PRATHAM BOOKS
A Book in Every Child's Hand

City of Stories

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Level 3

There was once a little girl who lived in one of the BIGGEST and BUSIEST cities in the world.

She really loved stories. But everyone she knew was too busy to tell her stories.

Her mother said, "I have to finish my work."

Her father said, "I am reading the newspaper."

Her brother said, "Can’t you see I am playing cricket?"

Her neighbour said, "I have to go to the market to buy things."

Her teacher said, "First, let us do sums."

Everyone was very busy.
Everyone was always behind time.

Many people were always tired and irritated and certainly had no time at all for stories.

One day Didi came to the little girl’s school.

Didi was not a teacher, and she was not a student. She was older than the children and she was younger than the teachers. She had warm eyes and a soft smile.

She was a friend of the children, and she was a friend of the teachers.

The little girl wondered if Didi knew any stories.

She went up to Didi shyly. "Do you have a few minutes? Can you tell me a story?"

Didi looked at the little girl very seriously. "Of course," she said.

"I can tell you a story. What kind of story would you like?"

The little girl’s eyes grew big with anticipation. "Can you tell me a story about a lion?"

Didi sat down in the verandah of the school, and started telling the little girl a story about a small lion who was lost in the jungle.

The little girl sat still and listened intently.

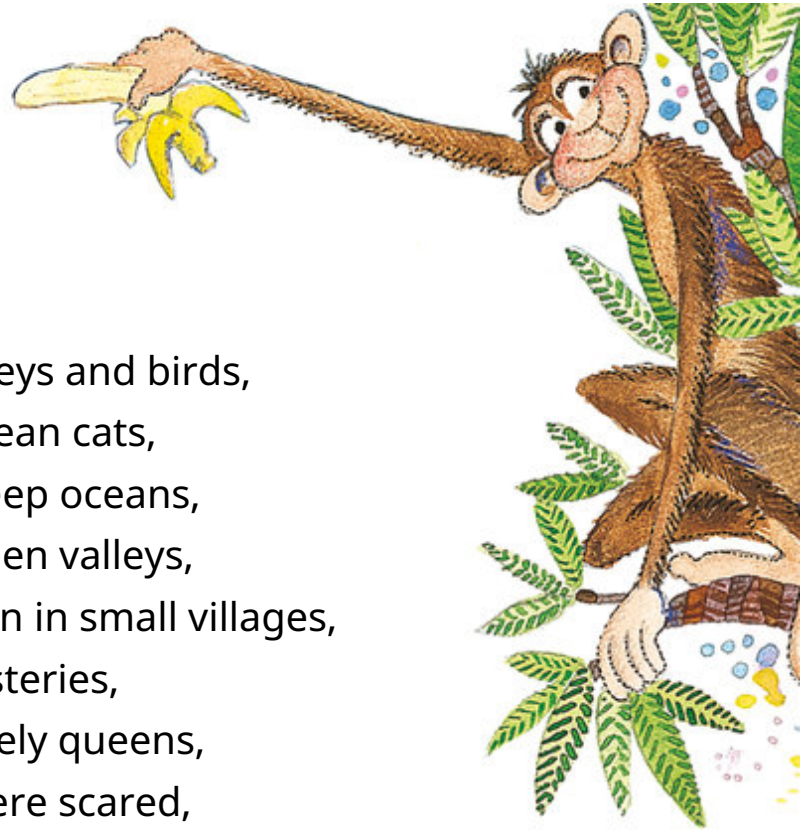
Didi’s story was so vivid that she could feel the wind through the branches of the huge trees in the jungle, the soft swaying sounds of the tall grass, and the velvety fur of the small cub.

The little girl’s friends who were playing nearby came to find out what Didi was saying.

Soon, they were absorbed in the tale too.

Before long, the little girl's entire class was around them, listening and imagining, and demanding more stories.

The little girl, her friends and the teachers soon found out that Didi knew lots and lots of stories.



