

My Experiments with Truth

by M.K. Gandhi

Pre-reading Task

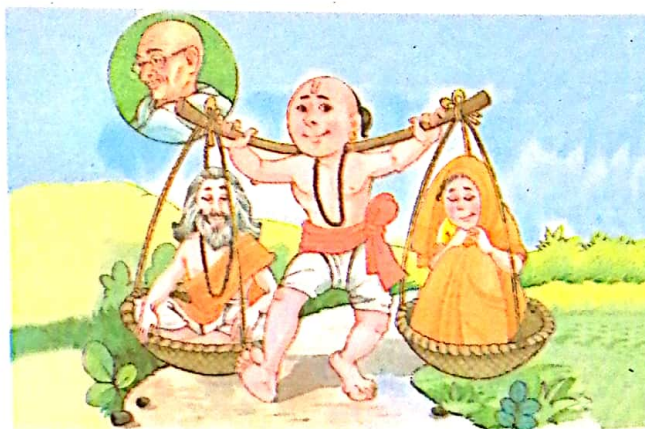
To err is human. All human beings make mistakes. But the best of the lot learn from their mistakes and improve.

1. Have you ever made any mistake?
2. What did you learn from it?
3. What do you do when you find a drawback or weakness—
 - (i) try to improve yourself?
 - (ii) try to forget it and don't care at all?
 - (iii) try to hide it from others?
 - (iv) try to lay the blame on others?

Now read this extract from Gandhiji's autobiography *My Experiments with Truth*.

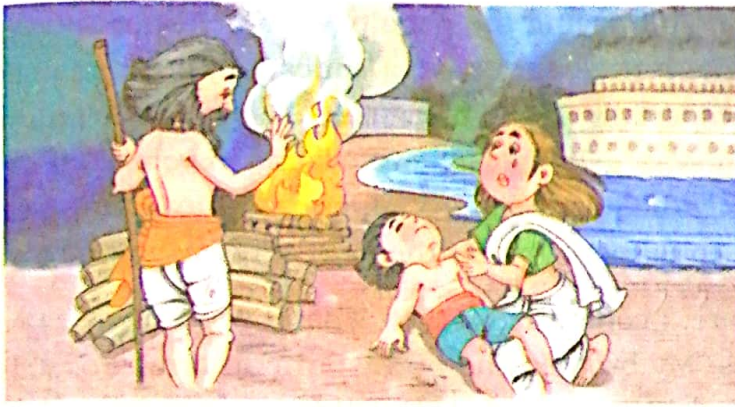
I must have been about seven when I was put into a primary school and I can well recollect those days, including the names and other particulars of the teachers who taught me. I do not remember having ever told a lie, either to my teachers or to my schoolmates. I used to be very shy and avoided all company. My books and my lessons were my sole companions. To be at school at the stroke of the hour and to run back home as soon as the school closed—that was my daily habit.

Two incidents belonging to this period have always **clung** to my memory. As a rule, I had a distaste for any reading beyond my school books but somehow my eyes fell on a book purchased by my father. It was *Shravana Pitribhakti Nataka* (a play about Shravana's devotion to his parents). I read it with **intense** interest. One picture in the book showed Shravana carrying his parents on



clung: held on closely

intense: deep

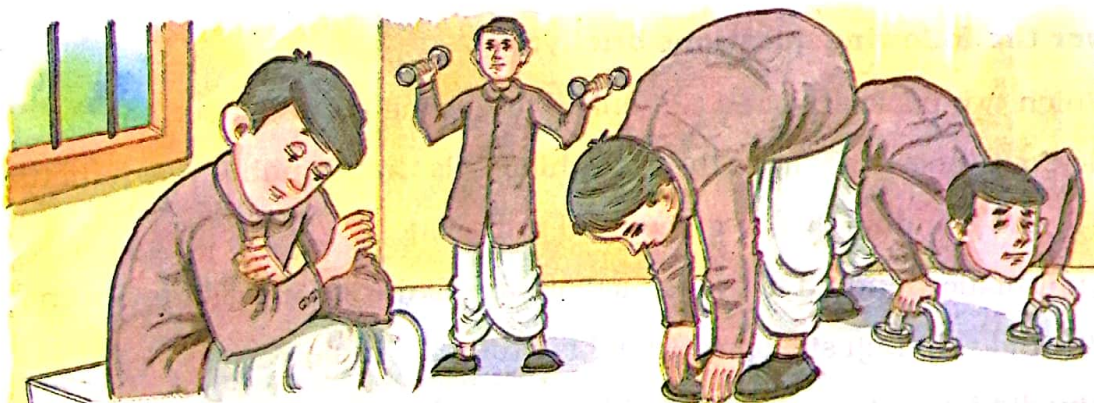


pilgrimage. The book and the picture left an undying impression on my mind. 'Here is an example for you to copy,' I said to myself.

