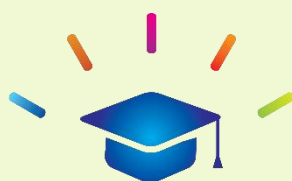


FINAL COMPILATION

Reflective Writing Course

Fourteenth Batch

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Thinking Teacher

Photographs: Courtesy **Anjali Krishna**

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Reflective writing is the song of the soul. It guides us to understanding our inner world and our actions. It is a mirror that shows us the light to reflect to the world.

Nandini Cardoso

What is Reflection?

Swati Rawat

Well, according to the dictionary, reflection means “an image seen in a mirror, on a shiny surface, or on water as light bounces back from it.” It also means “the act of thinking carefully or deeply about something.”

In the mental sense, reflection is the process of letting the mind shine light upon the memories, experiences, and information it has gathered. As that light falls upon the contents of the mind, they return as thoughts, interpretations, opinions, or conclusions upon one’s mental landscape.

Perhaps that is why the same word “reflection” is used both for mirrors and for thought. In both cases, something hidden becomes visible when light is directed toward it. Both reveal what was already there, waiting to be seen.

Reflection is the process through which the mind revisits and examines what it already holds, along with what it is currently consuming.

Yet reflection is rarely pure or untouched. The mind interprets everything through filters it has gathered throughout life, from family, society, culture, education, experiences etc.

In this sense, reflection is a bounced back image. The thoughts, judgments, and conclusions that arise are shaped by countless influences acting upon the mind as much of what a person knows from birth onward is borrowed, beliefs, values, ideas, even ways of perceiving.

Using these borrowed filters, one constructs ethics, morals, and standards of judgment. These become the parameters through which reflection operates.

Information then passes through these mental sieves, and what emerges are often recycled opinions, interpretations, and conclusions, not entirely original, but reformations of what has already been absorbed.

In this way the mind reflects reality much like disturbed water reflects light.

This is the story of reflection.



Reflective writing is a process of baring open your soul. It is a difficult journey which triggers your innermost feelings, brings to the fore your layered thoughts and helps you understand yourself.

Rajalakshmi Ramkumar

What do you think education is—or who is an educated person?

Nithya Karthikeyan

When we call someone educated, we usually mean that the person has studied in a good school, has qualifications, speaks well, knows how to behave in different social situations and can adapt to the world around them. All this matters. It gives a person access, confidence and a certain ease in society. But I keep wondering whether this is enough. Can a person be called educated only because they have had the right exposure and opportunities? Or does education also have something to do with what a person becomes from within?

Parker Palmer writes that, in the classical understanding, education is an attempt to "lead out" from within a person a core of wisdom. This idea stayed with me because it makes education feel very different from merely filling a child with information or training them to meet expectations. It suggests that education should help a child discover what already exists within them—their voice, their strengths, their questions and even the parts of themselves they are still trying to understand.

For me, education is not only about being taught. It is also about understanding oneself—recognising one's strengths and weaknesses without shame, having the space to make mistakes, to feel confused, to grow emotionally and to slowly form one's own understanding of the world. A person may have degrees and knowledge, but if they cannot recognise another person's struggle, accept difference or look at themselves honestly, then somewhere, education has remained incomplete.

I feel this strongly when I see children who enter our school through the Right to Education provision. They are in the same classrooms, wear the same uniform and are expected to meet the same requirements as everyone else. On the surface, it may look like inclusion. But their starting point is often very different.

Some of them come from homes where parents have not had the opportunity for formal education. There may not be anyone to help them with homework, explain school expectations or prepare them for the kind of language, confidence and social behaviour that is often taken for granted in school. They are suddenly placed in a space where their peers may already know how to speak, participate, make friends, use technology and deal with academic pressure. For some children, all of this is familiar. For others, it is not.

At times, I feel we expect these children to fit into our world too quickly. When they seem hesitant, emotionally vulnerable or unsure, it is easy to notice only their behaviour. Yet, behind that hesitation is often a child trying to find their footing in a world that does not yet feel like their own.

This is why I do not think education can simply mean giving every child the same books, the same tasks and the same examinations. It must also mean giving them a genuine chance to belong. It should help them discover what they are capable of while allowing them to carry their own background without shame. They should never feel that they have to erase who they are in order to be accepted.

