

The Boy and the Banyan Tree

Teaching Guide

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This story, set in India, explores the friendship between a very large, very old banyan tree and a young boy. The tree helps the boy grow to be a successful adult, and the boy returns to repay the tree's many kindnesses, providing new friends for the tree and allowing it to flourish.

The Boy and the Banyan Tree allows students to make connections to diverse voices, experiences and perspectives, supports students' understanding of some universal truths of growing up, and provides opportunities for cross-curricular exploration and enrichment.

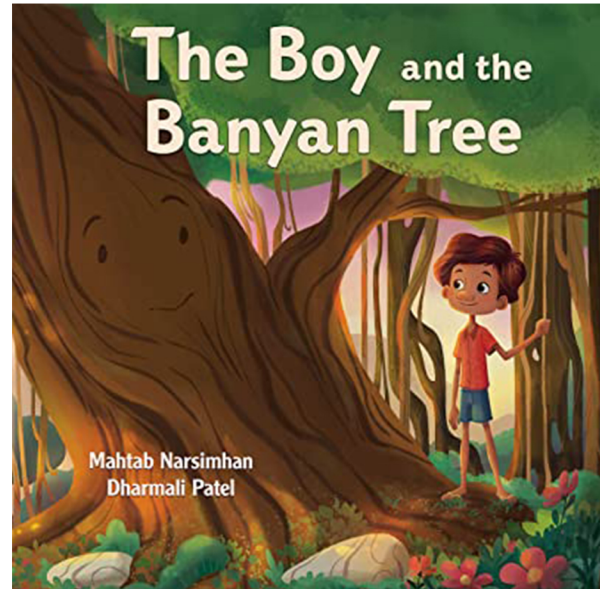
Themes and Big Ideas

- Friendship
- Paying it forward
- Paying it back
- The universal truths of childhood are the same, regardless of culture or country

Read-Aloud Prompts and Teaching Strategies

Below you will find prompts which can be used as you read the story aloud. These prompts should assist you in teaching the conventions of picture books, as well as practising the making of connections, inferences and predictions, sequencing and recalling details, and using illustrations to clarify meaning. They will provide opportunities for students to communicate ideas, foster critical thinking and support cross-curricular applications.

Choose the prompts that work best for your particular students and the learning expectations of your class. Don't feel you need to include all of them, or even some from every spread. Let the



story and the students' engagement lead you. You may want to use sticky notes to make recalling the prompts easier.

Pre-Reading/Introduction

Show the students the cover of the book.

- What do you notice? What do you wonder?
- **[Read the author's and illustrator's names aloud.]** Do you know what we call the person who writes the book? What does an "illustrator" do?
- The illustrator chose warm colours of mostly browns and yellows when she created the cover. How do these colours make you feel? **[Extension: Talk about warm and cool colours for younger kids and colour symbolism in art for older students]**
- What do you imagine the boy is looking at, high up in the banyan tree? Why?
- Have any of you ever climbed some place high up like the boy? How did it feel to you, being up high?

Beginning the story

Dedication Page

- What is a "dedication page?" **["A special place where the creators of the book can send special messages to people who are important to them and honour them in the book."]**
- **[Read the dedications aloud to the students.]**
- How do we know who wrote each dedication? **[Discuss the initials, show which initials match each creator, and then ask them to think about what their initials are, in order to confirm they understand the concept.]**

Spread 1

- We learn the story takes place in a country called India. Have you ever heard of it? **[Likely a number of students will have done so.]** Does anyone want to share what they know about it?"
- The little boy in the story is described as being curious. What questions does he ask the banyan tree?
- We call the voice that is telling a story the narrator. Do we know who is telling the story here? **[The students may suggest it is the boy or the tree, because those characters are speaking dialogue. This is a chance to explain the idea of "third person narrative," as well as point out the dialogue on the first spread, showing the particular punctuation that dialogue requires, in the form of quotation marks.]**

Spread 2

- What made the banyan tree happy?

- The narrator says the boy ‘swung from her roots.’ How do you think he can do that? Aren’t trees’ roots underground? Let’s look at the illustrations more closely to see if we can figure it out.

