

Welcome dear children
to a reading session.
Imagine that today is
your first library period.
This is the Junior
School Library.

Everyone looks forward
to the library period,
every week, eagerly. It
is a quaint and colourful
storehouse of a variety
of beautiful books.





Children leave their footwear in a neat row on this brick lined cement slab.

Isn't it a colourful and inviting space?

Husshh! Some students are reading quietly. Come in!!! Let us settle down. Today, I have selected a very interesting short story for you to read. I hope you like it too.

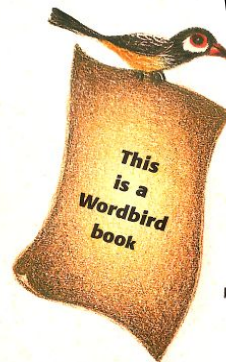


JUNIOR
SCHOOL
LIBRARY

This book is from
our Junior School
Library. Enjoy !!!



Adapted from



a story by Mahasweta Devi

The Why-Why Girl

illustrated by Kanyika Kini



10,725

a story by Mahasweta Devi

The Why-Why Girl

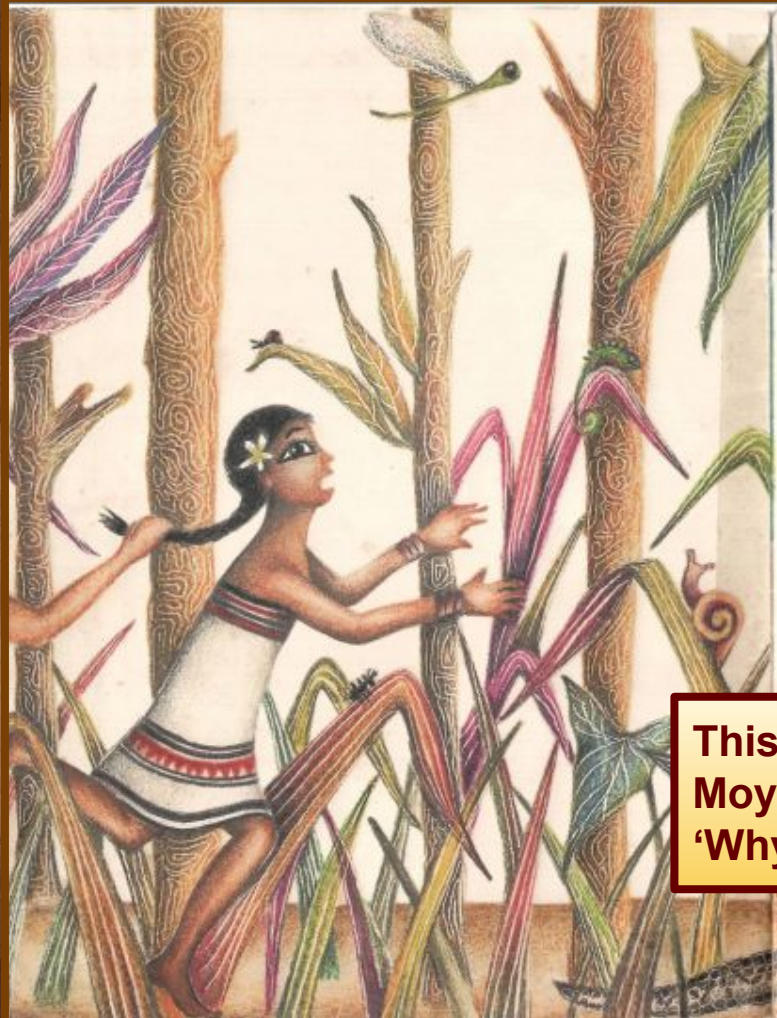
Illustrated by Kanyika Kini



Do you ask lots of questions? Are you curious about things around you? Do you wonder often?

In this story, you will meet a little girl called Moyna who is more or less of your age, but has a very different life. She cannot go to school since she has to graze goats, collect firewood, fetch water, etc. She catches snakes too. The author visits Moyna's village whenever she has some work there. There she meets this curious girl who asks many questions. That is why she is called *The Why-Why Girl*. Do you know who named Moyna '*Why Why Girl*?' Read the book to find out.

Did you know? When the name of a character in a book is the name of the book too, he or she is called an 'eponymous' character.



“But why?”

The question came from a small girl, about ten years old. She was chasing a large snake.

I ran after her, grabbed her plait and held her back, shouting, “No, Moyna, don’t!”

“Why shouldn’t I?” she asked.

“It’s not a grass snake or a rat snake, it’s a cobra,” I replied.

“Why shouldn’t I catch a cobra?”

“Why should you?”

“We eat snakes, you know,” Moyna said.

“Yes, but don’t do it this time,” I said.

“I will, I will.”

“No, child!”



