of books and looked after them. Sure enough the library was rebuilt just the same as the old one, only by now everyone called it the Unicorn, and we all brought our books back just as the unicorn lady had told it in her story.

The day the library opened, because I had helped carry the unicorn out, I got to carry him back up the steps with the unicorn lady, and the whole town was there cheering and clapping, the flags flying, the band playing. It was the proudest and happiest day of my life.

Now, all these years later, we have peace in our valley. The unicorn lady is still the town librarian, still reading her stories to the children after school. As for me, I’m a writer now, a weaver of tales. And if from time to time I lose the thread of my story, all I have to do is go and sit on the magic unicorn and my story flows again. So believe me, I believe in unicorns. I believe in them absolutely.

The End

 **Thanks to Walker Books for this contribution**

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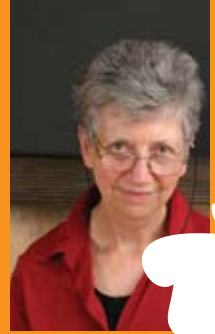
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Beverley Naidoo

Beverley Naidoo was born in South Africa and began writing in exile in England while a teacher. Her first children's book, "Journey to Jo'burg", was banned in South Africa until 1991 but it was an eye-opener for thousands of readers worldwide. Her characters in "Chain of Fire", "No Turning Back" and "Out of Bounds" face challenges in real situations that she describes as 'more dangerous than any fantasy'.

She has won many awards for her writing, including the Carnegie Medal for "The Other Side of Truth" about two refugee children smuggled to London who also feature in "Web of Lies". Her latest novel "Burn My Heart", set in 1950s Kenya, is about friendship, loyalty and betrayal. Her most recent stories are mermaid legends in "Call of the Deep". Having had books previously banned in her birth country, she was delighted to be the South African nominee for the Hans Christian Andersen Award in 2008. Read more at www.beverleynaidoo.com




Locking up Freedom

Beverley Naidoo

Believe it or not, the library at my school was kept locked! I have no memory of going inside and choosing a book for myself. What's more, when I asked our vice-principal to sign a form so that I could join the Johannesburg city library, she refused. I can still hear her voice with her Irish lilt...


'And what would you be wanting to read more books for, Beverley? Have you not got enough with your text books already?'

I was puzzled at the time, but later I realised that the nuns who taught me felt that it was their duty to control the books we read. In class, when we read a story, a poem, a novel or a play by Shakespeare, we were told what the author meant. Our teachers told



us to write down what they said and learn it. To them, teaching included teaching us what to think. At least I was lucky to have some books at home that I would read for pleasure. I would lose myself in them and my imagination would roam.

This was all a long time ago – more than 50 years – but the idea of keeping young people away from books and controlling their ideas still angers me. You see, I was brought up in apartheid South Africa. I was a white child in a whites-only school and none of my teachers encouraged me to ask questions, let alone question the racism all around us. It's a bit like we children were little donkeys with blinkers who had to follow instructions from teachers and adults who also wore blinkers.



After I left school, I was very fortunate to make friends at university with people who helped me tear away the blinkers. For the first time, I began to read books that invited me to see the world around me in new ways. I began to realise that for black South Africans the country was like a vast prison and I began to ask the questions that I'd never asked before. What I saw, with my own eyes, was shocking, but at least I was now beginning to choose my own journey. That led to me being locked up in jail for eight weeks in solitary confinement, with no charges. I was still a 'small fish' in the resistance to apartheid, but my brother and his friends who challenged the system were locked up for

years. Reading and discussing books was important to them because books allowed their minds to travel outside the prison walls. Books helped them keep their minds free!

I started writing when I was living in exile in England and had two children. Their father and I weren't allowed to return to South Africa where we had both been born. That made us refugees from our home country and I wanted to find a way for our children, and others, to imagine what apartheid was like. If I could tell them a gripping story, they might want to know more...

