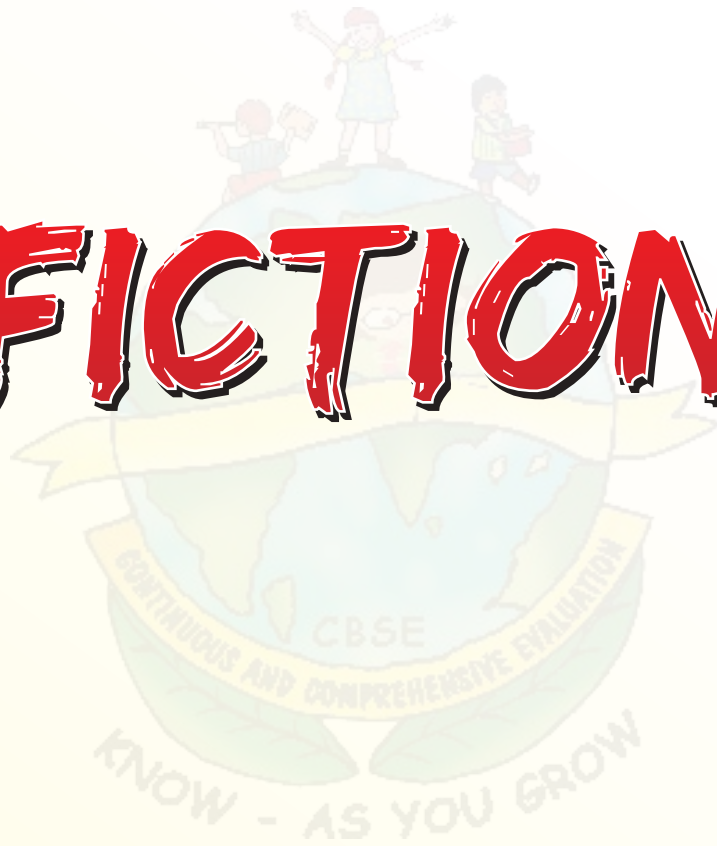


FICTION



F. 1 How I Taught My Grandmother To Read

by Sudha Murty

1. Write about the following memories or experiences. Share your views with the class.

- i) A memorable holiday spent with your grandmother
- ii) A story told by your grandmother
- iii) The things you admire the most about your grandmother
- iv) The difference between your mother and your grandmother

2. Have you ever been on a trip to any place in India, where you didn't know the language spoken locally? How did you feel? How did you manage to communicate?

3. Now read the text

1. When I was a girl of about twelve, I used to stay in a village in north Karnataka with my grandparents. Those days, the transport system was not very good, so we used to get the morning paper only in the afternoon. The weekly magazine used to come one day late. All of us would wait eagerly for the bus, which used to come with the papers, weekly magazines and the post.
2. At that time, Triveni was a very popular writer in the Kannada language. She was a wonderful writer. Her style was easy to read and very convincing. Her stories usually dealt with complex psychological problems in the lives of ordinary people and were always very interesting. Unfortunately for Kannada literature, she died very young. Even now, after forty years, people continue to appreciate her novels.
3. One of her novels, called *Kashi Yatre*, was appearing as a serial in the Kannada weekly *Karmaveera* then. It is the story of an old lady and her **ardent** desire to go to Kashi or Varanasi. Most Hindus believe that going to Kashi and worshipping Lord Vishweshwara is the ultimate *punya*. This old lady also believed in this, and

ardent: showing strong feelings



her struggle to go there was described in that novel. In the story, there was also a young orphan girl who falls in love but there was no money for the wedding. In the end, the old lady gives away all her savings without going to Kashi. She says, 'The happiness of this orphan girl is more important than worshipping Lord Vishweshwara at Kashi.'

