



**Classroom Guide for**  
**AANI AND THE**  
**TREE HUGGERS**  
by **Jeannine Atkins**  
illustrated by  
**Venantius J. Pinto**

### Reading Level

Interest Level: Grades 1-4

Reading Level: Grades 2-3

(Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula)

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.8/.5

Lexile Measure®: 650

Scholastic Reading Counts!™: 4.2

### Themes

Bravery, Environmental Action and Conservation, Female Role Models, Community Involvement, Indian History

### Synopsis

One day, Aani, a young girl in a large Indian family, is resting against her favorite tree when she hears the unfamiliar roar of trucks. She alerts the village women, who tell her that the sounds are made by men from the city who have come to cut down the trees. The women explain to the cutters that their trees provide the villagers with food and fuel; are home to animals; and prevent erosion. But the men are heedless. The cutters move closer, and as Aani makes a decisive move to save her special tree, the women around her are inspired and join in. Together, they help save their beloved forest.

Based on a true event in northern India, *Aani And The Tree Huggers* presents an enduring message of bravery and environmental action.

### Background

The text is based on actual events known as the Chipko Andolan (Hug the Tree Movement), which took place in northern India in the 1970s. This movement did much to preserve local forests; today, councils meet within most villages to decide how many trees can be cut without endangering the land and those who live there, and also, new trees are planted each spring.

The illustrations were inspired by 17th century styles of northern Indian miniature painting. In the "Illustrator's Notes," artist Pinto explains: "I drew from the various

aspects of each style to [articulate] the shakti (energy) personified by the women of the Chipko Andolan and of the forests, which survive today in northern India because of the bravery of people like Aani."

The Republic of India, made up of 24 states and seven union territories, is the seventh largest and second most populous nation in the world. Physiographically, it comprises plains, plateaus, and the Himalayas, which includes some of the highest mountains in the world.

The many people in India are generally distinguished by language rather than by ethnicity. The two official languages are Hindi and English; besides, there is Telugu, Bengali, Mar-athi, Tamil and Urdu. The most dominant religion in India is Hinduism; next is Islam, then, Christianity.

## **BEFORE READING**

### **Prereading Focus Questions**

Before students read the story, you might want to discuss one of the following questions as a motivation for reading.

1. Do you have a favorite place to spend time?
2. Do you think that preserving forests is a high or low priority? Why or why not?
3. Is there anything that brings your community together? What is it?
4. Observe the book's cover. Address students' comments, questions, and observations.

### **Vocabulary**

Ask the students to write down words they do not know into their vocabulary notebooks. Ask them to then cite a number of uses of the words they come across in their reading or through conversations (or other means) and to create their own sentences using these words.

You might also have a discussion on "heroism," such as, what it means, what some examples of heroes or acts of heroism are.

## **AFTER READING**

### **Discussion Questions**

After reading, discuss the story. Some questions that can be used to generate discussion are:

1. Why was Aani's tree so important to her?
2. Why did the cutters come to the village? How did the village women react to the cutters' presence?
3. What did Kalawati say were reasons why the cutters should not cut down the trees?

4. What do you think prompted Aani to action? What do you think she was thinking and/or feeling? What do you think of what she did? Can you imagine what the cutters were thinking/feeling? How about the other women in the village? How about Aani's mother?
5. Why didn't the village women take the money?
6. Why do you think the other village women also began to hug the trees?
7. Do you think that the cutters returned? Why or why not?

### **Reader's Response Journals**

To promote active reading, you might want students to keep a reader's response journal as they read the story. This journal will help students personalize what they are reading.

1. Do you come from a large family? Where do you go for your time alone and what do you do?
2. The men and women in Aani's village both worked. What kind of work do the women in your family and in the neighborhood around you do? What about the men?
3. The village women took a risk to preserve the trees. Why did they do it? Have you ever taken a risk in order to stick up for something you believe in? What was it? What happened?

### **Other Writing Activities**

Ask students to respond to one or more of the following writing activities:

1. Write what you envision happening next in the story.
2. Do you think that the risk the village women took was worthwhile? Why or why not?
3. If possible, make contact (via Internet or otherwise) with a school in India with which students can establish pen-pal relationships.

### **ESL Teaching Strategies**

Following is an activity for engaging students for whom English is a second language.

Let students read through the story. Assign characters to the students and let them read through the story again, focusing on their characters' words. Then, read the story out loud together.

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

In order to integrate students' reading experiences with other subject areas, you might want to have students complete some of these activities.