Tara Westover's journey made me think deeply about this. Education gave her knowledge and a place in the outside world, but it also gave her the courage to question the identity that had been created for her. She was able to decide what she wanted to believe, where she wanted to belong and who she wanted to become.

So, an educated person, to me, is not simply someone with the best schooling or the right qualifications. It is someone who understands that people do not begin from the same place, who can look at their own life with honesty, recognise another person's struggle without judgement and make space for others to grow. Perhaps that is what I am still learning as a teacher—that education is not only about helping children reach a standard, but also about making sure they do not lose themselves while trying to reach it.



The mind never sees life as it is; it sees life through the fingerprints of every yesterday. Reflection is the art of noticing those fingerprints before calling them reality.

Swati Rawat

A letter to an aspiring teacher

Roshni Thapa

Dear Ijk,

I hope the world around you is revolving slowly and peacefully, and that you are at ease. I got an opportunity to write a letter to an aspiring teacher, no one struck my mind better than you.

I am yet to call myself an experienced teacher. I have been teaching for one and a half years, and I can say with pride that a teacher is a lifelong learner. We will have a lot on our plate. A plate should always be filled with savory and spice, and I surely am experiencing that. I'm telling you this because you are considering becoming a teacher, and I can already see the passion in your eyes.

People say teaching is an easy job, a last resort, and a job with perks like holidays. But they haven't seen what being a teacher looks like. Teaching is not only about completing lesson plans, preparing worksheets, giving homework, and correcting papers. It is shaping the future of the student, not through comparing numbers, but through planting a seed of knowledge, growth, discipline, values, etc. Through my little experience, I realised that not everyone can be a teacher and not everyone deserves to be one.

Like the two sides of a coin, being a teacher is not easy. It comes with baggage. You are going to struggle, face challenges, the work may feel demanding and you might even want to give up. But always remember the purpose behind your efforts. To be a great teacher, you should have patience. You should be kind, understanding and empathetic.

You will make a big difference in those young minds when you understand that every student is unique, they have their challenges and dreams. Always believe in them and yourself too. Always be a learner. Your passion for learning, working hard, and delivering knowledge will encourage the learners. You will not see that soon, but the impact will grow with them, building their love for learning and shaping their future. Be kind to yourself and always take some time out and celebrate every small achievement, even if it is as simple as a student's excitement in the class when they see you, or their big smile with the declaration, "We love your class".

As you are accepting the responsibility of becoming a teacher, don't forget that every student's interest in learning is in your hands. Show integrity, compassion, respect, and honesty in everything you do.

I hope my letter inspires you as you begin this rewarding career. May you continue to grow and learn skills and inspire your students.

One last line - don't forget to be kind to yourself even when the path gets rough.

With best wishes,

Roshni Thapa

Connecting to Parker J Palmer Rajalakshmi Ramkumar

Connect to any of the assertions made by Palmer in this chapter, from your own experience and describe the connection as vividly as you can.

"Here are the facts: don't think about them, just get them straight."

There are some topics in social science which are sensitive, and I do try to discuss them with my students in detail. But there are certain topics where I believe that I need to be politically correct.

One such topic was about the need for reservations in educational institutions. As a teacher, I had to justify the need for reservations. But, as an individual, I was not in favour of the same in its current format. In fact, I still vividly remember a 16-year-old me passionately arguing with my own social science teacher about this.

While I was planning for this topic, I anticipated this discussion and decided to keep it short and simple as I realised that this would extend my teaching time and I had multiple topics to complete as per my syllabus planner. As expected, while discussing this topic, students had a lot of ideas to share, lots of topics to discuss. I did try to convince them about the idea of social justice and explained to them that for exam purposes what to write, despite feeling otherwise. This was when one child put me in a spot and asked - *ma'am, do not give us the right answer but give us your honest answer*. This led me to think about how students can see through our pretences and unfortunately, even if I want to share my opinions with them, can I do so?

On further retrospection, I realised that if I wanted to have noteworthy discussions and debates with my students, for them to carry on this learning for years, it is not enough if I ask them to know about the facts, rather I need to indulge in honest interactions. This may lead to push back or arguments from various quarters, but if I am honest and convinced about my thought process – don't I need to be confident enough to justify my beliefs and values?

I believe that as a teacher, I should not influence or force the impressionable young minds, but I can definitely discuss the different aspects of any issue and I can also express my honest thoughts, provided those are not drawn from any preconceived ideas or stereotypes.