That was the beginning of *Journey to Jo'burg*, my first book for young people. Once it was published, it quickly travelled around the world in many different languages. I began to receive hundreds of letters from readers telling me their thoughts and asking me questions. But there were no letters from South Africa because the apartheid rulers banned the book until the year after Nelson Mandela was released from jail. Someone could be put in prison or made to pay a fine if they were found with it.

Not having books is not always about lack of money but about what we value. Books are 'mind food'! One of our most important freedoms is surely to read, imagine, think and ask our own questions about the world.

A few years ago I wrote this poem. It arose from

thinking about Journey to Jo'burg. It's also about much more, but that I leave to you.



They tried to lock up freedom

They seized the book

Ripped out its spine

Flung it in the fire

Pages fluttered through smoke

They grabbed the pages

Scratched out lines

Crushed them in their fists

Words squeezed through knuckles

They twisted the words

Tore out sound

Swallowed them in their silence

The heart of the book cried out



The pages grew wings

The words breathed Freedom



'They Tried to Lock up Freedom' © Beverley Naidoo 2004. Commissioned by Barbican Education; published in Journey to Jo'burg, HarperCollins Essential Modern Classics, 2008

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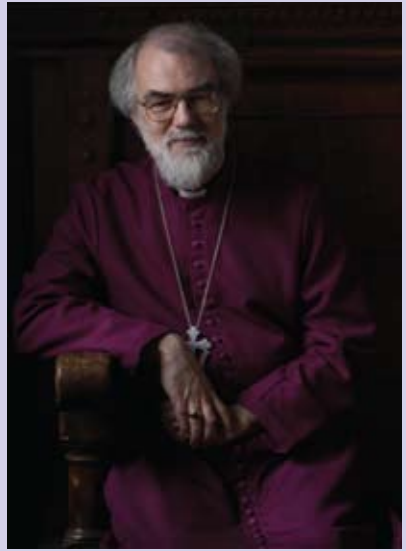
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Archbishop of Canterbury: Rowan Williams

Rowan Douglas Williams was born in Swansea, south Wales, UK, and was educated at Dynevor School in Swansea and Christ's College Cambridge where he studied theology. He studied for his doctorate at Wadham College Oxford. From 1977, he spent nine years in academic and parish work in Cambridge before returning to Oxford.

In 1991 Professor Williams accepted election and consecration as Bishop of Monmouth and in 1999 he was elected Archbishop of Wales. Williams was confirmed on 2 December 2002 as the 104th Archbishop of the See of Canterbury.



Dr Williams is acknowledged internationally as an outstanding theological writer, scholar and teacher. His interests include music, fiction and languages. Dr Williams is married to Jane Paul, a lecturer in theology, whom he met while living and working in Cambridge. They have a daughter and a son.





Arabic Class in the Refugee Camp (Islamabad, 2006)

One by one, the marks join up:
easing their way through the broken soil,
the green strands bend, twine,
dip and curl and cast off little drops
of rain. Nine months ago,
the soil broke up, shouting,
crushing its fist on houses, lives,
crops and futures, opening its wordless mouth
to say No. And the green strands
stubbornly grow back. The broken bits
of a lost harvest still let
the precious wires push through
to bind the pain, to join with knots and curls
the small hurt worlds of each
small life, to say another no: no,
you are not abandoned. The rope of words
is handed on, let down from a sky
broken by God's voice, curling and wrapping
each small life into the lines of grace,
the new world of the text that maps
our losses and our longings, so
that we can read humanity again
in one another's eyes, and hear
that the broken soil is not all, after all,
as the signs join up.



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Nelson Mandela

Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was born in Mvezo village in the former Transkei, South Africa, in 1918. After finishing school he went to university and studied law. He joined the African National Congress in 1942 and devoted himself to the struggle against apartheid. In 1952 Mandela travelled the country organising non-violent resistance to discriminatory legislation. This included the 1952 Defiance Campaign, resistance to forced removals and to the introduction of Bantu Education in 1953. He advised community activists to “make every home, every shack or rickety structure a centre of learning”. He was banned more than once, arrested and charged several times, and in 1964 was sentenced to life imprisonment for his efforts to end apartheid. He became one of the world’s most famous political prisoners. After 27 years in prison, Mandela was released and helped steer South Africa through its peaceful transition to democracy. In 1993 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, and became the first democratically elected president of South Africa in 1994. He retired from public life in 1999. He remains South Africa’s best-loved hero.



