

Reflections on Storytelling session of “ The Three Kittens ” by V.Suteyev



Thousands of years ago when humans came into being, they experienced life in myriad forms. They felt a need to express their daily struggles and accomplishments in form of speech or drawing. And stories were born..... Stories of valor, struggles, achievements, adventure, mysteries, fantasy, morals and many more... displaying different shades and range of sentiments and experiences.

For children, stories have always been fascinating and interesting part of growing up - from grandma tales to bedtime stories with parents, from excitement to relaxation - stories serve different purposes. Stories stimulate the imagination and transport children into another world.

I see stories as an essential tool, not only for enjoyment and developing skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing, but also to increase understanding of the world, challenging mindsets, fuelling imagination and curiosity and helping listeners to be able to view a situation from different perspectives.

This summer (May – June , 2011)I launched a group called “**Our Story Circle**” . Each story had activities woven around it to ensure development of **DIFFERENT DOMAINS** –

- A. LANGUAGE
- B. COGNITIVE,
- C. PERSONAL, SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL
- D. AESTHETIC
- E. PHYSICAL (gross motor, fine motor, sensory).

These could be:

1. PUPPET MAKING AND PUPPETRY,
2. INVENTING OWN STORIES,
3. CONVERTING STORIES INTO DIFFERENT TYPES OF STORY BOOKS,
4. ROLE PLAYS AND DRAMATIZATION OF STORIES,
5. REAL LIFE EXPLORATIONS,
6. DRAWING,
7. PAINTING,
8. SEQUENCING,
9. COOKING,

10. PUZZLE MAKING,
 11. MAP READING AND MAKING,
 12. PICTURE READING
- and many more.....

The activities emerged from the story as well as interest of the group. **ALL ACTIVITIES WERE NOT INCLUDED IN A SINGLE STORY.** Children were engaged as per their age, needs, interests and skill level. I had planned that there should be two age groups 3-6 years and 7-12 years. While conducting the workshop, one of the batches had children from 3-12 yrs engaged differently through same story.

Wonderful books from [Eklavya](#), [Tulika](#), [Pratham](#), [NBT](#), [Viva](#), [Scholastics](#) were my resources. One of the stories which I took up was *The Three Kittens* by V Suteyev. This story was covered differently with three groups. In this article, I have captured what happened during the story sessions and reflected on my observations of the responses of children to this story.

THE FIRST GROUP enjoyed the story and listened with awe wondering what will happen with each action of the kittens. This group was interested in enacting the kittens. I already had a carton ready which could be made into a bin and then a stove pipe/ tunnel. They climbed into the carton and as they were coming out, a robe of white was slid over their shoulders. This carton was then made into a stove pipe which the children entered and as they came out a black robe was slid over them. A circle was drawn on the ground to denote a pond. The children jumped into this and as they stepped out, they were helped to slide out of the extra robes they had worn. They enjoyed the process of enacting *The Three Kittens*. This was followed by making a kitten hand puppet with chart paper.



The older children came in when the younger were completing their kitten hand puppet. They wanted to make the kitten too and insisted on listening to the story or reading the story book. Once they were familiar with the story, they got down to making their own hand puppet kittens. The children chose their own color of chart paper. Soon they came up with different ideas, why not a cat, why only kittens. Some even made their cat and converted it into a lion by changing the mouth. One child went to make a story about a cat and a lion. This inspired others to make their own stories in which one of the characters was a cat or a kitten. We had four more stories which emerged: *A lazy Cat* by Anoushka; *Cat and the pants* by Dhruv; *The Cat and his friends* by Abeer and Manjima. The children planned the dialogues and

converted the stories into puppet shows. They used the plush puppets, which I had made many years back, as they felt that since they would be selling the paper puppets, they should use something different for their own shows. They practised their puppet show. All I did was to be attentive and give suggestions on voice modulation, managing puppets for better effect and remind them that they were a “team”. The group watched each other’s performance , gave suggestions and offered assistance to the individual performers. This batch wanted to set up a stall and have a puppet show as their closing ceremony. They put up a stall near the market inside the apartment complex- sold tickets for the show and even made a sale of hand puppets they had learnt to make. They put up an interesting show. I was happy to see that the message to be a “team” had registered. They helped and assisted each other at the stall and during the performance. The show was appreciated by many- both children and adults. Some children from the audience were inspired to buy puppets, make their own show and were given a chance to perform in front of the audience. I was amazed at the talent and imagination each child possesses- all one needs to do is to provide them a platform to let it take shape, watch them and guide them only when absolutely necessary.