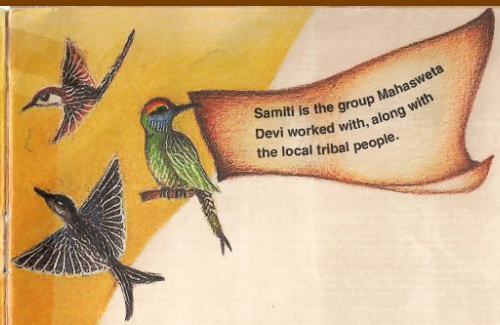
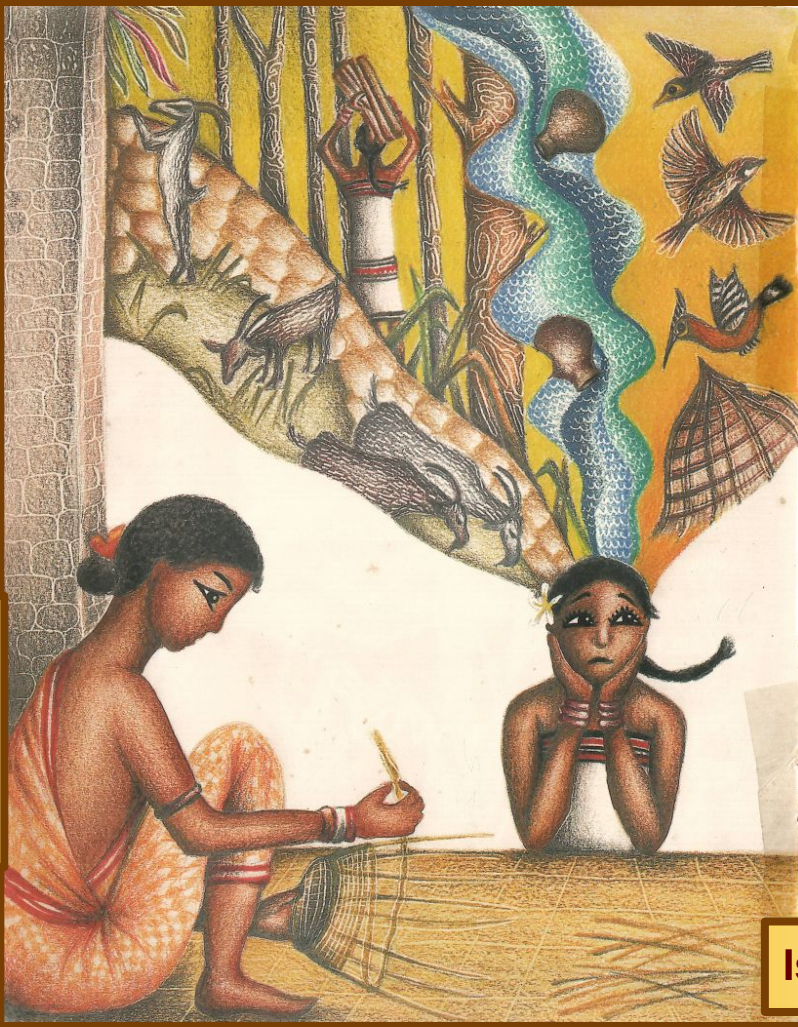
The ‘I’ in the story is Mahasweta Devi herself. She works a lot with tribal groups.

This is Moyna’s 1st ‘Why’?

“But why?”

More to come...

Moyna’s life is different from ours in yet another way; even her eating habits are unusual. While many of us are vegetarians and others eat fish, chicken, mutton, etc., she and her family eat snake meat. That’s the way of the tribe she belongs to.



Samiti is the group Mahasweta Devi worked with, along with the local tribal people.

I dragged Moyna back to the Samiti office, where I worked. Her mother, Khiri, was there, weaving a basket. The Samiti was a place where people could come to learn to read and write, or simply sing and dance together.

“Come,” I said to Moyna. “Come and rest for a little while.”

“Why?”

“Aren’t you tired?” I asked.

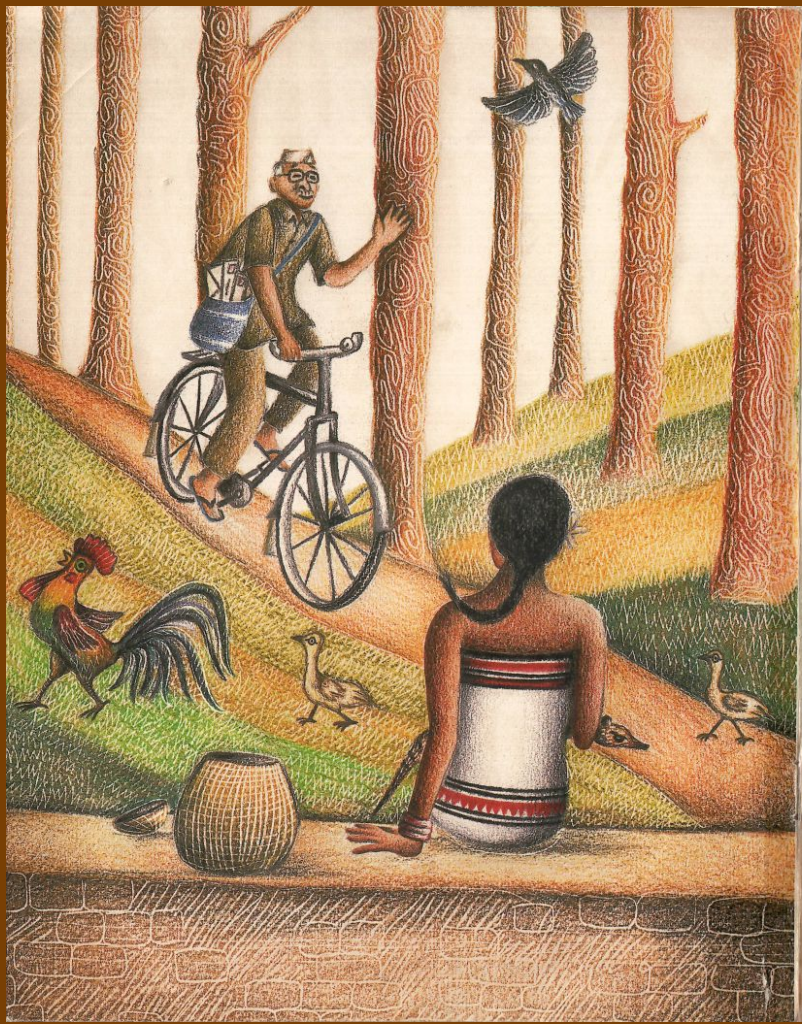
Moyna shook her head vigorously.