Extracted from Nelson Mandela’s speech at the launch of the National Campaign for Learning and Teaching in 1997



Our country is well endowed with natural resources. But our most valued treasure is our people, especially the youth. It is our human resources that enable us to reap the benefits of all our other assets.

Our fight against poverty, crime, and all the maladies of our society requires us to invest in the development of our human resources. ...

At the forefront of this effort is education and training. We are obliged to make it possible for everyone to develop their potential to the full; to provide opportunities for everyone to learn and nurture their talents. We have a duty to create a conducive environment; and to provide the necessary tools and the mechanisms to support people in their endeavours to better themselves. ...

The potential to be reclaimed is immense. The millions of our adults who never had the chance to learn to read and write; the hundreds of thousands of our youth displaced from education without any meaningful skills; the nation’s workers who must ensure that our country embraces the world’s new technologies – we can tap this power to build a better life by using every opportunity to ensure that our nation learns.



Our message to teachers on this occasion is this: let your watchword be unqualified commitment to the interests of those whose education has been entrusted to you.

Amongst other things, this means meticulous punctuality; thorough preparation for every lesson; dedication to ensuring that every student learns something from each lesson. It involves keeping abreast of developments in your subject areas and working co-operatively with both colleagues and management to ensure that our schools truly educate the nation. In short it means upholding the highest standards so that dignity is fully restored to the teaching profession. On your shoulders lies an enormous responsibility. If you fail our children you fail our country.

To students, this campaign is a call to make learning your main, if not your only, priority. For you too, punctuality, attendance and diligence in study must be the order of the day. Active participation in lessons and inquisitive probing to aid your own learning, respect for fellow students and for teachers; and a resolve never to use drugs or take dangerous weapons to school – all these and many more, make up the fabric of the culture of learning. ...

To parents, we say today that taking an interest in your children's education is as important as their own efforts and those of teachers. You can help educate the nation by participating in the activities of schools and protecting them from vandals; by supporting them, by working with teachers and students; and by constant guidance which ensures that your children always attend school and do their school work...

We can no longer afford to sit by while some schools are turned into havens of drug abuse, violence or vandalising of valuable property. We can no longer sit and watch while any of our country's children are held back in the mire of ignorance and lack of skills. ... Let us join hands, and work to make our schools work for us.

I thank you.”

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Archbishop Desmond Tutu

Anglican priest Desmond Mpilo Tutu became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches in 1979. He spoke strongly against the apartheid and in 1984 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts. In 1986 he was elected Archbishop of Cape Town, the highest position in the Anglican Church in Southern Africa. In 1989 he led a march to a whites-only beach, where he and supporters were chased off with whips.

In 1994, after the end of Apartheid and the election of Nelson Mandela, Tutu was appointed as Chairman of South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to investigate apartheid-era crimes. This policy of forgiveness and reconciliation has become an international example of conflict resolution, and a trusted method of post-conflict reconstruction. He continues to pursue an active international ministry for peace.



Below are extracts from an interview Desmond Tutu gave to the Academy of Achievement in 2007 and has given the Global Campaign for Education permission to use in the Big Read.

When you were a boy in Klerksdorp (small town in South Africa), what was your childhood like, and what experiences had a large influence on you?

My childhood in Klerksdorp? Well, like any other black child, we lived in a ghetto, and yet, it wasn't as if you went around feeling sorry for yourself. We knew that we were deprived. That life wasn't the same as for white kids, but it was as full a life as you could make it. We made cars for ourselves with wire!

My father was a school master and principal of the primary /elementary school in which I started. My mother was not very educated. I had, and still have two sisters. My brothers died in infancy so I was the only boy in the family and to some extent perhaps a little bit spoiled.

Was there any book that you read growing up that had the most effect on you?