She could tell stories about monkeys and birds,
about ferocious dogs and mean cats,
about fish in blue rivers and deep oceans,
about high mountains and green valleys,
about children in big cities and children in small villages,
about adventures and mysteries,
about handsome kings and lovely queens,
about what to do when you were scared,
and what to do when you were sad,
about finding lost treasures,
and about knowing wonderful secrets, and much much more.

Everyday the little girl and her friends sat with Didi.

Children from other classes came.
The teachers of the school came.
Children from neighbouring schools came.
Children who were not in school came.
Children who had left school came.
Children who were too young to go to school came.

Some sat and listened. Some stood and listened.
The youngest children lay down on their stomachs,
cupping their faces in their hands, and listened.
As they listened, they learned how to tell stories to each other.

They learned how to build stories, how to spin stories, how to weave stories, how to embroider stories, how to cook stories and how to fly stories like kites in a big blue sky. They all learned how to tell them so that the listeners could not blink or move and would remain mesmerized till the story ended.

Slowly, through Didi, the little girl, and the children, stories began to spread through the city. People began to tell stories and people began to listen to stories.

Mothers stopped work; fathers put away newspapers and teachers put aside the arithmetic textbooks; neighbours did not go shopping.

They began to tell stories. The big brothers stopped playing cricket, and the little sisters stopped skipping rope. They began to listen to stories.

The bhajiwala stopped selling bhaji. The doodhwala stopped delivering milk. The paanwala put aside all the paan and supari.

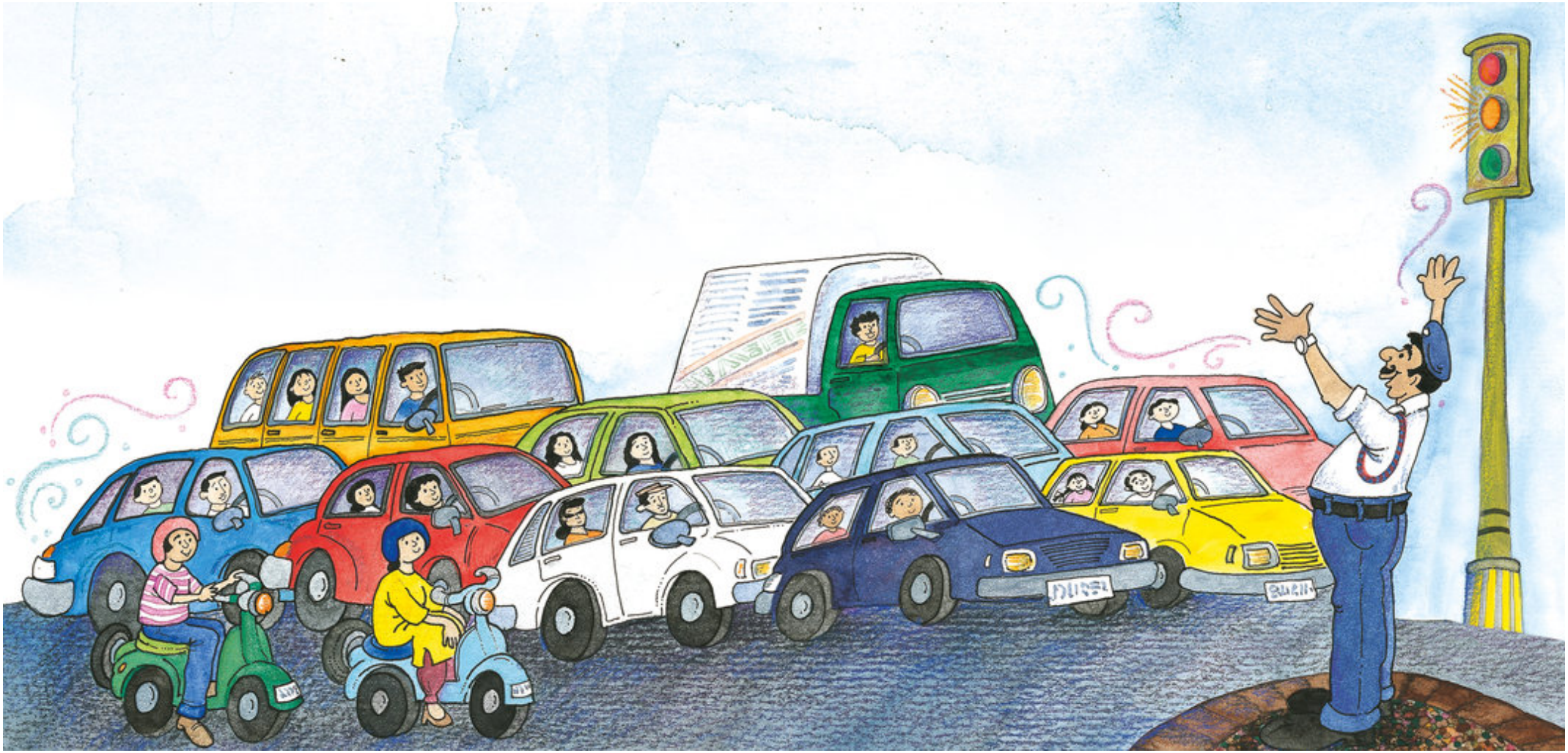
They all started listening to each other’s stories.