“Who will bring the goats home?
And collect firewood and fetch water
and lay traps for the birds?”

came the questions, one after another.

This is Moyna’s mother, Khiri.

Isn’t Moyna’s life different from yours?



"Moyna, don't forget to thank the Babu for the rice he sent us," said Khiri.

"Why should I?" Moyna said. "Don't I sweep the cowshed and do a thousand jobs for him?"

Does he ever thank me? Why should I?"

Saying this, Moyna ran off.

Khiri sighed and shook her head. "Never seen a child like this. All she keeps saying is 'Why'. No wonder the postmaster calls her

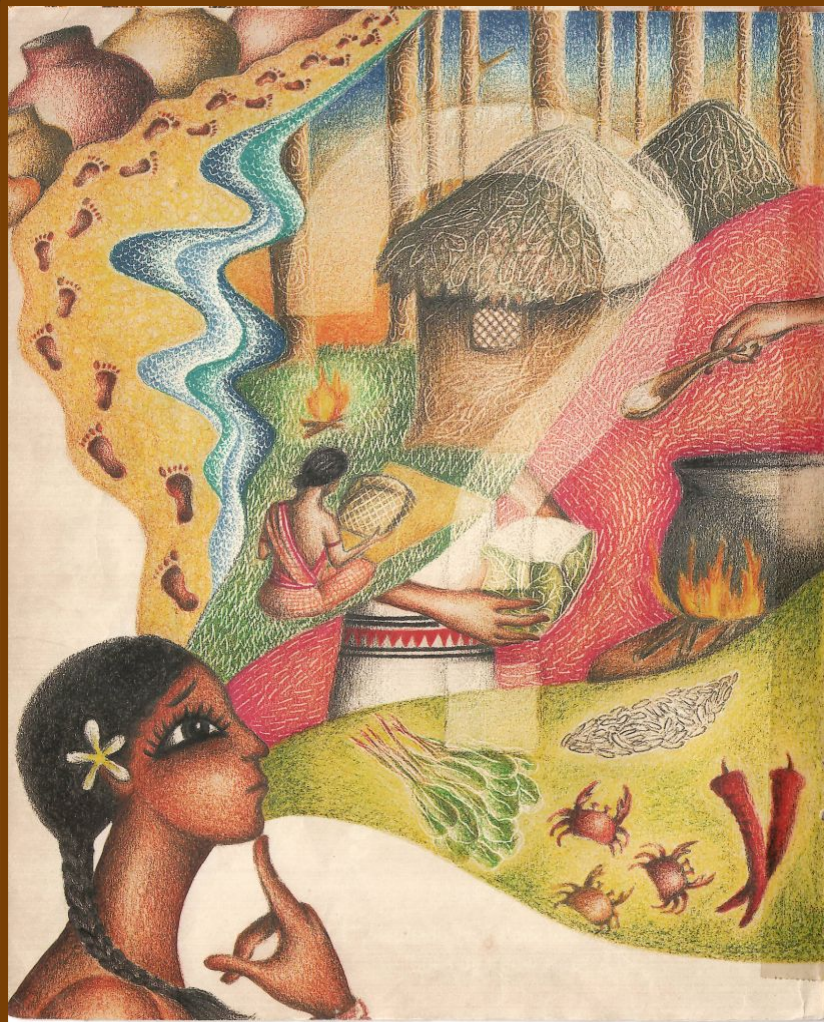
Why-Why Girl!"

"I like her," I said.

"But she's very obstinate," Khiri retorted.

"Just won't give in."

'Obstinate'
means to be
stubborn;
to be strong
about one's
thoughts
and ideas.



Moyna was a Shabar. The Shabars were a poor tribal group, and they owned no land. But nobody complained. Only Moyna's questions went on and on.

*“Why do I have to walk so far to the river to fetch water?
Why do we live in a leaf hut?
Why can't we eat rice twice a day?”*

Moyna tended the goats of the village landlords or babus, but she was neither humble nor grateful. She did her work and came home in the evening.

“Why should I eat their leftovers?” she would say.

“I will cook a delicious meal with green leaves and rice and crabs and chilli powder and eat with my family.”

The Shabars did not usually send their daughters to work. But Moyna's mother had a bad leg and so couldn't walk properly. Her father had gone off to faraway Jamsheedpur in search of work and her brother, Goro, went to the forest every day to collect firewood. So Moyna had to work.



That October, I stayed in the village for a month. One morning, Moyna declared that she would move in with me.