Reflective writing is your mind and heart being honest with yourself; it is the willingness to look closely at what happened, questioning your assumptions rather than becoming imprisoned by a single story or your own biases. Reflective writing is the gentle, mellifluous sound that flows when the mind finally speaks to itself without pretence.

Sweekriti Rai



Conflict Description from a Benevolent Third-Party Perspective

Chandrika Limboo

In 2014, Student X transferred from a well-known private school to a government school in North Sikkim and joined Grade 11. Shortly after joining, she attended school wearing minimal makeup, including mascara and fairness cream. During a school assembly, several female students, including Student X, were singled out by teachers and student leaders because their wearing makeup was considered inconsistent with the school's policy about dress code.

From the teachers' perspective, maintaining discipline and enforcing school standards may have been viewed as an important responsibility. They may have believed that addressing perceived rule violations publicly would reinforce expectations and discourage similar behaviour among other students. As authority figures, they may also have felt pressure to demonstrate consistency in enforcing school rules and preserving order within the school community.

However, the students involved experienced the situation differently. Student X felt embarrassed and humiliated by being singled out in front of her peers. The situation became even more distressing when another student was slapped. Witnessing this intensified Student X's feelings of anger, injustice, and fear. Feeling overwhelmed and unable to remain in the situation, she decided to leave the school grounds and return home.

The teachers appeared to interpret her attempt to leave as a refusal to comply with school authorities. They may have been concerned that allowing a student to walk away from a disciplinary situation in front of the entire school could undermine their authority and encourage similar actions by others. As tensions increased, the teachers attempted to stop her from leaving. In the process, physical force was used, including restraining her with a bamboo stick and dragging her by her hair from the upper floor of the school building till the assembly ground.

The teachers may have believed they were preventing her from leaving the school premises and maintaining authority. However, these actions intensified the conflict and contributed to Student X's feelings of fear, humiliation, and powerlessness.

As the incident unfolded in front of the school community, Student X felt exposed, unsupported, and deeply distressed. She pleaded for help while many students and staff remained passive observers. Their silence may not necessarily have reflected agreement with what was happening; rather, some may have felt uncertain, intimidated, or unwilling to challenge authority figures in a public setting.

One student leader, Ajit, perceived the situation differently. He believed that the treatment of Student X had become excessive and unfair. Acting on this belief, he intervened and encouraged other students to support her and consider reporting the incident. However, concerns about potential consequences, including fear of conflict with school authorities or police involvement, led many students to withdraw their support despite their initial sympathy.

The incident also affected Student X's family. Her parents were called to the school and found themselves in a difficult position. Like many parents in communities where teachers are highly

respected, they may have felt limited in their ability to challenge the school's actions directly. Although the incident was not formally resolved, the support and understanding Student X received from her father helped her cope with the aftermath and continue her education.

In the years that followed, the experience left a lasting impact on Student X. It affected her sense of trust, belonging, and self-confidence. At the same time, the incident highlights broader issues concerning discipline, authority, communication, and the use of power within educational settings. It illustrates how a situation that may have begun as an attempt to enforce school rules escalated into a conflict that caused significant emotional harm and left lasting consequences for those involved.

From a benevolent third-party perspective, the conflict appears to have arisen not only from differing views about school rules but also from misunderstandings, power imbalances, emotional reactions, and the absence of constructive communication. While the teachers may have believed they were fulfilling their duty to maintain order and discipline, the methods they used had profound effects on Student X's well-being. The incident serves as an example of how authority, when exercised without sufficient empathy, dialogue, and respect for personal dignity, can unintentionally deepen conflict rather than resolve it.

Reflective writing falls under the essential tools for one whose heart burns for a process that needs time and order. It offers a pause, organisation within and a means to wait in a process that feels too slow, as if to compensate for a reality that cannot yet bear our dream.

Sarra Ben chaabane

Letter to a grandchild (yet to be born) about the COVID pandemic

Sweekriti Rai

My dearest granddaughter,

As I sit down to write this letter, thousands of memories are unfolding in my mind's eye, some pleasant, some distressing and some ordinary. With the fading hours, each has ripened into delayed appreciation, carrying a twinge of sweetness in every situation that life has sprung at me.

The COVID-19 pandemic was the bitterest episode of my life, yet it forced some breakthroughs that I would never have unearthed myself. I am still in the process of learning that grief and love are not a paradox but rather companions – things that must coexist together to know their separate value and impact. The house we once called home adapted to the new silence that arrived with the absence of a person.