Spread 3

- Why is the boy unhappy?
- Who here has ever flown a kite? How did it make you feel?
- What do you think a “kite match” is?
- What advice does the banyan tree give him?

Spread 4

- Let’s look closer at the illustrations. Does the boy follow the tree’s advice? What does the boy do to make money? How does it work out?
- How do you get the things you want? **[Some will say they just ask for things, while others will say they do chores. Bring this conversation around to the idea that it is better to work for the things we want, rather than just expecting to be given them. You might even introduce the idea of needs versus wants, or taking responsibility.]**

Spread 5

- Why do you think the boy has less time to play as he gets older? **[They should be able to make a connection between his working in the last page, and likely working more now that he is continuing to age.]** What other things change when you get older?
- **[Point out the image of the banyan tree in this spread, so the students can better understand its distinctive look and how its roots work.]**

Spread 6

- What does the word “crops” mean? **[See if you can direct the conversation into a discussion of cause and effect, with the relationship between the rain and the crops, and the crops and being hungry.]** Why can’t the boy and his family and friends not just go to the store and buy food?
- How does the tree help?

Spread 7

- Why do you suppose the author chose not to include any words on this page?
- Can we still figure out what’s going on, even though there aren’t any words? **[Again, use this spread to reinforce the idea of how valuable the illustrations are in a picture book. Students need to understand the illustrations tell the story as much as the words do.]**
- “Reading” the pictures on this page, what does the boy see from the top of the banyan tree? How will this solve the problem?

Spread 8

- The narrator says, “That night the villagers’ bellies did not rumble.” What is the author telling us?
- Why didn’t the author just say “the villagers ate the animals?” [Try to make the students see that good writing is about showing, rather than just telling, and that authors use great word choices to create a picture for the reader, in much the same way the illustrator creates a picture for the reader. Great word choices are a convention of picture books.]
- The illustrator gives us a glimpse into the boy’s home. How is it the same as your home? How is it different?

Spread 9

- How would you feel if you saw the boy’s friends chasing the stray pup? Was he right to stand up to his friends, even though they don’t like him anymore? [See if they can infer that the stray pup is the loyal friend the boy made that day.]

Spread 10

- Are you surprised the boy is leaving his village? Why?

Spread 11

- The narrator says “Years went by.” What do you predict the boy has been doing while all these years have been passing? [Reinforce that “when we predict, we use words, pictures, and our own ideas to figure out what’s most likely. Predictions aren’t just random guesses. The way we prove our predictions is by explaining why we think they are the most likely choice.” By grade 2, the students should be able to explain their predictions orally.]
- How does the banyan tree’s village look the same as yours? How is it different?

Spread 12

- Who is the young girl in the picture? Who is her papa?
- [Point out the three exclamation marks in this spread.]
- Can any of you tell me what this symbol means? [If they don’t know, tell them that its name is a lot like its purpose. It tells the reader to read the words with excitement, and it’s called an exclamation mark.” Emphasize the “ex” sound in both words. Then reread the text on the page, emphasizing the excitement in those sentences. You may choose to read the sentences without excitement or emphasis, to show them the contrast.]
- Why is the banyan tree sad?
- The tree has always been the one to help the boy in the story. What do we notice this time, though? [For older students, you can discuss how picture books often make use

of repetition of an element in the story, and then offer a twist on that repeated element near the end. You can give Goldilocks and the Three Bears, or Robert Munsch books, as an example.]

Spread 13

- Can you predict how the boy and his children are going to help the tree? [Remind them to “read” the illustrations as well as the words.]
- [For older students, ask them why the words “*Be kind to someone in need*” are written in slanty writing (italics). After taking suggestions, explain that slanty writing is called italics, and there are a number of reasons to use it, including for inner thought or emphasizing words that need to be read with extra expression. The narrator is showing us the boy is remembering the words of the tree in his mind.]
- When the family works to help the tree, others join them. Do you think it is possible for kindness to be contagious? Think about that. Then share your thoughts with a partner or two. After, we will share our ideas altogether. [Think-Pair-Share]

Spread 14

- Why was the banyan tree the happiest she had ever been?
- Why do you think the word “*happiest*” is written in italics – that slanty writing font – this time?
- Would you like to climb in the banyan tree on this last page? How does the illustrator make it look inviting? [See if they can recognize the brighter colours, smiling faces, more action, etc. in the illustration.]

