



Classroom Guide for **YASMIN'S HAMMER**

written by **Ann Malaspina**
illustrated by **Doug Chayka**

Reading Level

*Reading Level: Grades 3-4

Interest Level: Grades 1-6

Guided Reading Level: Q

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Overcoming Adversity, Working Toward a Goal, School and Learning, Family, Child Labor/Poverty, Modern-day South Asia (Bangladesh)

Synopsis

In the noisy streets of Dhaka, Bangladesh, another busy morning is beginning as Yasmin and her younger sister ride to work in their father's rattling rickshaw. Yasmin is aware of words everywhere, and she longs to go to school so she can learn to read. But Yasmin and her sister need to work and earn money to help support their family. Each day they go to the brickyard, where they chip bricks into small pieces that will be used to make concrete.

Yasmin knows that if she could read, when she grows up she could have any job she wanted. One night she comes up with a plan to take her future into her own hands. She works harder at the brickyard, earning extra coins from the boss. Finally she saves enough to buy a book. Excitedly Yasmin takes it home, and everyone looks at the pictures in the candlelight. When Yasmin's parents realize that none of them can read the words in the book, they decide they must do something so that their daughters can go to school. Their father takes on a second rickshaw route, and their mother weaves baskets in the evening to sell at the market. And then one day, as their father drives Yasmin and her sister in his rickshaw, he takes a new route—not to the brickyard, but to the school.

Background

Yasmin's Hammer was inspired by a trip author Ann Malaspina took to South Asia, where she saw many school age children working in the city and in the countryside. She says: "I researched the book by contacting organizations that fight child labor, reading about work and education in Bangladesh, researching the cyclones that flood the country every year, and contacting people who live in Dhaka. One man told me about the many crows in the city, so I added them to the story. He also described the frequent call to prayer from the many mosques. A young student helped me decide what clothes Yasmin and her sister would wear, and what sort of job the mother would have. Several people suggested that the two girls have a lunch of *khichuri*, a popular food in Bangladesh."

Additional background information about Bangladesh can be found online at [The World Factbook: Academic Kids](#).

Teaching Tip

Yasmin's Hammer is a valuable resource for teaching how an author helps the reader visualize a story by including vivid sensory details.

BEFORE READING**Prereading Focus Questions**

Before introducing the book to students, you may wish to develop background, tap prior knowledge, and promote anticipation with questions such as the following:

1. What does it mean to be educated? Why is education important? What are some ways to become educated?
2. Do you think every child in the world has the opportunity to go to school? Why or why not? What might hold parents back from sending their children to school?
3. What is the difference between a right and a privilege? Do you think learning to read and write, and going to school, is a right or a privilege? Why do you think so?
4. Have you heard of the Asian country of Bangladesh? Find it on a map and tell me what you notice about its location and any special features you see on the map.
5. What are some ways children can help their families?
6. What is realistic fiction? How can you tell if a book is realistic fiction? What are some realistic fiction stories we have read in class?

Exploring the Book

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title means. What do they think the story is about?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, acknowledgments and author's sources, dedications, illustrations. Encourage students to note the setting of the story and clothing of the characters as they look at the illustrations.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out who Yasmin is and how her hammer is important to the story.

VOCABULARY

The story contains several words that refer specifically to Bangladeshi items as well as some descriptive words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Have students work with these words and phrases. Talk about the vocabulary below, and then ask students to come up with a description of or synonym for each word and phrase.

rickshaw	khichuri	lentils	peacock	Abba
Amma	jute sacks	mosques	sour limes	taka
paddy	mohish	current	mango	bamboo
cyclone	brickyard	grit	borsha	curry
power cut	dinghy	begh	shapla	

AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

Literal Comprehension

1. At the beginning of the story, why can't Yasmin go to school?
2. Why do Yasmin and her family move to the city? How is life in Dhaka different from life in the country?
3. What job do Yasmin and Mita have? What is Amma's job? What is Abba's job?
4. How would you describe Yasmin and Mita's boss? What is he like?
5. Why does the boss give Yasmin extra coins?
6. What does Yasmin do with the extra coins she earns?
7. What does Abba do to help Mita and Yasmin go to school? What does Amma do? Why do they need to earn more money?
8. Why does Abba turn down a strange road on the last page of the story?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking
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9. How does Yasmin feel about moving from the country to the city?
10. What does Yasmin think of the city of Dhaka? How do you think she feels when she sees signs, newspapers, and books that she cannot read?
11. How might knowing how to read help Yasmin become a shopkeeper, a teacher, a doctor, or the governor?
12. Why is owning a book so important to Yasmin, even when she can't read it?
13. Why do you think the shopkeeper picked the book he did for Yasmin?
14. Do you think Yasmin really had enough money to buy the book? What makes you think so? If you think she did not have enough, why did the shopkeeper sell her the book anyway? And why did he sell it to her instead of giving it to her?
15. How did Yasmin's parents react to her bringing the book home? What emotions do you think Yasmin and her family experience while looking through the book?
16. What changed after Yasmin brought the book home?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines in the story that suggest how each character is feeling.
- The **Illustrator** might create a timeline of illustrated scenes from the story that follow the sequence of events in the plot.
- The **Connector** might find information about what life is like for children in Bangladesh.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of each character in the book and describe the kind of person he or she is.
- The **Investigator** might look for information about other countries where child labor is still prevalent and what is being done to end it.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. What challenges does Yasmin face every day? What does she do to overcome them? Are there challenges that you face in your life? What do you do to overcome them?
2. Yasmin works extra hard in the brickyard once she hatches her plan. Have you ever had to work extra hard for something you wanted? What was it and what did you do to earn it?
3. Yasmin and Mita eat *khichuri*, a rice and lentil dish, for lunch every day. What foods do you like to eat for lunch?
4. How old do you think Yasmin and Mita are? Why do children in Bangladesh sometimes work instead of going to school? How is this different from life in the United States?
5. Do you think Yasmin will be successful in school? Why do you think so? What aspects of her character might play a role?
6. Have you ever moved? If you have, how did the experience make you feel? Why?
7. How do students in your school show their determination to learn in and out of school? Do they have to make sacrifices to make sure they become educated? If so, what kinds of sacrifices do they make?

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Teach ELL students simple phrases such as "I don't know that word." "I have a question." "Speak more slowly." "Please repeat that sentence." Encourage ELL students to use these phrases to communicate their needs while reading.

2. After the first reading, go back through the story page-by-page and have students orally summarize what happens, using the illustrations to provide clues to the action.
3. Have each ELL student write three questions about the story. Then have students pair up with strong English speakers/readers and discuss the answers to the questions.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. Have students use a world map or globe to locate Asia and Bangladesh. Depending on students' familiarity with world geography, ask students to hypothesize about the climate and landscape of the region using the details provided in the story. Then ask students to do research to confirm or refute their predictions.
2. Have students research what school is like in Bangladesh and two other countries of their own choosing. Items to consider include: Is school public (free) or private (paid)? Do students wear uniforms? What subjects are studied? How many days per week, and hours per day, do students go to school? Is going to school required by the government? If so, for how many years? One place to start is online at [School Years around the World](#). Ask students to compare and contrast what they find in a report, graph, or chart.
3. According to the Afterward, nearly half of all Bangladeshis live in poverty, and children must work to help support their families. Have a discussion with students about the low-paying jobs that are available to children in Bangladesh, such as tea servers, housemaids, and rag collectors, and whether or not students think it is right that children work at these jobs. Students may also be interested in finding out more about the efforts of Save the Children and the Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee in trying to provide affordable schools for children.

Language Arts/Writing

1. Have students write a letter to Yasmin or Mita telling her about their community and their school.
2. Ask students to write a book recommendation for this story explaining why they would or would not recommend this book to other students.

Science

Yasmin's family moves to Dhaka because their home in the country was destroyed by a cyclone. Ask students to research cyclones, how they develop, and their effect on communities around the world.

Food

Two foods that Yasmin and her family eat are khichuri (rice and lentil dish) and curry (made with pumpkin). If cooking facilities are available, you may wish to try cooking a version of one of these dishes with students (recipes are available online). Or, you may wish to bring in a lentil and/or curry dish from a local Indian (or Bangladeshi) restaurant for students to taste.

Art

Yasmin's father's rickshaw is described as being "painted with the brightest stars, the bluest peacock, and a brave bandit queen from the movies." Have students create a poster, ad, or sign for Yasmin's father that advertises his rickshaw services.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ann Malaspina is the author of more than fifteen nonfiction books for young people. Her interest in equal rights and social change often leads her to write about people struggling on the margins of society to improve their quality of life. She was inspired to write *Yasmin's Hammer* after traveling in South Asia and reading news reports about young workers in Bangladesh. Malaspina lives with her family in northern New Jersey. Her Web site is annmalaspina.com.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Doug Chayka has illustrated several picture books, including *Four Feet, Two Sandals*, chosen as a Notable Social Studies Trade Book for Young People and a Notable Book for a Global Society. Chayka has taught illustration at Pratt Institute and currently teaches at Ringling College of Art. His work has also been displayed in the Society of Illustrators Best of Children's Book Art exhibit. Chayka and his wife live in Sarasota, Florida. His Web site is dougchayka.com.

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RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Yasmin's Hammer* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/383/hc/yasmin_s_hammer

BookTalk with Ann Malaspina and Doug Chayka:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/p/yasmin.mhtml>

More Discussion Questions:

http://www.leeandlow.com/p/yasmin_dq.mhtml

Word Search:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/images/pdfs/activities/YasminSearch.pdf>

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http://www.leeandlow.com/books/383/hc/yasmin_s_hammer (secure on-line ordering)

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