"No," said Khiri.

*"Why not? It's a big hut.
How much space does one old woman need?"*

Moyna said, referring to me, of course.

"What about going to work?" her mother asked.

"I'll go, but I'll come here after work," Moyna said firmly.

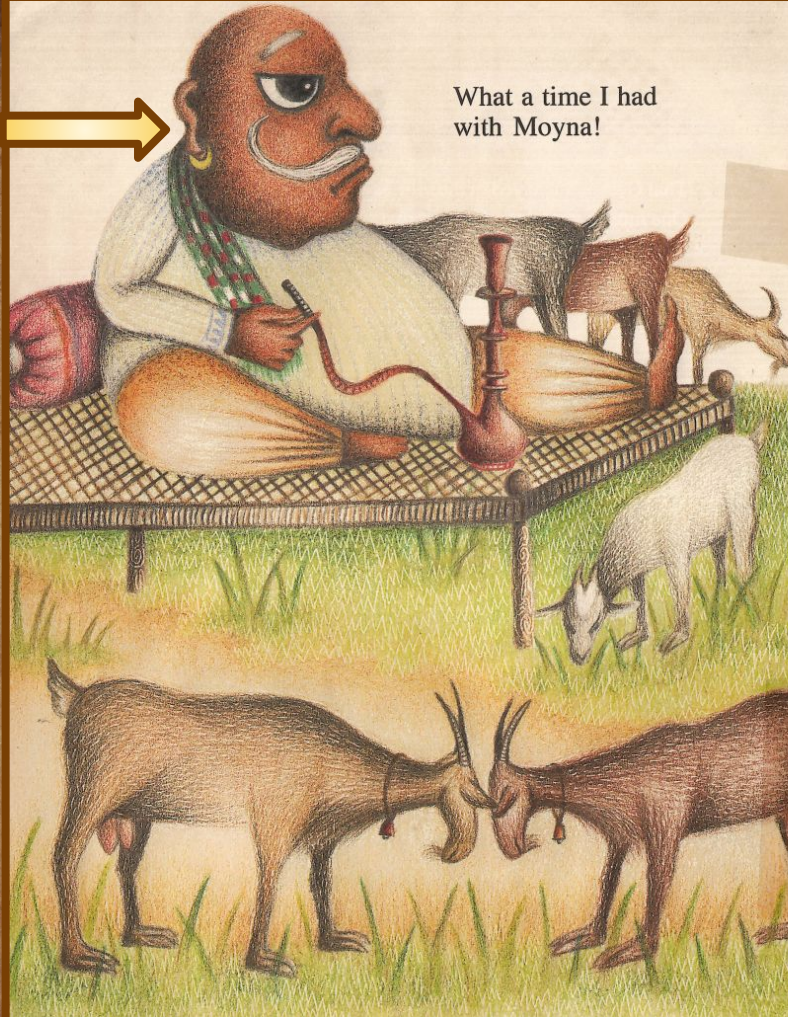
And she came, with one change of clothes and a baby mongoose. "It eats very little and chases away the bad snakes," she said. Our Samiti teacher, Malati, said to me, "She'll exhaust you with her whys!"



Who is the 'I' in this paragraph?

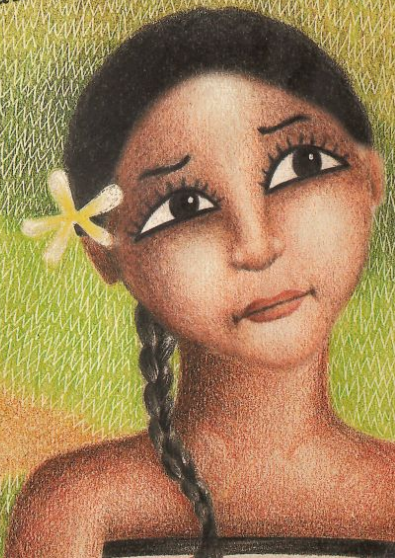
'Exhaust' means to 'make someone tired.'

