

# FINAL COMPILATION

February 2021 Reflective Writing Course



Thinking Teacher

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## Letter to a future grandchild about the pandemic of 2020

Manjeet Kaur, Suchitra Academy, Hyderabad

**Date: ---2045**

Dear Grandchild,

I want to tell you about an event that changed your parents and me and made us think about life in a different way.

What made us start thinking differently was the pandemic. By now, you must have heard about the 2020 pandemic.

On 24th March 2020, Mr. Narendra Modi (the then Prime Minister) declared a countrywide lockdown. The whole country came to a standstill, and the reason was the pandemic COVID-19.

All of a sudden, we became part of a horror movie. The villainous Coronavirus killed lakhs of people, and we remained helpless. It turned our lives upside down. Never would we have imagined ourselves to be confined to our homes, with no outings at all.

This situation also gave us a chance to look at things differently. Those hard times taught us the value of everyday things in our lives: like fruits, vegetables and groceries. It also made children appreciate their parents, who worked day and night to fulfil their (reasonable and unreasonable) demands and never complained.

In the beginning, the lockdown was regarded as a holiday by some children. And I was a teacher at that time. Teachers really worked hard, and it was during this time that the concept of 'virtual classes' began and with it, a tough time for teachers started.

In its war against the Covid-19 pandemic that was ubiquitous in its expansion, the lockdown was a massive disruption in the socio-economic history of India.

That tough period imbibed in us values - like sharing and standing with each other during any phase of life. It even taught us the value of money and the necessity of saving money for rainy days.

The efforts of the government, health-workers, and police officers cannot remain unsung, as they worked day and night to make our lives easy and smooth. This revealed how we were dependent on every profession and showed us that every person is important in society.

The lessons of hygiene that we were taught early in life came in handy during the COVID-19 crisis. Every time we returned home from outside, washing hands was mandatory. The mask became our everyday accessory. Lockdown then made us realise what we really *need* (not *want*) to live reasonably well, and the answer was “NOT TOO MUCH.”

With everybody confined to their homes, there was a rapid return of clear blue skies, breath-taking fresh air, and clean water. Moribund rivers getting revived, the re-appearance of the chirping of the birds, sudden sighting of wild animals in urban areas, the arrival of the dolphins in coastal regions, and even rapid healing of the ozone layer made us realise how much we had messed up with Nature.

The crisis of Covid-19 impacted us not only negatively but positively, too. We started building and adopting solutions to stay within planetary boundaries in the right manner, both in our personal lives and in public spaces.

So, this is what I want to apprise you of - that there is a positive outcome to everything in life, it just depends on the way we look at it.

I hope you will remember this lesson and try to inculcate it in your life too.

From your loving grandmother,

Stay blessed.

Reshma Joshi, Sri Aurobindo International School, Hyderabad

### THE 'SINGLE STORY' OF MY CHILD ...

My daughter was born with attractive eyes and loud voice but was underweight. She was so small that the same dress would fit her for years. Every other milestone was perfectly normal for her, except for her small stature. As a tot, she always loved to perform rhymes through her songs and action and her 'shows' were popular at home among our near and dear. But at school, this was not the case.

Everything was just ok until she crossed Kindergarten and I could hardly identify the 'single story' of hers taking shape gradually. During her growing years, she was mostly found dissatisfied and unhappy that her teachers did not care for her talents. Many even commented openly to her face about her small build! She shared that although she is not selected in any of the events, she is very confident of anything that her friends perform. Being in the same school, I too used to feel her plight, but I would just overlook this, thinking that her friends must be better off. Sometimes, I would also feel helpless. It was only her Theatre Art teacher who was extremely appreciative of her talent, and he would give her the responsibility of direction back-stage. I always thought that he just didn't want to disappoint us.

Much later, thanks to him, her 'other story' unfolded like never before.

At the age of 13, when she was in grade 8, Aditi was selected (after a rigorous audition process) from 500 children, as the protagonist in a Bollywood film, produced and directed by a famous film personality. I was awestruck while watching her on the big screen. The school had organized a special visit to the theatre for teachers and her classmates. Those of her teachers, who were a part of that single story of hers back then, were now actually celebrating something that they could never have imagined!