### Social Studies

1. Read more on the Chipko Andolan movement, i.e., what events took place, who was involved, what results were borne.
2. Aani, who wanted to model after the older women who wore silver bracelets around their ankles and red tikas, ended up inspiring the adults to action in a moment of bravery. Provide a list of other children and/or female role models who have been influential in literature and in history, i.e., Joan of Arc, Susan B. Anthony, and ask students to choose one person to research and report on.
3. The author describes some of Aani's surroundings; namely the Himalayan mountains. Ask students to construct a topographical three-dimensional map of northern India. Be sure to have a larger map to illustrate northern India's context in Asia.
4. The men in Aani's village were cutting stalks of rice. What other natural resources does India yield? But also learn more about India in general, i.e., the languages spoken, religion, population, economy, etc.
5. Invite community members to the class to discuss environmental preservation and how students can play a role. Perhaps students can share the information they have learned with another class (via an oral presentation, skit, etc.); together the classes can work toward local environmental preservation.

### Science

1. What animals do you see illustrated in this book? Find out what they are and learn what other animals are indigenous to northern India.
2. Kalawati rhetorically asks the cutters where animals would go if all the trees were cut down. Where do different animals live? Discuss different animals' homes or niches, i.e., nests, caves, underground. Let students draw different animals. Then, having provided containers labeled with a specific niche or habitat, let students deposit these drawings of animals into the appropriate container. This activity is conducive to a larger unit on animals.
3. As a classroom, adopt a tree. (Or, begin by planting a tree.) Get to know how trees grow, what they need, the specific type of tree the class has committed to nurturing, and note its characteristics, e.g., its life cycle, leaf type, bark. Keep a "progress report" on the tree, i.e., observing any growth or sickness.
4. Why do we need trees? Compile reasons, i.e., for oxygen, homes for animals, building material, etc. Afterward, the students can create a mural depicting why we need trees, write a rap about it, or write a persuasive essay.

**Mathematics**

1. Kalawati mentioned that the cutters have already cut more trees than the villagers cut in a year. Look at averages of how many trees are cut down per year in different regions. You might also want to chart how long it takes for different trees to grow.
2. The cutters offered Aani 1,000 rupees to let go of the tree. How much is that in dollars? (Furthermore, what currency pictures can be telling: Take a look at Indian and other currency and what it depicts.)

**Music**

Aani was surrounded by sounds: her hectic house, the roar of trucks and cutters, birds, etc. Listen to what kinds of sounds you hear around you. Write down the things you hear.

**Art**

1. Observe more Indian miniature painting.
2. Look at examples of Indian traditional dress and note the differences according to gender, age, and status. Then, ask students to write down what they know about a certain person according to what they are wearing.
3. Ask students to identify their favorite trees (From backyards, sidewalks, parks, etc.) and draw self-portraits that include the trees.

**About the Author and Illustrator**

**Jeannine Atkins** received her B.A. from the University of Massachusetts and her M.A. from the University of New Hampshire. She is a former teacher who now writes full-time.

When asked what interested her in writing *Aani And The Tree Huggers*, she stated, "I always liked people, but as a child, trees were perhaps equally important to me. I climbed trees, daydreamed beneath them." She continued, "the Chipko movement inspired me because it breaks the stereotype of submissive Indian females."

Jeannine Atkins lives in Massachusetts with her husband and their daughter. She has also written *Get Set! Swim!* available in Spanish under the title *Preparadas Listas Ya*.

**Venantius J. Pinto** was born in Bombay, India. He studied art at the University of Bombay, and received a masters degree in fine arts from Pratt Institute in New York.

The illustrations are watercolor and gouache on paper. The background and lighter colors were burnished by a conch shell after having been rendered in layers.

A fine artist, designer, and animator, Mr. Pinto lives with his wife, in Sunnyside, New York. This is his first picture book.

**Awards & Reviews**

**"Choices,"** Cooperative Children's Book Center  
**Notable Children's Book,** *Smithsonian*

"A testament to heroism, based on events in northern India in the 1970s. When cutting crews came to slash the forest, women and girls faced down the developers and halted the destruction. More books of this caliber might help save the planet."—*Smithsonian*

"Atkins has developed a highly sympathetic character in Aani, as well as a clear picture of life in a rural Indian community. Pinto's artwork corresponds by giving readers insight into the colors and scenes of the country. An exemplary first picture book for both author and illustrator, this collaboration will appeal to a wide audience of children."—*School Library Journal*

"It is simply a book worth shouting out loud for. It is powerful without being overbearing. The energy is positive. Its message is direct: The environment we live in must be treated with dignity and respect, and it must never be taken for granted."—*International Examiner*

**Resources on the Web**

Learn more about ***Aani And The Tree Huggers***

[http://www.leeandlow.com/books/7/hc/aani\\_and\\_the\\_tree\\_huggers](http://www.leeandlow.com/books/7/hc/aani_and_the_tree_huggers)

Other books by Jeannine Atkins

*Get Set! Swim!*

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