The bus driver left his bus and came to listen. The conductor forgot his bag of tickets and money in the bus – he was in such a hurry to tell the passengers his stories.

Trains did not run in the city, because the drivers were too busy with stories. Newspapers were not printed. Buildings could not be built, the flyovers could not be completed.

No restaurants served pau-bhaji, no bhelwala made bhel-puri. No fisherman went out to fish. No one was willing to do anything but tell stories and listen to stories.

The postmen did not deliver letters because they were busy with stories.



The policeman sat in the middle of the busy intersection telling stories to all the drivers around him. All the televisions in the city were switched off because people were listening to stories.

The entire city came to a complete halt. The Mayor of the city was worried.

"What is to be done now?" he said to his Council of Ministers as he paced up and down the big room, in the Mayor’s mansion by the sea. "No one is working, and nothing is happening in the city."

The Council of Ministers worked feverishly making plans and strategies. But nothing worked, no one listened.

Finally, Didi and the little girl were summoned to the Mayor’s mansion by the sea. The Council of Ministers had been told that these two had flooded the city with an ocean of stories.

The little girl looked very little in the large room with high ceilings and tall pillars. She held on to Didi’s hand tightly.

Didi too looked small, surrounded by the fat and tall men and women of the Council of Ministers. No one smiled. Everyone looked at them with frowns and scowls.

"These stories have brought our big city to a halt. What do we do about this?" asked the Mayor in his loud booming voice.

There was complete silence in the room. All you could hear were the distant murmurs of a story that the Mayor’s gardener was telling the Mayor’s bodyguards.

The little girl gripped Didi’s hand even more tightly. Didi looked straight at the Mayor.

Her voice was not loud, but it was very clear. "Let there be one story every morning and one story every evening," she said. "That way everyone everywhere will have stories, but they can also go back to doing what they have to do."

"Excellent idea!" roared the Mayor.

The Council of Ministers clapped. The fat and tall men and women began to smile. The little girl loosened her tight hold on Didi’s fingers.

The whole city heaved a sigh of relief. From that day on, in the big city, one story is told in the morning, and another one before going to sleep at night.

From that day on, the little girl and Didi’s big, busy city is called the City of Stories.

Dedication by Rukmini Banerji

For all the young people of Pratham who work with children.

Dedication by Bindia Thapar

Especially for Nui. Also for Smitu, Amma, Tariq, Suvir and Amit. And... for Maow.

Acknowledgements by Bindia Thapar

For Manisha, Sampurna and Rinki, for waiting and believing.

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City of Stories
(English)

Nobody in the city has time to tell a story, until Didi and a little girl start a tidal wave of stories, that washes over everybody. Read this fascinating fable of transformation of a city into the City of Stories.

This is a Level 3 book for children who are ready to read on their own.

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