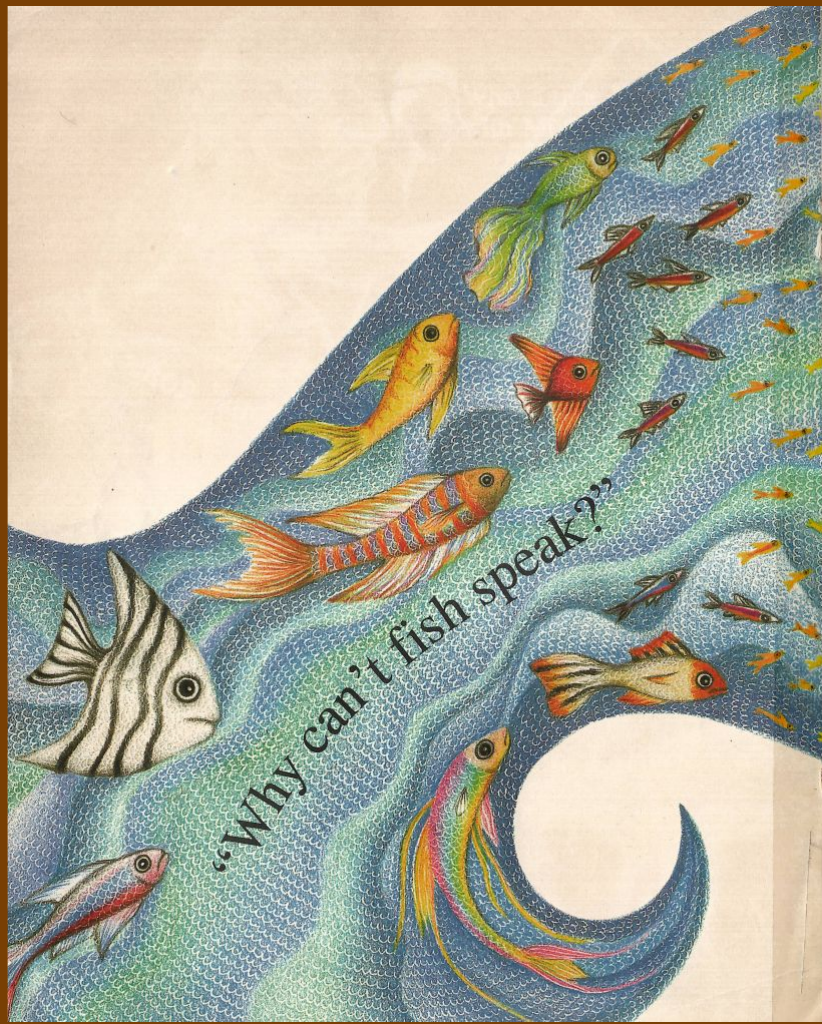
He is the
landlord.



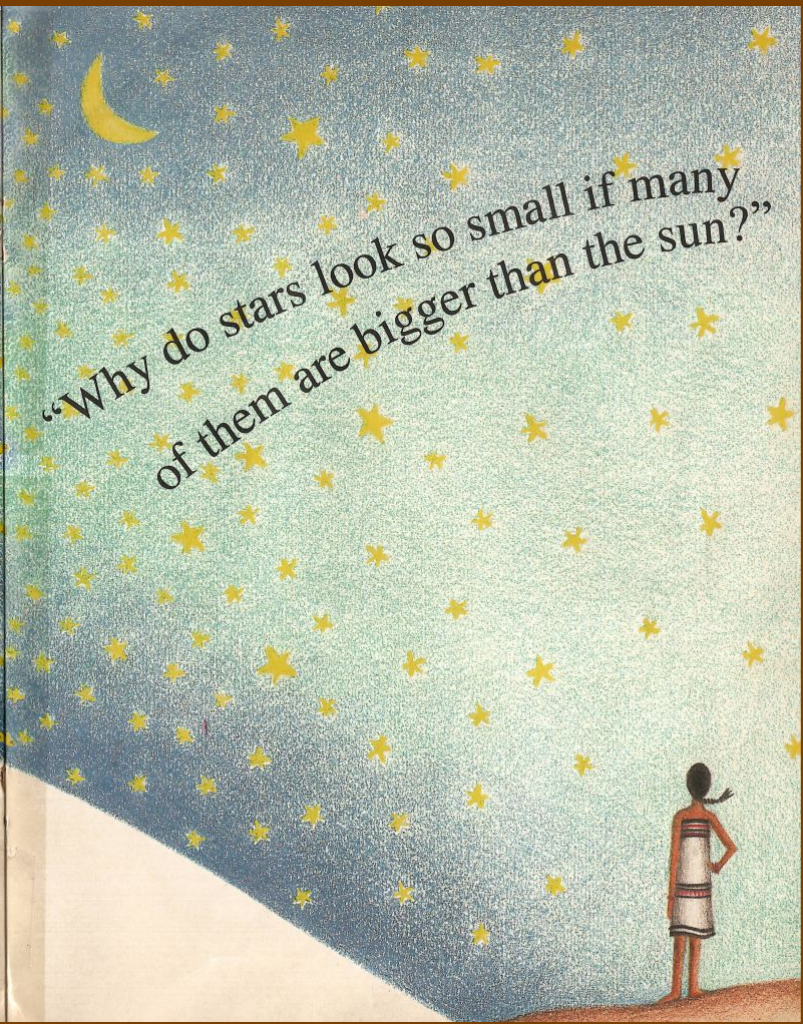
What a time I had
with Moyna!

“Why do I have to graze the Babus’ goats?
Their boys can do it.”