When I read the story with **THE SECOND GROUP** (age group 3-8 yrs), it was a read aloud strictly staying with the script of the book. I began with introducing the title, author and publisher of the story. On the first two pages itself, some children were quick to express their view that white kitten was the cutest. On questioning further, I realized that the typical **INDIAN MINDSET OF FAIR SKIN BEING BETTER THAN THE DARK WAS AT WORK**. A child(I will call her Tuhina- not her real name) was insistent on “white as cutest” was fair herself while another girl who was wheatish complexion was quiet. Any suggestion to view black as beautiful was dismissed by Tuhina. I still expressed my views that each color is beautiful and a few kids nodded. I continued with the story as other children wanted to see and hear what kittens would do in the story. The younger ones marveled at what color the kittens would turn into. The older ones wanted the story to extend by all kittens turning grey, then brown and even more colors. They suggested extensions in the story before they jumped into the pond. They were thrilled to read different words- “dashed, chased, hopped, crawled”. They had listened another story prior to this and had learnt the describing words for the animal walks- like snake slithered, elephant stomped. They took pleasure in the way verbs were used. One thing no kid was able to understand was the concept of “stove pipe” and its being black inside. They found it more acceptable to call in a pipe which had fresh black paint inside.

I pondered over the remarks about white kitten being the cutest. I had read this story aloud to my 3 year old but this angle had never emerged. I wondered how to introduce the story with another group. I thought of names for the kittens: Hubble, Bubble and Trouble.

The **BLACK** was named "**BUBBLE**", **GREY** "**TROUBLE**" and **WHITE** "**HUBBLE**".

Then I further developed their characters: the grey one was first to get into Trouble, the white one followed the grey immediately; the black kitten was reluctant and tried to stop the other two (he followed in hope to look after their safety). The first person I discussed this with was my twelve year old. He somehow did not like my suggestion. He preferred "Bubble" for white, while it could be "Hubble" for grey and "Trouble" for black. This made me understand how naming the characters as per our perception of "goodness" related to color is predominant in a child's mind. I discussed why a black could only be Trouble and white one Bubble. Why is something pretty as bubble associated with only white? We talked about it and my son fell silent.

I REALISED THAT HE NEEDED TIME TO THINK ON HIS OWN ABOUT THIS SO I LEFT HIM TO FIGURE IT OUT HIMSELF.

THE THIRD TIME I took up this story, I was better prepared for any discussions which could emerge. I introduced the title of the book, the author and the publisher and then on the first page instead of remaining close to the written word, I introduced the characters as "Bubble", "Hubble" and "Trouble". This group had a mixed response to this- some kids said they liked grey, two liked black but remaining liked white. When the names were given to the characters most children wanted "Bubble" for the white kitten, for the remaining two it did not matter though they did not like "Hubble" at all. "Yeh bhi koi naam hua? Iska matlab kya hai? Aap aise hi bana rahe ho. Yeh naam accha nahin hai." There was a **good discussion on why white kitten should be Bubble and not Hubble**. Many children were somehow not happy white kitten being perceived as Hubble. Thank fully my twelve year old (after the discussion he had with me a week back and having taken time to reflect on the color and its association with our perception of good or bad) said that he like grey best and any name was fine. In the end, many kids wanted to do away with the names totally as they felt it would be confusing. I did understand that despite the discussion, they still perceived white as cute and did not want it to have any other name than Bubble. But one positive step was that they **were more amenable to seeing other two kittens as attractive**- though not enough for them to get the name Bubble!



This was an important realization for me about the how “white/ fair” being cute or better is so deeply entrenched in the minds of as young as four to eight year olds. This even influences the acceptance of names for the story characters they perceive as “good” or good looking”.

What concerns me is that if children, who do not have fair complexion, show their preference for “white” or “fair” and reject the dark outright, then do they also reject themselves on some level.

Do they even realize their rejection of themselves?

Are their parents aware of this?

Are they also responsible for this?

Is this the reason that when I see them in the park- somehow they seem to want to follow the fairer kid with sharp features and attractive clothing?

Would this rejection somehow result in having low self esteem in future and result into good business for brands like “Fair and Lovely”?

Do these brands have a hand in creating this mindset by their advertisements on the television or is it a vicious circle of mindsets leading to a business and business thriving on mindsets.?

HMMMMMMMMMMMM..... I am still thinking. But what is of utmost concern to me is that each individual – in any skin tone should be comfortable with themselves and skin tone should not be the criteria to form an opinion on “goodness” of a person.

I would definitely like your opinion on this.

Does this observation hold any meaning for you? Or

Am I overreacting and making a mountain out of mole hill?

Anyway who would have ever thought that a story book as simple as The Three Kittens could have raised these questions.

On second thoughts, did V Suteyev think of all this and then made a story revolving about The Three Kittens- one black, one grey and one white?