One of the things that my father did was to let me read comics. People used to say that's bad because it spoils your English but, in fact, letting me read - I devoured all kinds of comics - fed my love for English and my love for reading but I suppose if he had been firm I might not have developed this deep love for reading and for English, which stood me in good stead when I later went into hospital for 20 months. I had something to do.

We didn't have too many books but my father was keen that one read things like Aesop's Fables and Lamb's Tales from Shakespeare. I didn't read the originals

but I read these stories that describe what Shakespeare was saying in the plays. And then he had the encyclopedia and it was fun just paging through. I recall one occasion in class - our teacher asking whether any one of us knew what they called those things in Holland for stopping the water. And it just happened that I had been looking through these books that my father had and it looked like I was really smart because I put up my hand and I said, "Dykes." And the teacher didn't know what to do. He really wanted to put me on a pedestal for having been able to know this particular thing.

Was there one teacher in particular you remember?

Ultimately, it's a man who was teaching us English Literature in what we call matriculation, the last 2 years of high school. He really was quite extraordinary. When he spoke of a Shakespearean play, you almost thought that he grew up with Shakespeare! He was very good, yes. A black guy, who was fantastic and gave us a deep love for literature.

Do you remember his name?

Yes. Geoff Mamabolo. He died. He was fantastic, fantastic. But I had other teachers. If you gave me five opportunities, I would give you five good teachers who were incredible. These were good teachers who were dedicated despite the fact that we lived a segregated life and when you went to town where the whites lived you saw their schools much, much better equipped and with better grounds. My father bought me a bicycle and I was about the only kid in the ghetto who had a bicycle and he would send me into town. And what was extraordinary was that frequently I would see black kids scavenging in the dust bins of the white schools where they picked out perfectly okay apples and fruit. White kids were being provided with government school feeding, but most of the time they didn't eat it. They preferred what their mommies gave them and so they would dump the whole fruit into the dust bin and these kids coming from a township who needed free meals didn't get them. And so it started registering without me being aware that they were registering that these were extraordinary inconsistencies in our lives.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I know that for a very long time my consuming passion, which was confirmed when I contracted TB when I was about 12 or so, was that I wanted to be a physician. I wanted to be a physician so that I can find a cure for the scourge and in fact, I was admitted to medical school. If we had had the funds maybe today I would have been a physician. As it turned out, I was not able to take up my place at medical school and instead went to Teacher Training College because the government was giving scholarships for people who wanted to become teachers.

I became a teacher and I haven't regretted that. It was wonderful because I thought back to my own teachers and what they had meant for me. And really trying to get kids who in so many other aspects of life were being told that they didn't really count to become outstanding at whatever they wanted within reason was humbling. I went back to teach at my alma mater, and the conditions would shock many people. I was teaching English and we had classes with an average number of 80 students in a class. Now imagine if you will, a language class where kids must be given a great deal of exercises, marking all of those 80. And no-one ever taught just one class. I remember I taught four classes, two of which were about 80 each and the other two about 40 each. There was no-one to complain to about the size of the classes because the government's position was that 'the natives are a nuisance and the least you can do for them, the least you can get away with the better.' Our educational system was the pits. It was just the sheer determination of the people.

When I started teaching, I tried to be what my teachers had been to me to these kids seeking to instill in them a pride in themselves and in what they were doing. A pride that said they may define you as so and so but you aren't that. Make sure you prove them wrong by becoming what the potential in you says you can become. For four years I taught English and History and it was fun when you got kids beginning to see the interconnectedness of things.

But then government decided that they were going to have something called Bantu education, an education specifically designed for blacks, and they made no bones about the fact that it was designed as education for perpetual serfdom. Dr. Verwoerd said, "Why do you have to teach blacks mathematics? What are they going to do with mathematics? You must teach them enough English and Afrikaans, the other white language as it were, for them to be able to understand instructions given to them by their white employers." He said that. I mean, unabashedly that was the purpose for him of education. It was then I said, "No, I'm sorry. I can't -- I can't collaborate with such a travesty, but I didn't have too many alternatives, too many options to choose from.