4. My grandmother, Krishtakka, never went to school so she could not read. Every Wednesday, the magazine would come and I would read the next episode of this story to her. During that time, she would forget all her work and listen with the greatest concentration. Later, she could repeat the entire text by heart. My grandmother too never went to Kashi, and she identified herself with the novel's protagonist. So more than anybody else she was the one most interested in knowing what happened next in the story and used to insist that I read the serial out to her.
5. After hearing what happened next in *Kashi Yatre*, she would join her friends at the temple courtyard where we children would also gather to play hide and seek. She would discuss the latest episode with her friends. At that time, I never understood why there was so much of debate about the story.
6. Once I went for a wedding with my cousins to the neighbouring village. In those days, a wedding was a great event. We children enjoyed ourselves thoroughly. We would eat and play endlessly, **savouring** the freedom because all the elders were busy. I went for a couple of days but ended up staying there for a week.
7. When I came back to my village, I saw my grandmother in tears. I was surprised, for I had never seen her cry even in the most difficult situations. What had happened? I was worried.
8. 'Avva, is everything all right? Are you ok?'
9. I used to call her *Avva*, which means mother in the Kannada spoken in north Karnataka.
10. She nodded but did not reply. I did not understand and forgot about it. In the night, after dinner, we were sleeping in the open terrace of the house. It was a summer night and there was a full moon. *Avva* came and sat next to me. Her affectionate hands touched my forehead. I realized she wanted to speak. I asked her, 'What is the matter?'
11. 'When I was a young girl I lost my mother. There was nobody to look after and guide me. My father was a busy man and got married again. In those days people never considered education essential for girls, so I never went to school. I got

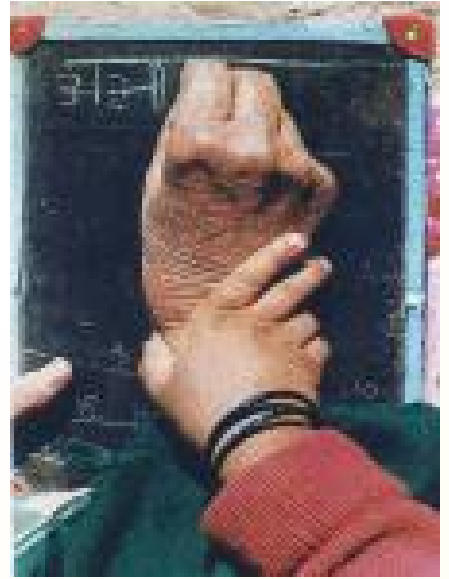


married very young and had children. I became very busy. Later I had grandchildren and always felt so much happiness in cooking and feeding all of you. At times I used to regret not going to school, so I made sure that my children and grandchildren studied well ...'

12. I could not understand why my sixty-two-year-old grandmother was telling me, a twelve-year-old, the story of her life in the middle of the night. But I knew I loved her immensely and there had to be some reason why she was talking to me. I looked at her face. It was unhappy and her eyes were filled with tears. She was a good-looking lady who was usually always smiling. Even today, I cannot forget the worried expression on her face. I leaned forward and held her hand.
13. 'Avva, don't cry. What is the matter? Can I help you in any way?'
14. 'Yes, I need your help. You know when you were away, *Karmaveera* came as usual. I opened the magazine. I saw the picture that accompanies the story of *Kashi Yatre* and I could not understand anything that was written. Many times, I rubbed my hands over the pages wishing they could understand what was written. But I knew it was not possible. If only I was educated enough. I waited eagerly for you to return. I felt you would come early and read for me. I even thought of going to the village and asking you to read for me. I could have asked somebody in this village but I was too embarrassed to do so. I felt so very dependent and helpless. We are well-off, but what use is money when I cannot be independent?'
15. I did not know what to answer. *Avva* continued.
16. 'I have decided I want to learn the Kannada alphabet from tomorrow onwards. I will work very hard. I will keep *Saraswati Pooja* day during *Dassara* as the deadline. That day I should be able to read a novel on my own. I want to be independent.'
17. I saw the determination on her face. Yet I laughed at her.
18. 'Avva, at this age of sixty-two you want to learn the alphabet? All your hair is grey, your hands are wrinkled, you wear spectacles and you work so much in the kitchen...'
19. Childishly I made fun of the old lady. But she just smiled.
20. 'For a good cause if you are determined, you can overcome any obstacle. I will work harder than anybody but I will do it. For learning there is no age bar.'
21. The next day onwards, I started my tuition. *Avva* was a wonderful student. The amount of homework she did was amazing. She would read, repeat, write and recite. I was her only teacher and she was my first student. Little did I know then that one day I would become a teacher in Computer Science and teach hundreds of students.