As it is often emphasised that one only learns the value of something/someone when they have lost it, and it cannot be retrieved. My breakthrough came with the death of the matriarch of the family, my grandmother. As she held the house together, internally she was falling apart.

The pandemic not only affected our family but also the entire world. When you're locked up in isolation processing grief, the sorrows you feel get amplified. Humans are different, and the way they process things is different as well – when our whole family was grief-stricken, suddenly I started pondering about the whole idea of suffering – what does it mean? What is its purpose? Why does it happen?

For days, I fretted over a proper explanation or logic, convinced that suffering has a common denominator. Yet every conclusion and logic vaporised as quickly as it came. What only remained was the doubt; perhaps the possession of suffering isn't always equal; it is distributed differently among each soul, and its shape is altered according to the lives of different individuals.

Even now, I cannot tell you what suffering is; all I know is that it penetrated the concrete walls of our home, wore a different disguise for each of our family members, and left, carrying something that even today we still struggle to name.

The world fell into an eerie silence – you must know that silence has the power to wreck empires and crush civilisations. As for me, despair loomed in every room of our house, yet it felt as though I was the only one who was racked by this boulder of woes. Grief arrived all at once, yet I resisted. The thought of one's great- great grandmother and one's distant cousins seeing the vulnerable parts of me that I had carefully concealed all these years left a feeling of distaste.

This unwillingness is a trait that I harboured for the longest of times within me, just like dust gathering upon forgotten furniture. The longer we delay confronting it, the more of a labyrinth we build in and around our minds, until we can no longer find the exit.

You must be wondering if it was the COVID-19 virus that contaminated my grandmother's already deteriorating health, but that isn't the case here. She succumbed to liver cancer, the big C – a diagnosis.

Her diagnosis came during the earliest phase of the pandemic, a time when people thought the virus was nothing but a passing cloud. The government imposed travel restrictions, and each attempt to secure a treatment felt like a door was being quietly shut. Eventually, through lots of hardship, our cousins managed to take her to Delhi, the hotspot of the pandemic. Fortunately or unfortunately, I was in college in Delhi giving my exams for the second semester.

My days became a gruelling schedule where mornings began with playing catch-up with the textbooks, afternoons in the heavily sharp sterile disinfected hospital corridors and evenings with some time alone to contemplate the uncertainty that had prevailed upon me. It felt lonely and scary to be in a place far from home, seeing the one who had shaped and nurtured you ever since you were born collapse.

The loss of someone that I deeply loved and respected only made me a recluse and avoidant. An individual who is afraid to confront their true inner self and emotions. However, with the passing of years, I still look back on this loss as the moment that altered my whole being. Till today, I am unable to be emotionally honest with myself. If I want to set any goal, let it be this: Never let hiding your feelings be the norm, so much so that you deceive yourself in the mirror.

Nor do I want to sway you into thinking that each adversity that you go through in life bears a lesson. Some experiences just happen to us, yet even those deserve to be closely examined. Or the things that you felt are simply unexplainable. Ask questions to yourself how they changed you. Did it leave you unsettled or restless? Not all questions you ask will have answers, but learning to live beside the unanswered questions is valuable, which perhaps is the moment when understanding (oneself) begins.

I cannot tell you how you should live your life, for your life only belongs to you, and you will have your own set of problems that I will not know how to solve. I can only plead and hope that you are not afraid of what lies inside of you. Never conceal your sorrow, your warmth and your bliss until you can no longer recognise them. It took me years to understand this, and even now I am still learning the soft cadence of my soul.

You, my young one, have an entire life ahead of you and emotional clarity and honesty will only serve as the strongest companion that will help you unlock a life that's full and content.

It is not a safety net that will prevent you from grief, but it will prevent grief from turning into a strange and unknown entity that lives within you.

Years from now on, if you can't remember anything else from this letter, just remember this: let your joys be vibrant and wholehearted, your sorrows wept, and your love expressed to the ones you cherish while they are still alive to feel and hear it.

Rest, you need not worry, for life has its own quiet way to teach you what you require.

Always take care,

With all my affection,

Your loving Grandma



Reflective writing is an honest attempt to review one's own beliefs, values, thoughts, patterns etc., and to embrace and celebrate the healed, liberated, free and authentic self.