Another similar play—*Harishchandra*—captured my heart. 'Why should not all be truthful like Harishchandra?' was the question I asked myself day and night.

To follow truth and to go through all **ordeals** Harishchandra went through was the one ideal it inspired in me.

There was another such incident during the time when I was in the seventh standard. Dorabji Gimi, the headmaster, was very popular among the boys, as he was a disciplinarian, a man of method and a good teacher. He had made gymnastics and cricket compulsory and I disliked both. I never took part in any exercise before they were made compulsory. I then had the false notion that gymnastics had nothing to do with education. Today I know that physical training is as important as mental training. The reason for my dislike for gymnastics was my keen desire to serve as nurse to my father. As soon as the school closed, I would hurry home and begin serving him. Now it happened that one Saturday, I had to go from home to the school for gymnastics at four o'clock in the afternoon. I had no watch, and the clouds deceived me. When I reached the school all the boys had already left. The next day, on being asked the reason for absence, I told Mr Gimi what had happened. He refused to believe me. I was convicted of lying! That deeply pained me. How was I to prove my innocence? There was no way. I learnt that a man of truth must also be a man of care. This was the first and last instance of my carelessness in school.



pilgrimage: a journey to a holy place

ordeals: painful experiences

But there is another neglect for which I am still paying the penalty. I do not know when I got the notion that good handwriting was not a necessary part of education, but I retained it until I went to England. When later, especially in South Africa, I saw the beautiful handwriting of lawyers and young men, I was ashamed of myself and repented of my neglect. I saw that bad handwriting was regarded as a sign of imperfect education. I tried later to improve mine, but it was too late. I could never repair the neglect of my youth.

There is another incident which I must share. I committed a theft when I was fifteen. I had run into a debt of about twenty-five rupees. My brother had on his arm an armlet of solid gold. I stole a bit of gold out of it and the debt was cleared. But this became more than I could bear. I resolved never to steal again. I also made up my mind to confess it to my father. But I did not dare to speak. Not that I was afraid of my father beating me. I was afraid of the pain that I should cause him. I decided at last to write out the confession. In this note not only did I confess my guilt, but I also asked adequate punishment for it. I also promised never to steal in future. With trembling hands I handed the confession to my father. He read it, and pearl-drops trickled down his cheeks, wetting the paper. Those pearl drops of love cleansed my heart, and washed my sin away. A clean confession, combined with a promise never to commit the sin again is the purest type of repentance. This incident, for me, was an object lesson in 'Ahimsa'.



I Understanding the Story

A. Answer the following questions briefly:

1. Which two books inspired Gandhiji a lot during his childhood?
2. Pick out the extract from the text which tells that Gandhiji was punctual.
3. Why did Gandhiji dislike games and gymnastics?
4. What made Gandhiji feel ashamed of himself during his visit to South Africa?
5. Why did Gandhiji steal gold from his brother's armlet?
6. Why did he confess his guilt to his father? How did he make the confession?
7. What, according to Gandhiji, is the purest type of repentance?

II HOTS

- A. Explain: He who is truthful will do no evil.
- B. Confessing one's mistake to one's parents needs great mental strength. Would you describe Gandhiji as a brave boy?

III Life Skills

'Physical training is as important as mental training.' Discuss with your partner the importance of physical training in life.

IV Values

- A. Every incident of Gandhiji's life taught him something. Given below are some incidents from his life. Read these incidents and write the values that Gandhiji imbibed from them.

	Incident	Values Imbided
1.	He saw the picture of Shrivana carrying his parents on pilgrimage	
2.	He read the play <i>Harishchandra</i> .	
3.	His headmaster convicted him of lying.	
4.	He observed the good handwriting of people in South Africa.	
5.	He stole gold and confessed it to his father.	

- B. 'We become the books we read.' How far is reading good books instrumental in building good character? Discuss.

V Writing Skills

- A. The chapter 'My Experiments with Truth' is a collection of Gandhiji's real-life incidents and experiences at school, which taught him what one should or should not do at school.

List at least five things that you think a student should do while at school. Also write at least five things that a student should not do at school.

1. A student should _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

1. A student should not _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

- B. Gandhiji's father experiences mixed feelings for his son on receiving the confession note. He pens down his feelings in the form of a diary entry. Imagine yourself in his place and write a diary entry in about 80-100 words.

About the Author

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, lovingly called the 'Father of the Nation', was born on October 2, 1869, at Porbandar, a small town on the western coast of India. He was born in a middle class family of *Vaishya* caste. Revered the world over, he is known to his many followers as *Mahatma*, or 'the great-souled one'. His concept of active non-violent resistance propelled the Indian struggle for independence. *The Essential Gandhi*, *All Men are Brothers* and *Freedom's Battle* are some of his popular books.