I struggled to wipe my tears so as not to miss the credits –

**Aditi Inamdar – in and as POORNA**

[\(350\) Poorna movie official trailer 2017 filmy studio - YouTube](#)

Aishwarya Produturi, Suchitra Academy, Hyderabad

## Letter to a teacher who impacted me

Dear Padmalaya Ma'am,

I hope you are doing well. You must be wondering who I am.

You taught me Math in 2010-2011 in Holy Family School. Remember that girl with braces and specs who told you that she would grow up and become just like you? Well, I must tell you that I did indeed grow up and become a teacher. Ma'am, can you guess which subject I'm teaching? Yes! Its Math.

You must be wondering why I'm suddenly writing to you after all these years. I was doing a course and a topic came up about the teacher who influenced me the most. It reminded me of all the happy moments that I had spent with you.

I'm not sure if you know the impact that you have had in my life. I was a child who often wondered if I had any talents at all. When I looked at my friends dancing/singing/painting/drawing, I had always asked myself why I couldn't do things like them. When I had teachers around me who always insulted me and my parents for my disability in such activities, you were a god sent angel in my life. The moment you walked into

my life: things became clearer to me. I understood that not everyone is good at everything. Some may dance, some may sing, some may be good at academics. The way you taught Math and the way you encouraged me to be a better version of myself (instead of comparing me with my friends), changed my whole perspective of life.

I finally found the one thing that I was really good at. I knew I could effortlessly solve complicated Math problems like no one else could. *My unique quality!* Thank you for being a teacher who made me realise this. I don't know what I would have done without you in life! Before you, there were many times when I felt like dying. I just did not understand why I was not able to do things like so many others could. Without you, maybe this world would have lost a child who was thoroughly misunderstood. I want to tell you that every waking moment of my life I have realised the impact that you had on me, but I never had the guts to put this down on paper, because I was not ready to accept the fact that at certain points of my life, I wanted to die. Thank you once again for all the things that you have done for me.

On the brighter side, I want to tell you that despite a lot of peer pressure, I have chosen a profession that makes me happy and content. Every day I wake up and start the day with confidence, because I know that I'm bringing change into some little one's life. Maybe I can't change what had happened to me, but I can help others, just like you had helped me.

I want to end this letter by saying that you have been an inspiration to me, and I love you and thank you from my bottom of the heart for all the things that you have done for me.

Love always,

Your dear student,

Aishwarya

Bhawna, Taktse International School, Gangtok, Sikkim

## Letter to a teacher who influenced me greatly

Dear Miss Plant,

I know you've taught thousands of young girls in your time as a teacher and I was one of them.

It was the year 2002, when you became my Geography teacher in grade 10 and interacted with me for the first time. However, it was many years before that, that I knew

you, or in a true sense, knew your *reputation*. It cannot be denied - nor argued - that that was the way everyone at our school was first introduced to you and I could tell from the way you glided through the hallways, held your nose high and stood with your back straight like a sentinel, that you knew it too.

Over the years, I don't know how it began, but you took it upon yourself to "discipline" young girls and teach them the "right ways". And somewhere down the line, you became the most shuddersome teacher we ever knew. Intentionally or unintentionally? This is something for you to ponder on, don't you think? But that was not the only thing that made you the most influential person at school. Equally mystifying was your descent. There were beliefs that you were a royal Persian princess, whose family had fled their native place due to war. I somehow held onto this theory and did see you as a war princess. I thought it justified your stern and unbending nature towards your students.

Similar to all my classmates, seniors and juniors, I too shivered at the mere mention of your name. I still do!

So when you first entered our classroom draped in a chiffon saree, lips pursed holding a thick Geography book in hand, my heart hammered against my chest and I held my breath as long as I could, not wanting to disappoint you or worse, anger you. But to my surprise, you were the same. Same as the other teachers, nothing extraordinary about your teaching or your demeanour. However, little did I know then that I was going to get my first taste of your wrath soon.