Lakshmi A V S

Letter to the parent of a student, sharing with them one's own fears and vulnerabilities as a teacher

Nandini Cardoso

Date: 4-07-26

Goa

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Mathur,

It has been an absolute delight to have Rehaan in my class. He is like a breath of fresh air and it's a joy to see how he lights up and comes alive when it is circle time. Despite his academic challenges, he takes the initiative to open discussions and ask questions - which I absolutely love.

But lately, I have been feeling I am failing him as a teacher because I cannot give him the attention and support he needs (as a twice 'exceptional student') in spite of having the training. I have begun to question myself "why has this gap appeared?" I think it has a lot to do with the curriculum and the pressures the school management puts on us teachers. We are expected to make the students into trophies that the management can flaunt while blaming us for shortfalls when we cannot deliver.

Yesterday, we were discussing about teachers and if we are losing relevance in an age of AI. Rehaan argued that teachers cannot lose relevance in an age of AI simply because AI makes things very impersonal and distant. He said students crave for human connection and warmth which cannot be provided by AI. To use his words verbatim: “AI can give us more knowledge but it cannot be our role model for feelings and emotions.”

And this is the Rehaan we all hold a single story about, woven around his academic inadequacies and behavioural challenges. I have often failed to notice his smile and sometimes, Rehaan himself. Rehaan and I have been locked into a power struggle so many times because of his inability to follow instructions. And when that happens I always question myself, “Am I being a good teacher?” I often wonder, whether with Rehaan in my class, I am being fair to him - especially on days when there are a lot of concerns raised about his behaviour. There are days when Rehan has seen me get angry and shout at the class and then he says to me, “Why do teachers tell students not to get angry and they themselves get angry and shout?” I had no answer but was silently impressed with his logical thinking. I guess it is this ability to think things through that helps him make better choices. [Thankfully, he is not an over thinker like his teacher.]

Rehaan and his wisdom help me navigate tough days when I question my life’s purpose and wonder how long I can hold on to being a ‘good teacher’. The term ‘good teacher’ is so subjective these days. It is no longer about subject matter expertise. I think it’s also the ability to teach from the heart. I wonder if I fit this description. These days, teaching is so much about “what if” and is therefore often driven by fear and compulsion. Teachers are overworked these days and yet, they are afraid to raise their voices, fearing the consequences. As a result, so many of us are losing our voices and creativity. But we expect the children to speak up and be fearless! Isn’t it paradoxical?

I am not sure how long I can continue working in an environment that dims my light. Maybe it’s time for me to pick up my dream of becoming a children’s author. But then what will happen to children like Rehaan if I quit? I hope they are not swallowed up by an unforgiving system.

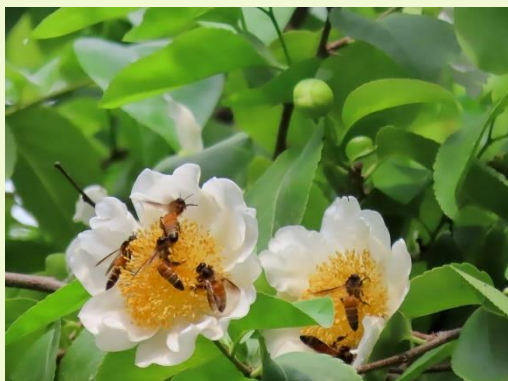
I do wish Rehaan the very best in life. I call him my brightest star. His friends and he are the reason that I am still able to walk through the gates everyday in spite of feeling empty and drained. Every day, Rehaan joyfully refills my cup with his empathy and positive energy. I hope the other teachers will be influenced by his energy and joy and we will have multiple stories about him.

My world is better and brighter because there is a Rehaan in it.

Grateful to be his teacher.

Warm regards and best wishes,

Nandini Ma’am.



Reflective writing, for me, is something that makes a person look at himself as a third person in a particular situation. This helps him gauge the situation and do what is needed rather than acting on compulsion or impulses.

Roshni Thapa

A letter to the teacher who influenced me the most

Lakshmi A V S

Dear Sir,

You had taught me Math in Class 7 and you were also our class teacher.

When I joined that school in Class 6, I was very overwhelmed by the big classrooms, large corridors, well-organized library and spacious playground, as I had come from a small school. I used to like talking and playing with friends, but I was not so focused on studies. After a terminal exam, you wrote my report card. In that, you described me as a mischievous child and also an intelligent girl. When I showed this to my father, he really liked the way you described me. My father's reaction made me feel that somewhere, you understood me and described me without judgment. I used to like your way of teaching math but after this episode, I liked learning math even more.