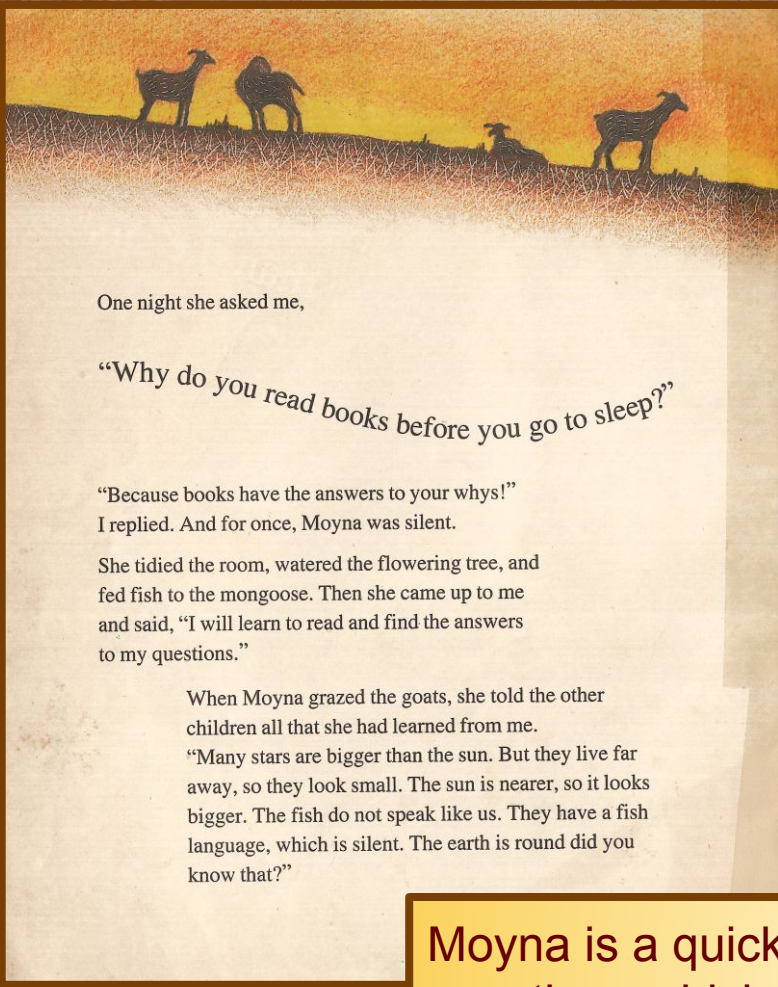




“Why can't fish speak?”



“Why do stars look so small if many of them are bigger than the sun?”



One night she asked me,

“Why do you read books before you go to sleep?”

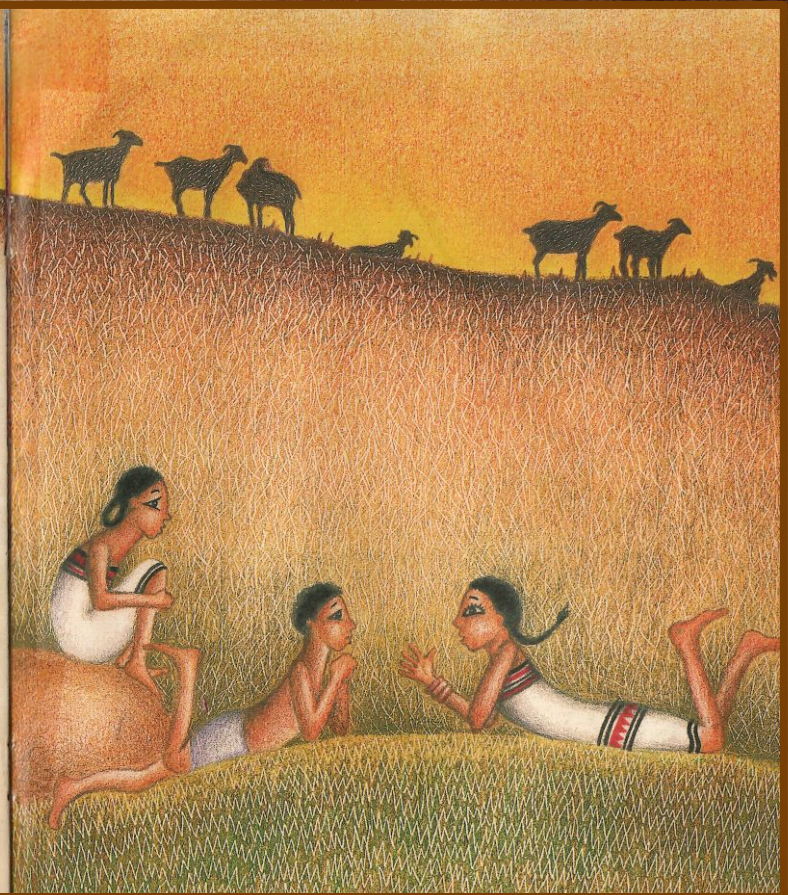
“Because books have the answers to your whys!”

I replied. And for once, Moyna was silent.

She tidied the room, watered the flowering tree, and fed fish to the mongoose. Then she came up to me and said, “I will learn to read and find the answers to my questions.”