Spread 15

- Why do you think the author chose to include all this information we find on the last page?
- The first point on this page has words written in italics again. This time it is for a different reason. Can you predict why?
- The author uses italics here because she is writing words in a different language. Latin is the language used for naming things in science, like plants and animals, or medical terms. Because it isn’t English like the rest of the book, it needs to be written in the italics font to show us it is a different language from English (in this case, Latin).

Activities

Math:

“A banyan can grow to a height of 30 metres.” Get a metre stick (or ten). Measure off 10 metres down the hallway of your school, in the gym, or outside. Now imagine three of those lengths. Picture them standing straight up. Would YOU climb a banyan tree?

Geography:

Use GoogleEarth or a similar program on the Internet, or use a globe, a map or an up-to-date atlas to investigate the Republic of India.

- What do you notice about India?
- Is it far away from your home or nearby? How can you tell?
- If you live in a different country, what are some similarities between where you live and India? What are some differences?

Science:

Learn about the Banyan Tree

- Use any available databases you might have subscriptions to access, to explore the banyan tree (e.g., PebbleGo, Tumblebooks, etc.)
- Alternatively, you can show the students some interesting related YouTube videos. As with any resources online, preview the videos first. Consider these:
 - Legoland's Banyan Tree (Cypress Gardens, Florida) <https://youtu.be/KYjztp6BxQI>
 - The Goddess Under the Banyan Tree <https://youtu.be/lq4lQlQ3ays> (This is better for older kids, or for your own learning).
 - The Mighty Banyan Tree <https://youtu.be/WmeIKCVZAJE>

Music and Dance:

Introduce the students to a traditional song about a banyan tree. Kindergarten students should enjoy this, and perhaps older students, especially if you can add a ukelele to your introduction (perhaps with the help of a music teacher or musician.)

Underneath the Leaves of the Banyan Tree <https://youtu.be/ubi0P6CEPIM> by Ukelele Mike Lynch

Analysing Using Graphic Organizers:

Read *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein and compare/contrast the two stories using a Venn diagram or a T-chart. This would be best for older students (grade 3s especially), and would be a fabulous assessment opportunity if given as an independent task, or as scaffolding for a later, similar activity, if done as a class.

Drawing:

Follow up the book by having the students create their own drawings of banyan trees. For younger students, try this: How to Draw a Banyan Tree with Wiser

<https://youtu.be/8cRJdleHT4E>

For older students, try this: How to Draw a Banyan Tree with MNSB Inward at https://youtu.be/6KBxWStCL_A or with Art Galaxy Drawing at https://youtu.be/T08_C64HcC8
Art Galaxy Drawing

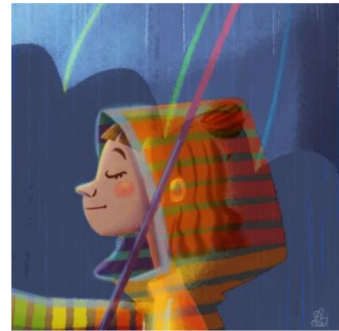
About the Author Mahtab Narsimhan:

Mahtab Narsimhan is an award-winning author with numerous critically acclaimed books in the fantasy, horror, mystery, and contemporary genres. Many of her books have landed on prestigious award lists, and *The Third Eye*, her debut novel, won the Silver Birch Fiction Award in 2009. She is inspired by the desire to make sense of the world through stories and is deeply committed to representation and inclusivity in all her novels. Please visit <https://www.mahtabnarsimhan.com/> for more information.



About the Illustrator Dharmali Patel:

Dharmali Patel is a versatile Artist and Illustrator who has been painting pictures for the last 20 years. Dharmali studied Applied Arts (Majors in Illustration) in Mumbai and further studies at Vancouver Film School. She hopes that her imagery will inspire young minds with beautiful design, provocative lighting, and emotive characterizations that encourage a love of reading and beautiful art. Dharmali lives and works in Toronto. Please visit https://www.instagram.com/dharmali_illustrations/ for more information.



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