In May of 1976 you wrote a letter to the Prime Minister warning of a building tension among black South African youth over the government imposed Bantu education. What was its significance leading up to the June 16th, 1976 riots?

"I wrote the letter to the Prime Minister and told him that I was scared. I was scared because the mood in the townships was frightening. If they didn't do something to make our people believe that they cared about our concerns I feared

that we were going to have an eruption.



I sent off the letter. I probably made a technical mistake by giving it to a journalist before hearing from the Prime Minister because this journalist was working for a Sunday newspaper and gave it enormous press, and I think quite rightly the Prime Minister was annoyed that I had not given him the opportunity but never mind. He, the Prime Minister, dismissed my letter contemptuously. I wrote to him in May of 1976. I said, "I have a nightmarish fear that there was going to be an explosion if they didn't do anything." Well, they didn't do anything and a month later the Soweto happened.

The South African government for some odd reason had ignored my letter where I warned. I didn't have any sort of premonition, although I felt there was something in the air, but when it happened, when June the 16th happened, 1976, it caught most of us really by surprise. We hadn't expected that our young people would have had the courage. See, Bantu education had hoped that it was going to turn them into docile creatures, kowtowing to the white person, and not being able to say "boo" to a goose kind of thing, you know, and it was an amazing event when these school kids came out and said they were refusing to be taught in the medium of Afrikaans. That was -- that was really symbolic of all of the oppression. Afrikaans was the language they felt of the oppressor, and protesting against Afrikaans was really protesting against the whole system of injustice and oppression where black people's dignity was rubbed in the dust and trodden underfoot callously, and South Africa never became the same -- we knew it was not going ever to be the same again, and these young people were amazing. They really were amazing.

What was it about these kids that makes you use the word "amazing?"

I recall that on one or two occasions, I spoke to some of them and said, "You know, are you aware that if you continue to behave in this way, they will turn their dogs on you, they will whip you, they may detain you without trial, they will torture you in their jails, and they may even kill you?," and it was almost like bravado on the part of these kids because almost all of them said, "So what. It doesn't matter if that happens to me, as long as it contributes to our struggle for freedom," and I think 1994, when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as the first democratically elected president, vindicated them. It was the vindication of those 1977 remarkable kids.

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Natalie Portman

Natalie Portman has established herself as one of Hollywood's most talented and sought-after actresses. Dedicated to charitable works, Portman speaks to the impact of microloans on the lives of those in developing countries on behalf of FINCA International. Portman became the organization's Ambassador of Hope in 2004, and serves as co-chair of the Village Banking Campaign with Her Majesty Queen Rania Al-Abdullah of Jordan.

The Oscar®-nominated actress will next star in *BROTHERS* and *NEW YORK, I LOVE YOU*, and recently wrapped production on Don Roos' *LOVE AND OTHER IMPOSSIBLE PURSUITS*. Portman's directorial debut, the short film *EVE*, premiered during the 2008 Venice Film Festival.

Other credits include *CLOSER*, *PARIS JE T'AIME*, *V FOR VENDETTA*, *COLD MOUNTAIN*, the *STAR WARS* prequel series, and *BEAUTIFUL GIRLS*. On stage, Portman starred in James Lapine's *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK*, and Mike Nichols' Shakespeare in the Park production of *THE SEAGULL*.



ILL-LIT

✿ by Natalie Portman - Actress and Activist

In that first decade of the twenty-first century, the decade commonly known as The Noughties, (alluding not to being notoriously naughty, but rather to being notoriously an era of naught), a counterculture of anti-reading youth emerged. Dubbing their movement: Ill-IIT, the four founders began by renaming themselves names that could be spelled without knowing how: CJ, TJ, PJ AND DJ. If someone asked them what those letters stood for, they'd answer, defiantly:

“Nothing.”

Ill-IIT amused themselves for not only having

three consecutive L's in their movement's name (an impossibility in any language), but also for confusing the archaic reader with the L-like capital I's, making the name seem more like a Roman numeral than a pronounceable word. (For an anti-reading group, they were quite adept at manipulating the common reader).