I did not realize at that time how much you had impacted me but now as I reflect back after becoming a teacher, I emulated you in writing the report cards of my own wards without being influenced by the prevalent didactic ways of writing about the students. I actually learnt the art of describing the students without prescriptions.

When I later started working in the Andhra Education Society School, I witnessed the Principal of the school praising my way of writing student report cards as exemplary in front of the other teachers.

At that time, I did not perceive this as your unique influence on me.

But today, as I am reflecting on the teachers who had influenced me, I suddenly realized that this way of report writing was definitely due to your influence. And for this, I am beholden and grateful to you. That quality in you permeated my work with students later.

I have not been conscious about this for a long time. I have realized only now that the proud feeling I have about my work is really owed to you.

With regards,

Lakshmi

Reflective writing, for me, is self-awareness and constructive criticism of my actions, thoughts, ideas, and learning process. To be able to analyse and think critically about what it means, how it affects me, and what I learn from it. It is not simply about describing what happened, but about having the courage to think more deeply and to agree with and disagree with my own actions.

Vishesh Tripathi



What is education?

Sarra Ben chaabane

When exploration happens from an early age, the tone is set and possibilities for the future are more open and hopeful for a broad way of perceiving the world around and our place in it.

Perhaps “education” is a word we should look into because when I hear this word, somehow an idea of formatting resonates with it for me. Perhaps “school” is a better word because there can be different types of school and there is a more open possibility as suggested by the expression “School of thought”. This does not mean that school requires an establishment, whether physical or moral but it may require awareness and direction. For sure, it requires vision.

It seems that “school” comes from the Greek word *skholē*, meaning “leisure”, apparently referring to the use of free time in opposition to the times individuals spent involved in physical work. *Skholē* was a time dedicated to the spirit it seems.

A school should be a place where children have a genuine choice and where exploration truly happens. But, at least today, exploration still needs to be organised somehow and children need to be guided for survival and for a healthy sense of belonging.

It is not clear to me where, when and especially, how, intervention is needed.

Each of us is part of a community. Life in communities needs organisation and this means that there will always be a certain amount of restriction but where to intervene and let the child

grow at the same time? In reality, children can be nasty and, depending on their family environment, which is a school by itself, blossoming may or may not happen.

So a school is a place of exploration with limited physical boundaries organised to allow and maintain a communal life.

Nature, sports, games should be part of everyday life as well as time for intellectual activities, critical thinking perhaps reading the news especially from the age of 12 years, I think. Arts and crafts definitely should be everywhere.

Learning is a wide idea and for this to happen, one of the goals of school should be to allow the child (or adult) to explore, notice outside and inside but inside most importantly without too much input initially at least. This is the foundation of learning.

It guides each of us to see where we are at, where we should start from and, especially, it lets us see the meaning of what we do and if there is one for us in certain areas of learning before we undertake the process.

Reflective Writing is like a cloud that has carried its weight for far too long. When it finally pours down, it nourishes the earth, bringing greenery, growth, and new life. Reflective writing transforms both our joys and our wounds into wisdom, helping us become better than we were yesterday. Though the scars remain but they no longer define us—they become the roots of healing, compassion, and new life.

Chandrika Limboo



Letter to a grandchild (yet to be born) about the COVID pandemic

Vishesh Tripathi

Dear Future Grandchild,

I don't know when you will read this letter or what kind of world you will be living in then. Maybe the COVID-19 pandemic will just be a chapter in your history books. But for us, it was something we actually lived through, and it is one of those experiences that I don't think I will ever forget.

When COVID-19 started spreading, everything changed within a few days. Schools were closed, roads became empty, and shops were shut, and suddenly staying inside the house became the safest thing to do.

At first, it felt strange and even a little exciting because it was something completely new. But as days turned into weeks and weeks into months, the reality slowly started sinking in. There

were moments when I felt frustrated, uncertain, and tired of doing the same things every day. None of us really knew how long it would last or what would happen next.

One incident that I still remember very clearly happened during the lockdown. Our Prime Minister asked everyone to come out to their balconies, windows, or rooftops at a particular time and clap or bang utensils to show appreciation for the people who were working on the frontlines. To be honest, when I first heard about it, I thought, "What a strange idea! How is this going to help?" It didn't really make much sense to me.