It was a regular school day and you were conducting class. As usual, there was pin drop silence in the room. You had just instructed us to open our books and turn to some page number. Maybe I was in a reverie of my own, so I did not hear your instructions right away. I turned to my desk partner and asked her to repeat the page number.

*Thudddd!* Something landed on my head with a heaviness that made me dizzy for a few seconds. Then I saw you, holding the book in your hand in front of me, wrath personified! Never in my years at school, had I been shouted at by a teacher, let alone smacked on the head. You might say "So what? It was just a smack." But it was *not* just a smack. It was a rare occurrence in a school that did not believe in corporal punishment. It was a paralyzing



experience that crushed my self-esteem, courage to ask questions and confidence to speak up.

When I think about school now, I really have to pry open my memories, but this one incident is so vivid, that I can almost feel the soreness in my head and taste the humiliation in my mouth.

Today, I am a teacher too and I do understand the need to teach discipline and good manners to students, but I still do not understand the need to hit your student, hold them by their sweater and jerk them like a lifeless doll (this is a story for another day) or embarrass them in front of the whole school for asking questions. But believe me, I have learnt through this incident, too. My mentor once said, 'Take all people who roughen your road or challenge you in every possible way, as your "Gurus". They bring out the stronger person in you and help you recognize your strengths as an individual, which you didn't know existed before.'

Through that one experience, I have learnt the importance of creating a safe environment in the classroom, the value of giving voice to my students and most importantly, reflecting on my actions as a teacher and how it might affect the young minds.

So I thank you for being an influence in my life and being my "Guru".

Liberated,

Bhawna

Gowri Sankari, Schram Academy, Chennai

## When my little niece became my teacher

(After reading the extract on **Repetitive Correction**, from **John Holt's HOW SCHOOLS FAIL**.)

I requested my colleague to share her ideas (related to teaching English Grammar) with her buddy teacher but she refused to do so. I tried other sources, but I was not able to find another person who could give ideas as this particular colleague could.

So I started to think: 'What should I do to get my work done'?

I recalled my brother narrating an incident about his four-year-old daughter, and what she did to get things done by her elder sister. The scenario was as follows: my elder niece refused to give her toys to her younger sister and was unwilling to play with her. But the younger one was very keen to get the toys from her sister. Noticing her elder sister playing a game of a shop keeper selling toys, the cute little one pretended to be a customer, went to her shop and bought the toys that she really wanted to possess.

This incident was an eye opener for me. Next day, I arranged a Teacher Development session and invited my colleague to present her ideas to the entire group of teachers. The session went well, and maximum numbers of teachers were benefitted.

**Kamlesh Bahukhandi, Suchitra Academy, Hyderabad**

### **Who is an educated person?**

An educated person knows how to pay attention to people and the world around. They strive to listen to what other people are saying. They can follow an argument, track logical reasoning, detect illogic, hear the emotions that lie behind both the logic and illogic, and ultimately empathize with the person who feels those emotions. They can solve a wide variety of problems, feel and understand the power of other people's dreams and nightmares, as well as their own. Educated people nurture and empower the people around them.

**Mary G, Suchitra Academy, Hyderabad**

### **Letter to a teacher I cannot forget**

Dear Jolly teacher,

How are you ma'am? Hope you are doing well.

I don't think you remember me because I am not that unforgettable. I am Mary. G, and you were my Grade V class teacher and my English teacher till grade VII.

Till grade IV I was very good at English, but I didn't know the exact reason why I started hating English. I realised why I hated English only when I became a teacher.

I still remember the day when you slapped me tightly for a very simple reason - I wrote the assigned work in some other book. I was about to give you the explanation but before listening to me, you started shouting at me and hit me very badly. Later, when you realised that you had taken the book for correction, you didn't even give me the book: instead, you said that I had lost it and I was very careless. It was very disheartening to be insulted in front of my class. Till today, I hate English and I am not that good at it. After my schooling, I tried my best to come out of that, but I couldn't, as it impacted me very deeply. Now I am a Math teacher and I get good responses from my colleagues.

I acquired a tag as 'Math Magic Mary' from my school parents.