22. The *Dassara* festival came as usual. Secretly I bought *Kashi Yatre* which had been published as a novel by that time. My grandmother called me to the *pooja* place and made me sit down on a stool. She gave me a gift of a frock material. Then she did something unusual. She bent down and touched my feet. I was surprised and taken aback. Elders never touch the feet of youngsters. We have always touched the feet of God, elders and teachers. We consider that as a mark of respect. It is a great tradition but today the reverse had happened. It was not correct.
23. She said, "I am touching the feet of a teacher, not my granddaughter; a teacher who taught me so well, with so much of affection that I can read any novel confidently in such a short period. Now I am independent. It is my duty to respect a teacher. Is it not written in our **scriptures** that a teacher should be respected, irrespective of the gender and age?"
24. I did return *namaskara* to her by touching her feet and gave my gift to my first student. She opened it and read immediately the title *Kashi Yatre* by Triveni and the publisher's name.
25. I knew then that my student had passed with flying colours.



About the Author

Sudha Murty was born in 1950 in Shiggaon in North Karnataka. A prolific writer in Kannada, she has written seven novels, four technical books, three travelogues and two collections of short stories. Her previous English book 'Wise and Otherwise' has been translated into thirteen Indian languages. Her stories deal with common lives and human values such as charity, kindness and self-realisation. As a sensitive writer, she writes about the suffering of the people. The main characters in all her books are highly educated, non compromising, highly principled women.

4. Now that you have enjoyed reading the story, answer the following questions by choosing the correct option

- (a) The grandmother could relate to the central character of the story '*Kashi Yatre*' as _____
- (i) both were old and uneducated.



- (ii) both had granddaughters who read to them.
 - (iii) both had a strong desire to visit Kashi.
 - (iv) both were determined to learn to read.
- (b) Why did the women at the temple discuss the latest episode of 'Kashi Yatre'?
- (i) to pass their time.
 - (ii) the writer, Triveni. was very popular
 - (iii) they could relate with the protagonist of the serial.
 - (iv) women have a habit of discussing serials.
- (c) The granddaughter found her grandmother in tears on her return as _____
- (i) the grandmother had been unable to read the story 'Kashi Yatre' on her own.
 - (ii) the grandmother had felt lonely.
 - (iii) the grandmother wanted to accompany her granddaughter.
 - (iv) she was sad she could not visit Kashi.
- (d) Why did the grandmother touch her granddaughter's feet?
- (i) As a mark of respect to her teacher.
 - (ii) It was a custom in their family.
 - (iii) Girls should be respected.
 - (iv) She had read the story of 'Kashi Yatre' to her.

5. Answer the following questions briefly

- (a) What made Triveni a popular writer?
- (b) Why did the grandmother depend on her granddaughter to know the story?
- (c) Pick out two sentences which state that the grandmother was desperate to know what happened in the story.
- (d) Could the grandmother succeed in accomplishing her desire to read? How?
- (e) Which of the following traits would be relevant to the character of the narrator's grandmother?
 - (i) determined
 - (ii) selfish
 - (iii) emotional
 - (iv) mean

Give reasons for your choice.



6. Here are some direct quotations from the story. Identify the speaker and write what each quotation suggests about the speaker. You can use the adjectives given in the box and may also add your own.

amiable, tender, gentle, sympathetic, understanding, determined, diligent, kind, concerned, systematic, wise, helpful, enthusiastic, selfish, cruel, humble, religious, prudent

	Speaker	Quotation	Quality Highlighted
a.		<i>'Avva, is everything all right? Are you O.K.??'</i>	
b.		<i>'At times, I used to regret not going to school, so I made sure that my children and grandchildren studied well.'</i>	
c.		<i>'Avva, don't cry. What is the matter? Can I help you in anyway?'</i>	
d.		<i>'We are well-off, but what use is money when I cannot be independent.'</i>	
e.		<i>'I will keep Saraswati Pooja day during Dassara as the deadline.'</i>	
f.		<i>'For a good cause if you are determined you can overcome any obstacle.'</i>	
g.		<i>I am touching the feet of a teacher not my granddaughter.'</i>	



LISTENING TASK

7. **Now you are going to listen to the story of a young girl about a special day.**

(a) Based on your listening of the story complete the boxes given below.