But when that day actually came, something unexpected happened. Almost the entire neighbourhood came out at the same time. Everywhere I looked, people were clapping, ringing bells, and banging utensils. For those few minutes, it felt like the whole country was connected through one simple act. Looking back now, I realise it was never really about making noise. It was about making people feel that they were not alone. During a time when everyone was isolated inside their homes, even something as simple as that brought a feeling of hope and togetherness.

That day taught me something important. In difficult times, happiness does not always come from big events. Sometimes the smallest things become the biggest source of joy. Under normal circumstances, we probably would have laughed at such an idea or ignored it completely. But during the pandemic, those small moments mattered a lot. They reminded us that even in difficult times, people could still come together and lift each other's spirits.

The lockdown also gave me something that I usually never had enough of—time. Time to slow down, think, reflect, and notice many things that I had ignored earlier. I started appreciating simple things like going outside, meeting friends, sitting together with people, going to school, or even having a normal conversation without worrying about anything. I realised that many things which I had taken for granted were actually a privilege.

One thing the pandemic taught me is that life can change much faster than we expect. We make so many plans thinking tomorrow will be just like today, but sometimes life has different plans for us. It also reminded me that no matter how independent we think we are, we all need other people. A phone call, a simple message, or someone asking, "How are you?" meant much more during those days than I had ever realised before.

Looking back, I also realise that I was always waiting for the difficult phase to end. But only later did I understand that those difficult days were changing me in ways that I couldn't see at that time. They taught me patience, gratitude, resilience, and helped me appreciate things that I had never paid much attention to before. Sometimes we only understand the value of an experience after we have gone through it.

I hope you never have to experience something like a global pandemic. But if life ever brings you into a difficult phase, don't be in a hurry to escape it. There may be lessons hidden inside it that you can only understand later. Keep going, take care of the people around you, and remember that even the smallest moments of hope and happiness can make a huge difference.

I know you are not even in this world while I am writing this letter. Still, I wanted to write it because some experiences should not just remain in history books. They should be remembered through the people who actually lived them. Years from now, you may know the dates, the numbers, and the facts about the pandemic, but I wanted you to know how it actually felt to

live through it. More than that, I wanted to pass on one lesson that stayed with me—that difficult phases are not only meant to test us, they also shape us in ways we may not realise at that moment. If this letter helps you face a difficult time in your own life with a little more patience and hope, then I feel it has served its purpose.

Take care of yourself and the people around you.

With love,

Your Grandfather

To me, reflective writing is chewing on the cud of my experiences—returning to them again and again until I absorb the essence of what they have to teach me. It is in this quiet process of revisiting and making meaning that I grow inwardly, evolving from who I was into who I am becoming.

Nithya Karthikeyan



My Reflections

Neeraja Raghavan

A course which was triggered by a lockdown has now reached its fourteenth run.

With each batch, there are newer and newer learnings.

This group gave me quite a few surprises.

Firstly, it was the only batch so far which had some members asking for more challenging assignments. It is a timely wake up call for me to revisit the level at which I had originally pitched the course, and as one member suggested, insert a few optional questions or assignments that demand deeper reflection.

It was also a batch where I felt hard put to draw out every member in class. This was the second lesson: there is a tightrope walk which the Course Instructor has to walk, with some wishing that I had 'gently called out' the silent participants (now, how one earth does one do that gently?!) while others suggested that I explicitly allow non-verbal participation. In one of the very early batches, I recall being very pleasantly surprised by the deep (written) reflections of a teacher who was totally silent in class. Obviously, I have forgotten this lesson somewhere down this road of fourteen course offerings.

Thirdly, this is the first batch that drew my attention to the importance of purposefully getting members to bond with each other. I have, so far, left it to members to engage (or not engage) with each other, respecting the boundaries of adults – or so I thought! But the desire to feel a sense of belonging to a class – especially when it ran for one hour weekly across ten weeks – is an understandable one. Infusing the reflective sessions every now and then with some humour, thus allowing members to talk to each other light-heartedly, is of course one way. Surely there are many other ways of preventing the format of the class from freezing into one rigid and stiff structure.

I am left pondering over these three learnings: and I thank this batch for giving me some valuable lessons.

If the course improves on even one of these scores, the credit will go to each one of you! Thank you!