That is enough for this life, students write beautiful letters which makes my life blessed.

Hope by reading this letter you will definitely realise the mistake and know why, till today, I hate English.

Thank you! Good wishes,

Your student, Mary.G

Preetmala Bakshi, St Kabir School, Chandigarh

## Our Mathematics Teacher

A retired officer from the Education Department in our city decided to work in our school as a Mathematics teacher. He thought he was extraordinarily brilliant at the subject.

Mathematics at our grade level comprised rudimentary algebra, geometry and Arithmetic. The old, lack-lustre teacher began teaching us geometry. His drawl in a soft tone was inaudible. We wondered who he was teaching. This prompted the class to snigger and get into all sorts of mischief behind his back. He taught with the presumption that we were understanding every theorem that he took up in class. None of us could comprehend what he was teaching, and we all continued to make merry.

Little did we realize that what was being taught was soon to be tested. It was geometry, geometry all the way.

Soon the 'half-yearlies' were to begin. When we confronted the question paper, there were no questions in algebra and arithmetic. Page after page, there were theorems to be solved. As we stepped out of the examination room, we were all suddenly hit by the stark reality. Soon the results were out and a few bright sparks of the class scored in double digit numbers. Most of the students had flunked the exam. Besides the fear of being hauled up by our parents, we felt that we had acquired a strange fear for the subject. No amount of motivation served to raise our confidence. The year passed and there were huge learning gaps and a broken spirit amongst most of us. The school realized that something serious had to be done, as even the 'above average' students had performed deplorably.

A quick replacement was found but it took a huge toll on our confidence and Mathematics remained a dreadful subject for the rest of our school years.

[Mounika, Suchitra Academy, Hyderabad](#)

## Letter to a friend describing my experience of the Reflective Writing Course

Dear Meghana,

It was so good to hear about your vacation in the last letter. Do you remember my mentioning that I joined a Reflective Writing Course? Well, today I want to tell you how glad I am that I joined the course and the impact that it has had on me.

To be honest, I was not interested in this course because I had to give it time in the evening - and you know how particular I am about not doing anything in the evening! Also, I felt, I already reflect enough, and I don't really have to take a course on it. I thought, "How will someone teach me how to reflect? Who takes a course to reflect? It must come from within." Now, you may wonder then, why I opted to take it. It was highly recommended by a person whose judgment I trust, so I took it up half-heartedly.

I remember the first session; I was greeted by a person with a warm smile. I instantly connected to her as she asked us all to address her as '*akka*' or '*Didi*', which was distinctive.

Though I liked the facilitator, I was disappointed by the session. We were asked to write about our feelings on a report of a child and put ourselves in different people's shoes. I had done a similar task in recent times and I wasn't interested to do it again. Nevertheless, I finished the assignment - because I had to.

The next day, I wrote the remarks of my students in their report card and when I re-read them, I noticed that there was something different about them - *that's when* I realised that it was because of yesterday's assignment! It was at that moment that I started believing in the course. None of the assignments felt like 'assignments' thereafter; they felt like opportunities to revisit many moments that I was not consciously ready to.

Each session was a great learning, I would eagerly wait for these sessions so I that could hear others' views and listening to their thoughts would amaze me.

I thoroughly enjoyed this course. It has helped me put my thoughts in writing, which was otherwise difficult for me. It encouraged me to make observations about my past and present experiences and helped me become self-critical. I had always thought that we must reflect only on our failures but, I now realise, it is important to reflect both on positives and negatives.

Without this course, I would not have been able to understand myself in the way that I do now. I feel close to myself. It has helped me change the way that I look at things. This course made me a better problem-solver too, because I understand each problem easily now, as I look at it from different perspectives.

This course has indeed made me a better person. I would highly recommend that you take it. I also think it must be a part of the academic curriculum, it would be of great help to students. This journey will be one of the high moments of my life and I will treasure the memories for a long time!

Waiting to hear back from you!