(i)

(ii)

(iii)

(iv)

What did the children do for the old people?

(b) List any three feelings of the old people in this story

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

(c) Complete the following

- i) We can make our grandparents happy by _____.
- ii) We can avoid constructing more and more Old Age Homes by _____.

8. **After having read the story, you realise the anguish of the illiterate adults. You want to make your friends aware of it and contribute something in bringing about a change in the lives of the illiterate adults. Deliver a speech in the morning assembly at your school about the Importance of Adult Education and ways to implement it.**

Read the following to make your speech effective.

The introduction of a speech is like the nose of an airplane. The nose sets the course and leads the plane off in a specific direction. A good introduction sets the direction of your speech by

- getting the attention of your audience
- introducing your topic
- stating your central idea or purpose



- briefly identifying the main points
- making your audience eager to hear what you have to say

WRITING TASK

9. You are the grandmother. How did you feel when your granddaughter gave you the novel 'Kashi Yatre'? Write your feelings in your diary.

To make your diary entry interesting, read the following information about what is a diary entry.

A diary entry is a purely personal piece of writing. The writer expresses his/her thoughts and feelings. Reactions to incidents are generally poured out in a diary. Hence expressions that are emotionally charged are used.

For example - When you are happy about something, you could start like this -

8th July 20xx, Wednesday 8 pm

Today I am very happy as.

.....

10. Here is a story about Swami and his grandmother. After reading the excerpt, change it into a conversation between Swami and his Grandmother.

After the night meal with his head on his granny's lap, nestling close to her, Swaminathan felt very snug and safe in the faint atmosphere of cardamom and cloves.

'Oh, Granny!' he cried ecstatically. 'You don't know what a great fellow Rajam is.' He told her the story of the first enmity between Rajam and Mani and the subsequent friendship.

'You know, he has a real police dress,' said Swaminathan.

'Is it? What does he want a police dress for?' asked Granny.

'His father is the Police Superintendent. He is the master of every policeman here.' Granny was impressed. She said that it must be a tremendous office indeed. She then recounted the days when her husband, Swaminathan's grandfather, was a powerful sub-magistrate, in which office he made the police force tremble before him and the fiercest dacoits of the place flee. Swaminathan waited impatiently for her to finish the story. But she went on, rambled, confused, mixed up various incidents that took place at different times. 'That will do, Granny,' he said ungraciously. 'Let me tell you something about Rajam. Do you know how many marks he gets in arithmetic?'



'He gets all the marks, does he, child?' asked Granny.

'No silly. He gets ninety marks out of one hundred.'

'Good. But you must also try and get marks like him.... You know, Swami, your grandfather used to frighten the examiners with his answers sometimes. When he answered a question, he did it in a tenth of the time that others took to do it. And then, his answers would be so powerful that his teachers would give him two hundred marks sometimes.

'Oh, enough, Granny! You go on bothering about old unnecessary stories. Won't you listen to Rajam?'

'Yes, dear, yes.'

'Granny, when Rajam was a small boy, he killed a tiger.'

Swaminathan started the story enthusiastically: Rajam's father was camping in a forest. He had his son with him. Two tigers came upon them suddenly, one knocking down the father from behind. The other began chasing Rajam, who took shelter behind a bush and shot it dead with his gun.

'Granny, are you asleep?' Swaminathan asked at the end of the story.

Now read the dialogue and complete the conversation

- Swami: You don't know what a great fellow Rajam is! In the beginning I could not get along with him but now he is my good friend. And you know, he has a real police dress.
- Grandmother: Is it? What does he want a police dress for?
- Swami: His father is the Police Superintendent. He is the master of every policeman here.
- Grandmother: I think, it must be a tremendous office. Do you know, your grandfather was a powerful sub-magistrate and the Police Force trembled before him? Even the fiercest dacoits of the place fled.
- Swami: That will do, Granny. It's so boring. Let me tell you something about Rajam. Do you know how many marks he gets in arithmetic?
- Grandmother: He gets all the marks doesn't he, child?

