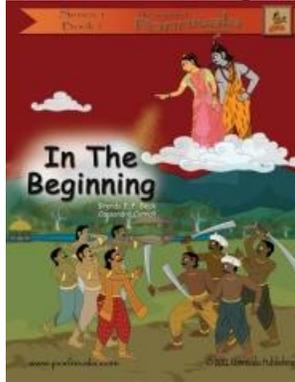


MINI FOLKTALE THEMES

(Episode-by-Episode Teaching Ideas)

Resource Materials: Graphic comic books, ipad books, + videos)

VISIT our SHOP: Choose the retelling that works best for you



Episode 1 – In The Beginning (Sub Stories a, b, c, d and e)

1-a) THE WOMAN WHO HAD A GRAND VISION

The great goddess Parvati creates 9 brothers who then work hard to bring a lovely and very fertile area under the plough.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone with a grand vision? Do you dream of creating something big yourself?

COMMENTARY: Often we have a dream or vision of something we would like to see happen... something grand and good. Sometimes if we work on a dream we can make it come true (for this story we can take the goddess's perspective... and think like she does). Often we need the support of others to help make a grand dream come true. In the above story it is the husband of the goddess (Lord Shiva) who gives her helpful psychological support. Many times a parent, a spouse, a sibling or a good friend plays the role of advisor in our own human lives... helping our own dreams advance through supportive words and actions. Shiva gave Parvati the courage to take a bold (and untried) step forward. She would create a new group of human beings.

1-b) HARD WORK WINS REWARDS

(OR THE REFUGEE WHO FOUND SUCCESS IN A NEW LAND)

Drought forces the lead farmer to leave his lands and migrate to find work in a land where there have been good rains. He is successful and the king is pleased. He is rewarded by the king with a land grant where he can homestead and start again.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you have a story about someone in your family or your neighbourhood who started out with very little but worked hard and achieved much in the end?

COMMENTARY: This story is similar to the one above. An initial hardship causes dislocation, but then a person's hard work in a new land (or new area) becomes recognized and praised. The powerful people there reward the skilled and dedicated worker and give him or her the assets needed to build a future independent life on. In this case the work is physical labor, but the king understands that the immigrant has brought more than this to his country.... The hero has literally brought a new abundance and prosperity to the king's lands through applying his fine work ethic, demonstrating to all who know

him his dedication and positive spirit. He works as an ally and for the good of the king, not just for personal reward.... Though it is a personal reward that is gifted to him in the end.

1-c) **THE CLOUD WITH A SILVER LINING**

Lord Vishnu creates a contest. The skilled farmers win and the previous residents (artists and crafts people) loose. Instead of controlling land they must now rely on their well-known creative abilities as “makers of things.” They become carpenters, stone masons, ironsmiths, goldsmiths and the like.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you even had a disappointment that quickly became an opportunity to embrace something not thought of before... something new and good?

COMMENTARY: This contest may seem “unfair” in that Lord Vishnu takes the side of the new comers and helps them obtain rights to land that previously belonged to others. The former residents are “pushed aside” (and even embarrassed) in this process. However, this can easily happen in real life... a person loses a contest for a job, does not get admission to the school of their choice, or misses out on a good business deal. Sometimes an actual war forces people to leave their lands and abandon their livelihood. But, when we look at this event from the perspective of the artisans, we find that the outcome has several good (if initially hidden) benefits. For one, the artisans are now assured of a living, as the farmers enter a contract (or covenant) to give them a generous amount of food for each plough or other implement they make. Even more important, the unfortunate loss of land rights opens up a new and promising profession for this entire group of people. Now they will become the creators, the artisans responsible for shaping useful and beautiful new things. This is like finding a new career or a new skill,... a trade one would never have developed if an initial period of hardship and dislocation had not been experienced. It is also like “leaving the family homestead,” perhaps as a younger son who does not inherit land, and having to strike out on one’s own. Many fine artists, poets and entrepreneurs have this kind of personal story to tell... something that “pushed” them into discovering their own personal inner creative strength... a skill they didn’t initially know they had!

1-d) **THINK TWICE BEFORE YOU ACT (OR DO YOUR HOMEWORK!)**

The king’s own lands are brought to ruin by a great drought. He lets loose his cows in hopes they will wander and find food elsewhere. They have tags on their necks and so their story can be understood. But the lead farmer is horrified to find “wild animals” eating his sugarcane. Without proper research he orders a fence built that has sharp spikes. The sacred cows die trying to jump over this fence to appease their hunger. They die and go to heaven where they complain to the great Lord Shiva. Shiva is angered by their story and curses the lead farmer’s family to seven generations of barrenness.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Have you ever made a big mistake because you didn’t ask enough questions before you decided to act?

COMMENTARY: This is a story about not taking sufficient care before deciding on a course of action. The farmer did not research the situation; he did not actually see a cow eating his sugarcane. He did not “read” any of the obvious “tags” they were carrying that explained their plight. As a result the farmer suffered a serious “curse” (an impediment or setback) that threatened to trouble his family for many years. There is a moral here: “Think before you act. Find out what impacts your decision could have on the innocent or the disadvantaged, before rushing into a decision.” The world has a way of “tripping you up” when you do something that is unfair to others, especially to those who are already weak and who are suffering. (There are plenty of modern examples in the financial world, such as a lending institution taking advantage of the poor by charging high interest rates or an investment salesman offering deceitful promises of prosperity later in return for handing over un-secured cash now). Another tack to take is to talk about taking measures for “personal protection” that could hurt innocent others unintentionally (carrying a knife, bullying etc.) Also note the “contrastive” outcome for story 2a, about the same farmer. The two stories can be considered together.

1-e) **THE GIFT OF A CHILD**

The wife of a large landowner is barren because her husband has been cursed by the gods for his careless actions. The wife learns of this problem and pleads with Lord Shiva for help. Finally this great Lord promises to help her overcome her barrenness.

SUGGESTED DISCUSSION TOPICS & EXERCISES: Do you know someone who very much wanted a child but couldn't have one naturally, and then had a happy surprise when one arrived unexpectedly?

COMMENTARY: The problem of barrenness has always been with humankind. It is a common modern issue too. Many couples seek help when they find their efforts do not easily lead to pregnancy. Often the woman is blamed (especially in earlier times, before the advent of scientific testing that nowadays can usually assign the problem to a biological barrier carried within one partner or the other). In a way this sub-story is “radical” for its time (though barrenness is a common motif in Indian mythology more generally). It is radical in a “social” sense because clearly the male half of the partnership is at fault. But his wife dearly wants children and so she works hard to find help. At last she is granted a child by the gods. This is often the feeling “expressed” by women who use fertility clinics. Their new and sudden ability to conceive seems, indeed, like a gift from above. But now the story takes another surprise twist. The gift from Lord Shiva does not create a normal biological pregnancy. Instead he grants the story heroine the chance to adopt a “magical baby.” Again the story is “socially stunning” because the gods endorse adoption from an “unknown” source. This is very modern, as most women who adopt these days do not know who the child’s parents were, and are often legally prevented from obtaining this knowledge. The story illustrates how an essentially “blind” adoption procedure becomes a “blessing,” and a reason for celebration. Indeed this “blind adoption” is the god-sanctioned solution to a terrible problem for this barren family. The outcome gives them great happiness. See the opening of Episode 2 to learn about where the baby was found and how joyous this outcome is for this lucky family.