-Mounika

Ann Vivin Clement, King's College, Haryana

## A Conflict that I wish to understand

This little episode happened on the breakfast table last weekend (Saturday). This is usually a time when Papa, Clement, Ann, Erica and Eric sit together to eat. Everyone's week-long busy schedule results in their eating at different times, as each one is differently engaged either in their work or study-related projects.

Everyone sat to eat and then Clement got up to switch on the TV (which is not an unexpected or unusual thing).

Immediately, Ann said, "Let's just talk and catch up instead of switching on the TV today."

Clement said, "I want to watch TV, the whole week I am busy and so I don't get time to watch anything."

Ann said, "If you are switching on the TV, then I am taking the breakfast to the terrace, at least I can enjoy the fresh air."

Instantly, Papa said, "I want all of us to eat together, let's just enjoy these wonderful *idiyappams*."

Clement exclaimed: "I don't like *idiyappam*!"

There is a background to much of this. Usually, a question goes around the previous night: "What do you want to eat for breakfast tomorrow?" Every week, the choice of one family member is acted on. So last evening when this was done, Papa expressed the wish to eat *idiyappam* whereas Clement demanded *puris*. Ann said: "Okay, let's have *idiyappam* tomorrow and *puri* on Sunday."

Now when Clement announced that he didn't like *idiyappams*. Ann responded, "You usually relish it, why are you sulking about it today?" She continued, "Okay fine, go ahead and switch the TV on." He shouted, "No, I don't want to do it anymore." At that instant Erica murmured, "Last evening I had a long chat with Ronnie (cousin), he is planning to go to Canada for further studies." This slowly led to more questions from everyone and gradually things got back to a more peaceful conversation that everyone enjoyed.

**Reflections:** The biggest challenge was to keep it neutral as I wanted to add my emotions (of hurt and being taken for granted, even after doing everything) while I was writing.

It came to my mind that the outburst from Clément's side might have been a result of being a little dissatisfied with not getting his choice of breakfast and again, getting denied his choice of wanting to watch TV. This thought had not crossed my mind till now.

I also felt that it was so easy to have avoided this conflict if I had been tactful and just changed the topic or let him switch on the TV with reduced volume.

I also realised that kids know how to diffuse a situation which could have aggravated further, as I was not ready to back down, and to show my displeasure, I wanted to walk away from the table.

It also made me reflect now, by looking at it from a third person's perspective, how this might be affecting the other three members who were the audience at this point of time.

Neeraja Raghavan, THINKING TEACHER, Bangalore

### My reflections on the course

Like every batch, this one, too, has given me food for thought. And much of it has come from the end-of-course feedback that I usually request from participants!

While I have always been adopting the practice of inviting teachers to read aloud their previously checked assignments in each session, I (thought I) had also added the caveat that *anyone* (whether or not they were specifically invited by me) could read aloud their work for all to hear. But this particular sentence in one teacher's feedback has set me thinking hard: *"I did not like the way I was craving for your validation. Every time I wanted to receive a reply saying it was a good piece of writing and if you can, you may read the writing in the class."*

Obviously, my explanation that I invite people to read aloud *because I feel there is something in their writing which will clear the doubts of others*, is not convincing. Somewhere, this invitation is being seen as an accolade. So I must reflect on this aspect and see how to work on it so as not to cause such tension.

Another piece of feedback that I received – and this is a first, in this course – is that there were times when the sessions turned monotonous. I wonder if I have lost the freshness that I had, when I ran the course initially – do I need to build fresh elements into it, so as to avoid sounding repetitive or mechanical?

And the last thing that I feel I could well have taken care of is the fact that the video clips played during some sessions were not clearly visible or audible. This could well have been due to glitches in Zoom or poor Internet. In previous runs of the course, I would usually stop after playing the video for the first few seconds, confirm if it was clear to all, and if not, email the link to them so that they could watch it individually on their devices while

the class was on. I forgot to do this, this time round! So the sessions where video clips were played were not as enjoyable (for some members) as the other sessions were.

This just goes to show that even when the same course is offered for the sixth time, there is much to learn for the facilitator of the course. I hope to do better next time, and I must thank this batch for giving me such candid feedback.

It is *always* such a privilege to engage with teachers who want to learn! THANK YOU!