Reading, Ill-IIT decided, was an outdated skill: computers could recognize your voice and correct your spelling, and any book or article could be summarized by a sound-bite online. Reading had become even less necessary to learn than multiplication tables.

When adults asked the four rebels how they thought they'd survive without reading, the four laughed and said:

“What do you think is gonna happen? You think we're gonna die from not reading?”

So they continued their struggle battling the literarchy by spray-painting graffiti of daggers rather than words, disseminating books on tape and wearing pins that bore blank surfaces, demonstrating the power of the wordless, unread message.

The four sat under the bridge one night, celebrating their excitement over their counter-literacy activities. TJ brought candy and soda from the store. PJ brought cookies and milk from home. CJ supplied the boom-box. DJ just stood around, still holding his can of green

spray-paint, which may or may not have been the source of his hair-color (it also could've been the extensive amount of time he spent in the chlorinated pool at the local YMCA—another favorite hangout for the members of Ill-IIT as, again, it spelled itself.)

The next morning, a police officer was completing his local patrol of the neighborhood and his routine stroll brought him under the bridge. There, amid puddles of stagnant rainwater mixed with under-bridge-type fluids, lay the four bodies of the counter-literates.

DJ, with his fluorescent hair, lay nose to spray can, his tongue sprawled out as green as his hair (he had not been able to read the large, bold, DO NOT INGEST warning on the bottle). CJ was still blotchy and swollen from a fatal allergic reaction to the almond extract in the chocolate bar he'd eaten, evidence of which could be observed at the corners of his mouth (he had not been able to read the MAY CONTAIN TRACES OF NUTS written in small letters underneath the ingredient listing on the wrapper). PJ's hair stood on end and his eyes bulged exaggeratedly, having been electrocuted when he had tried to unplug the boom-box as he stood knee-deep in a puddle (fully unaware of the BEWARE ELECTRIC SHOCKS MAY OCCUR WITH LIQUID CONTACT label taped to the electric cord).

And finally, sweet TJ, the only one of the four who, classically, loved cookies dunked in milk; TJ, for whom PJ specifically dug out a milk carton and cookies from the recesses of his refrigerator and pantry, respectively; TJ, still milk-moustached and crumb-lipped though his body lay motionless, had expired four months after his milk had (its shelf-life was clearly marked, but TJ could not read GOOD UNTIL FEB 6 09).

The policeman, whose name was Levaquantario, a name that one most certainly had to know how to spell, shook his head in dismay at the evidence:

“If only they had known how to read!”



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Angélique Kidjo

Grammy winner Angélique Kidjo is not only one of the spunkiest, most electrifying performers in the pop world today, but she's also an artist whose mission has been to explore the relationships of diverse musical cultures. Her striking voice, stage presence and her fluency in multiple cultures and languages have won respect from her peers and expanded her following across national borders. Kidjo has cross-pollinated the West African traditions of her childhood in Benin with elements of American R&B, funk and jazz, as well as influences from Europe and Latin America. Angélique also travels the world advocating on behalf of the children in her capacity as a UNICEF goodwill Ambassador. She created her own charitable foundation, Batonga, dedicated to support the education of young girls in Africa.



FATHERS, PROMISE YOUR DAUGHTERS

✿ by Angélique Kidjo

I was 6 years old and nothing was more thrilling to me than to watch my mother, who had sewn their great colorful costumes herself, rehearse with her theatre troupe. I could see the dancers sweating as they practiced their moves, backed up by singers shouting old tales from my West African country, Benin. Even though I could not understand the complex stories of Kings, Queens and battles, I knew every line and every dance.

Then one day the unthinkable happened. One of the singers was sick and didn't show up for the performance. Suddenly Mom looked at me with strange eyes and said:

“I have listened to you and I've noticed you know her part well. Tonight you will go on stage and replace her.”