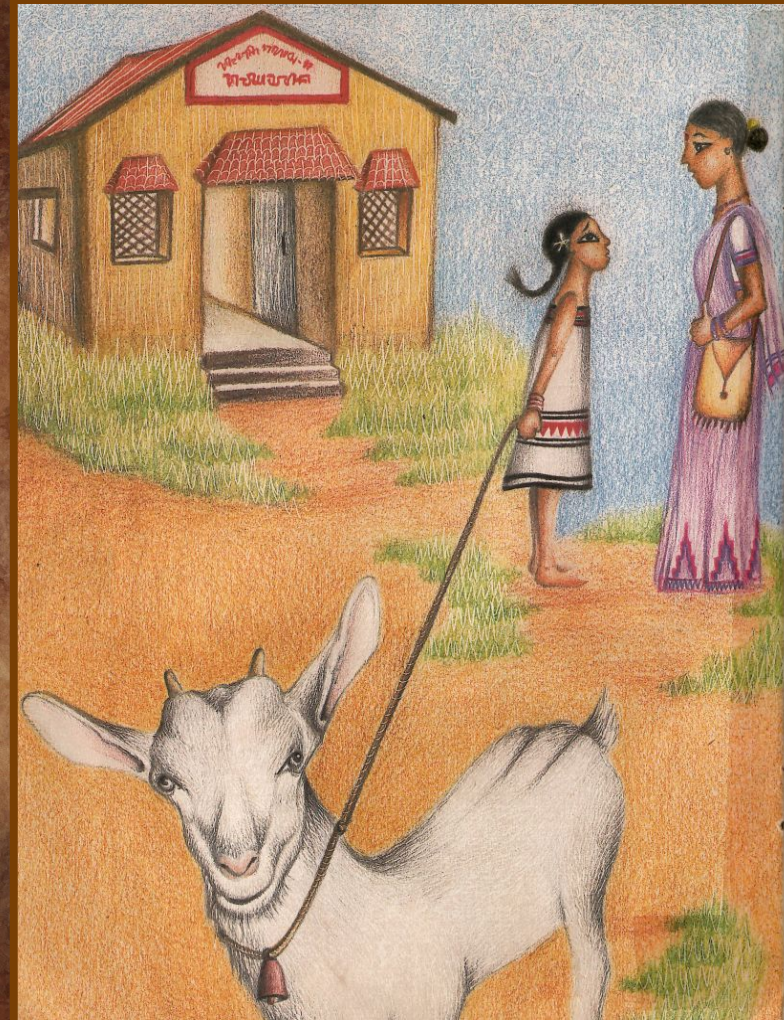
When Moyna grazed the goats, she told the other children all that she had learned from me.

“Many stars are bigger than the sun. But they live far away, so they look small. The sun is nearer, so it looks bigger. The fish do not speak like us. They have a fish language, which is silent. The earth is round did you know that?”



Do you read books? Reading is a very important habit to develop from a young age.

Moyna is a quick learner. It is her curiosity and questions which help her understand everything well.



When I returned to the village a year later, the first thing I heard was Moyna's voice. "Why is the school closed?" she challenged Malati as she entered the Samiti's school, dragging along a bleating goat.

"What do you mean, why?" asked Malati.

"Why shouldn't I study too?" asked Moyna.

"Who's stopping you?"

"But there's no class!"

"School is over for the day," Malati pointed out.

"Why?"

"Because, Moyna, I take class from 9 to 11 in the morning," said Malati.

Moyna stamped her foot and said, "Why can't you change the hours? I have to graze the goats in the morning. I can come only after 11. If you don't teach me, how will I learn? I will tell the old lady" — me! — "that none of us, goatherds and cowherds, can come if the hours are not changed."

Then she saw me and fled with her goat.

fled - ran away; 'Fled' is the past tense of the verb 'flee.'

Moyna is very keen to go to school, isn't she?

Think:
Does school excite you too?

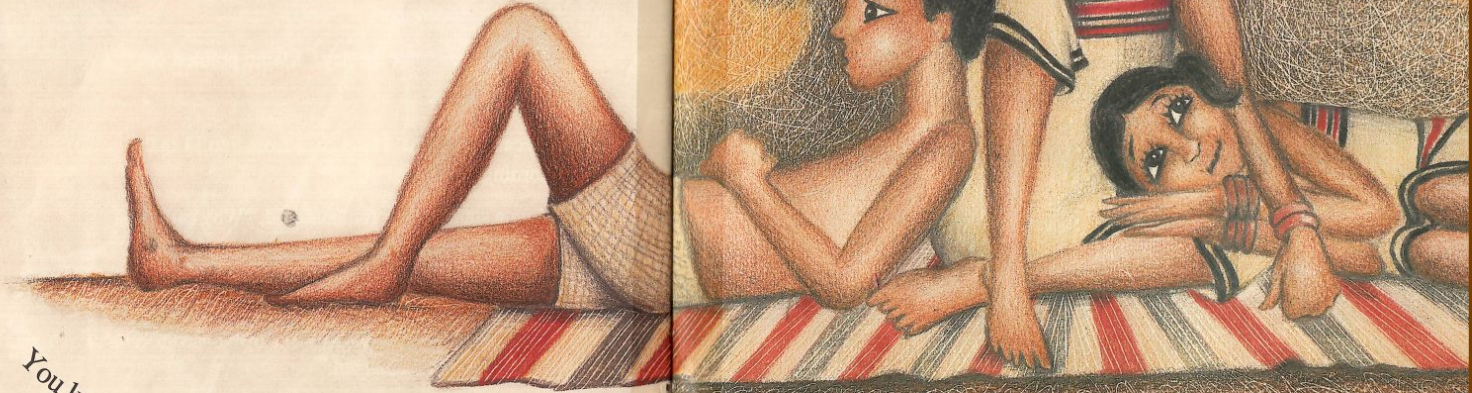
What are the 2 things that you love about your school?