I knew I could sing - my family used to say I sung before I talked - but I could not picture myself in front of an audience. But I had no choice. At the last moment, I had to be pushed on stage, like someone jumping from a plane with a parachute. There was silence - a big silence; everyone was so surprised to see such a little girl. Then people started to laugh and cheer

and that made me feel more relaxed and so I started to sing. I felt so good when I heard the clapping. I knew at that moment I would spend my whole life on stage!

I was more and more famous in Benin and I was able to make a living. It was sometimes tough because there is a big prejudice in my country against entertainers, who many people thought live a wild life, which was really not my case at all!

But I did start to think: “Why do I have to go to school, sit for hours in the classroom and work hard on my homework when I already have a job?” My grades started to fall until one day, my dad called me, and said “So you want to stop school and be a singer?”

“Yes Dad! This is exactly what I want to do. I need to practice my music, to learn new songs, to play with my band. I don’t have time for school!”

Although I didn’t think so at the time, I was really a very lucky teenager to have a father like I did, who told me in no uncertain terms. “This is not going to happen in my house. If you want to be a singer, I mean a great singer, you have to be educated. You have to be able to express all the beauty of the world in your music and your lyrics. You need to learn. I will make a deal with you; I am going to support your singing career but you have to go to school and get a good education.”

I have to admit I was mad at my Dad and couldn’t understand him at the time but he left me no choice. I kept going to school and he kept his promises. He produced my first big show in Togo when the original promoter quit saying I was too petite and no one could see me on stage! After all these years, I am so grateful to my father. I now know he was right. The education I received has allowed me to travel the whole world, to be confident enough to sing and to speak in front of all kinds of people, even Kings and Queens!

I just want all the children of my continent to be lucky like me and to have an education so they can fulfill their dreams like I fulfilled mine!

Angélique Kidjo

NOW YOU’VE READ THIS, GIVE SOMEONE ELSE THE CHANCE

 *write your name for those who can't* 

www.campaignforeducation.org/bigread

(If you can’t get online, use the page at the back of this book)

Mary Robinson

Mary Robinson, the first woman President of Ireland (1990-1997) and former United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (1997-2002), has spent most of her life as a human rights advocate. Born Mary Bourke in Ballina, County Mayo (1944), the daughter of two physicians, she was educated at the University of Dublin (Trinity College), King's Inns Dublin and Harvard Law School to which she won a fellowship in 1967.



As an academic (Trinity College Law Faculty 1968-90), legislator (Senator 1969-89) and barrister (1967-90, Senior Counsel 1980, English Bar 1973) she has always sought to use law as an instrument for social change, arguing landmark cases before the European Court of Human Rights as well as in the Irish courts and the European Court in Luxembourg.

The recipient of numerous honours and awards throughout the world, Mary Robinson is a member of the Royal Irish Academy and the American Philosophical Society and, since 2002, has been Honorary President of Oxfam International. A founding member and Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders, she serves on many boards including the Vaccine Fund, and chairs the Irish Chamber Orchestra.

Currently based in New York, Mary Robinson is now leading Realizing Rights: the Ethical Globalization Initiative. Its mission is to put human rights standards at the heart of global governance and policy-making and to ensure that the needs of the poorest and most vulnerable are addressed on the global stage.

IN HER OWN WORDS

✿ by Mary Robinson

I still remember that moment of excitement when I first realized I could read.

I grew up in the west of Ireland and I was actually in church, holding a child's prayer book. The priest was reading one of the prayers. I suddenly realized I could read the words. I got terribly excited and nudged one of my brothers who didn't think it was that interesting:

“I understand, I understand!”

I was not yet four years old. I remember my fourth birthday, a real landmark, had not yet come and I was so proud I could read!

After that day in church, I became a voracious reader as many young girls do, always lost in a book all the time.

Because I was a bookworm, I was fascinated by words. I wrote an essay for school when I was age eight in which I used the word “consequently”. The teacher didn’t believe I had written the essay myself! I was so sad and disconcerted, even humiliated that the teacher didn’t believe me.

It taught me later to never underestimate how children can learn very rapidly and love words and learning, sometimes even use words you don’t expect. And now, I have grandchildren who do the same thing today!

I was influenced by my own grandfather who lived in the same small town. He was a lawyer who had retired early. I would visit him almost every afternoon. He would talk to me about law and justice and fairness, taking cases for poor tenants against the landlords. As he was talking with me, all kinds of books would be delivered, from the library or even books imported from England!

Books became very important as far as I was concerned and that sense of law being part of justice was something I learned to appreciate from him. With all these ideas in my head, I would then have to go back to my family and be a child again, told to do my homework and help do chores around the house.

I say I got my early interest in human rights because I was the only girl in my family, wedged between four brothers—two older and two younger!

Both my parents were doctors and they always told me I was equal to my brothers. That equality applied in the family. We each had to do household chores. We all had to wash up and help clean. That’s important when boys and girls grow up together, to have a real sense that both boys and girls should contribute to work in the home.

Too often, the girl child has all the duties, taking care of sick parents or other children. She is often the first to bear those kinds of burdens. We must encourage girls to stay in school. We must stand up with and for her.

When I became interested in human rights, I realized that education is the window to all other human rights. As United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, I saw the importance of education when I traveled and I still see it today. You have to understand and know your rights to be able to exercise them. I've seen that over and over again.

Many children in conflict or who are displaced don't have access to schooling. Recently, I was in Eastern Chad at a camp on the border of Darfur, in a camp for displaced families. I saw children being taught in a large group with no pencils, no paper, just a blackboard and a young teacher—but what they did have was an eagerness to learn.

Later, we sat in the camp with the students' mothers who were also learning how to read. They couldn't write their names, so they couldn't directly access the food that was being distributed and often suffered discrimination. Their husbands had been killed due to the conflict, but they were determined to move forward, to be literate and learn to write their own names. They were in a tent, learning by rote, when their children coming out of their classrooms passed by and were teasing their mothers, trying to be quicker to repeat the words. There they were, both generations learning, the children because they had access to education at the right stage of life, the women because they were brave and determined to survive. The mothers shooed away the children and got right back to learning.

In my own country, when I was serving as President of Ireland, I supported women in different parts of divided Belfast, who were bravely making links and calling for their children to be educated together. Their communities were divided by the conflict. It was

hard for them to stand up and say we could do it differently. You don't come out of conflict unless there is contact between people and leadership shown at local level. Very often it is women who make that connection.

Education has been important in so many situations. I was recently in Liberia with women leaders from Africa and around the world. We talked about how important education is to girls, to protect against so many problems: contracting HIV/AIDS, or older men who may be trying to take advantage of them. It will help her to have a safe birth when she's a mother. It will help her to know that her children should also be educated.



Education is the beginning of learning how to cope with the world. It opens up choices and opportunities and enables people to become active in economic activity. One of the fastest and most sustainable ways to increase the development of a country is to educate children and particularly our girls. When you educate a girl you educate a family and a community.

I still remember today that sense of adrenaline when I learned to read. It was a real breakthrough. A first step for one girl in Ireland growing up to one day having the opportunity to serve as a leader of my own country and then travel around the world helping others stand up for their human rights.

Every child should have that wonderful moment and opportunity.

April, 2009

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 Write your name for those who can't 

www.campaignforeducation.org/bigread

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Visit the Website

Millions are joining in the Big Read and everyday we are hearing about new activities and new celebrities telling remarkable stories as part of this campaign. Online you will be able to read about the latest happenings, view photos and footage of events.

There will also be audio recordings of these stories for you to listen to, and resources to help teachers use this in the classroom.

www.campaignforeducation.org/bigread

Global Campaign for Education

The Global Campaign for Education is made up of organisations and individuals who believe that every person should have a good quality, free, public education.

But there are still 75 million children out of school, and 774 million adults who cannot read.

That's why the Global Campaign for Education's Action Week is focusing on the **Big Read** during 20th – 26th April 2009.



**The
Big
Read**



Global Campaign for Education

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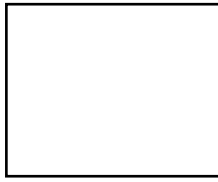
The Big Read



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