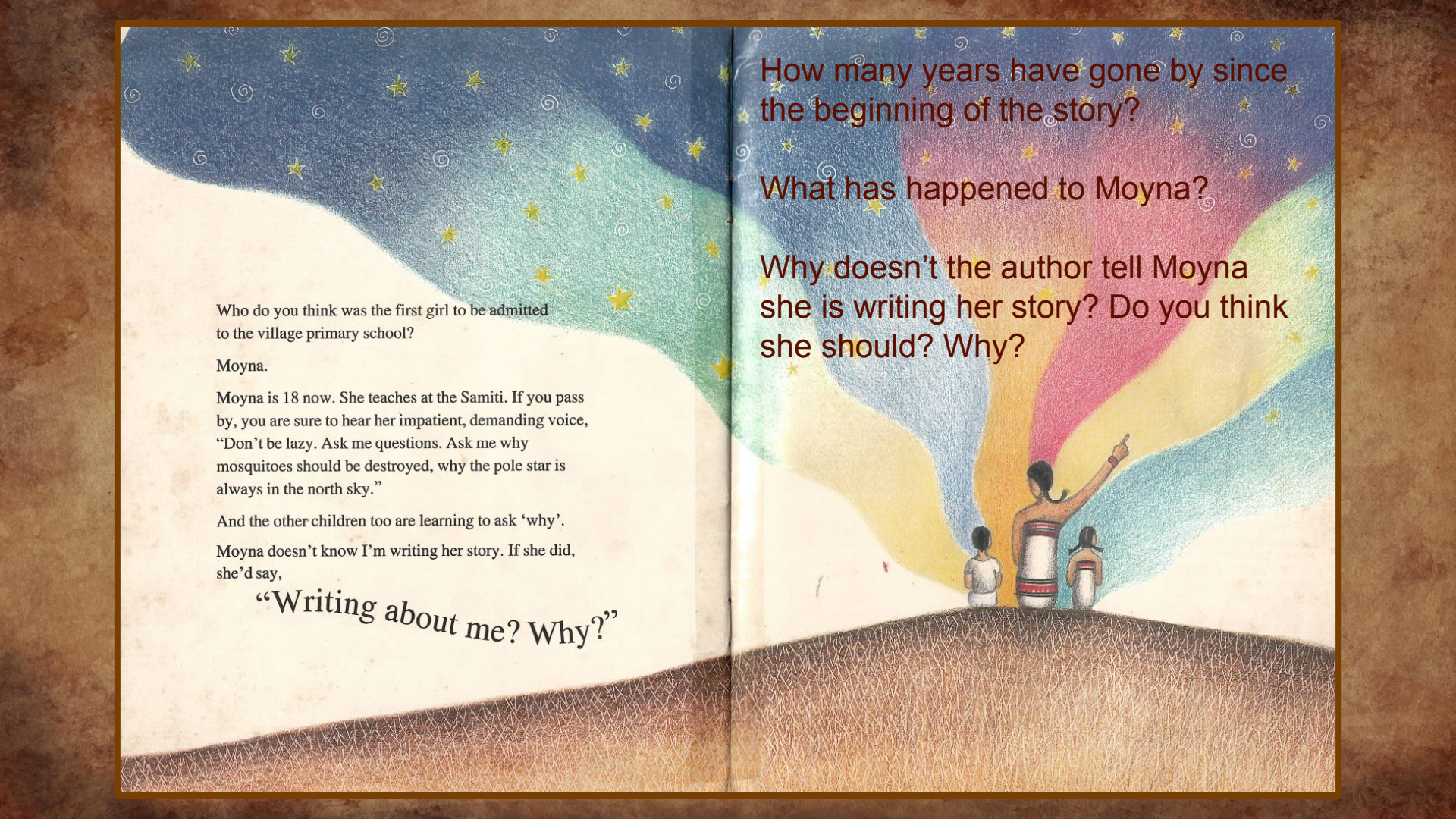
Moyna has two siblings. She loves to share whatever she learns at school, with them.

I went to Moyna's house in the evening.
Nestling close to the kitchen fire, Moyna was
telling her little sister and elder brother,
"You cut one tree and plant another two.

You wash your hands before you eat, do you know why?
You'll get stomach pain if you don't.

You know nothing — do you know why?
Because you don't attend classes at the Samiti."





Who do you think was the first girl to be admitted to the village primary school?

Moyna.

Moyna is 18 now. She teaches at the Samiti. If you pass by, you are sure to hear her impatient, demanding voice, "Don't be lazy. Ask me questions. Ask me why mosquitoes should be destroyed, why the pole star is always in the north sky."

And the other children too are learning to ask 'why'.

Moyna doesn't know I'm writing her story. If she did, she'd say,

"Writing about me? Why?"

How many years have gone by since the beginning of the story?

What has happened to Moyna?

Why doesn't the author tell Moyna she is writing her story? Do you think she should? Why?

I hope you liked the story. Like Moyna, now, I have a few questions for you. The questions on the story slides are for you to just think about; no need to answer them.

The questions below have to be answered by you in your notebook. Please write your answers in complete sentences.

1. How many questions had Moyna asked by the end of the story?
2. Which questions of Moyna did you like the most? Give reasons.
3. Do you have siblings like Moyna? Or cousins? Or good friends? Write a short paragraph about how you spend time with them, what you talk about, what you share with each other, etc.

4. At what age did Moyna become a teacher and where did she teach? What kind of a teacher was she?

5. Which school did you go to before joining Rishi Valley? Describe your previous school in 3-4 paragraphs with a proper beginning, middle and conclusion.

Make it interesting by adding details about what you liked and did not like about your school, your favourite place in the school, your favourite and not favourite subjects, a teacher you liked and why, your friends, an incident in school that you still remember, etc., etc. Feel free to write about anything.

Leave a line after every paragraph.