



STORIES

from City as Lab

Life in the Time of COVID-19

Part 2

2020-2021





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Preface

2020 came upon us in the most unexpected way. It brought sickness, death, grief and distance. It blatantly revealed, if not widened, existing inequities with respect to health care, nutrition, sanitation, employment and education.

2020 also forced us to re-consider our priorities. To examine who is truly “essential” for the smooth functioning of society. To acknowledge our own privileges. And to appreciate and value the work of scientists more than ever before.

Everyone has a story to tell about 2020 – the year of the pandemic. The year the world encountered COVID-19.

Everyone.

Students, teachers, doctors, patients, parents, delivery persons, sanitation workers, business owners, nurses, ward boys, auto-rickshaw drivers, police personnel, NGO founders, animal lovers, artists, daily-wage labourers, farmers, senior citizens... every one.

However, not all stories are told. Or heard.

Our story project for CaL this year asked students to tell the stories of ordinary people. The selected stories published in this two-part book give voice to those whose voices are typically left out of popular media. These stories capture glimpses of life in the time of COVID-19 – as told by 6th to 9th grade students from Mumbai and Pune.

Students interviewed the protagonists and wrote their stories in one of four formats – a first person narrative, a journalistic feature story, a picture book or a graphic novel. Over the course of five months, under the guidance of their teachers, students became authors, illustrators, journalists, researchers and editors.

The nine stories in these two books showcase empathy, courage, hard work, gratitude, loss and optimism. Not all of these stories have happy endings... but life goes on. And so above all, these stories showcase a relentless human spirit for survival.

We thank all the students and teachers who participated in the City as Lab story project this year and congratulate the teams whose stories are published here!



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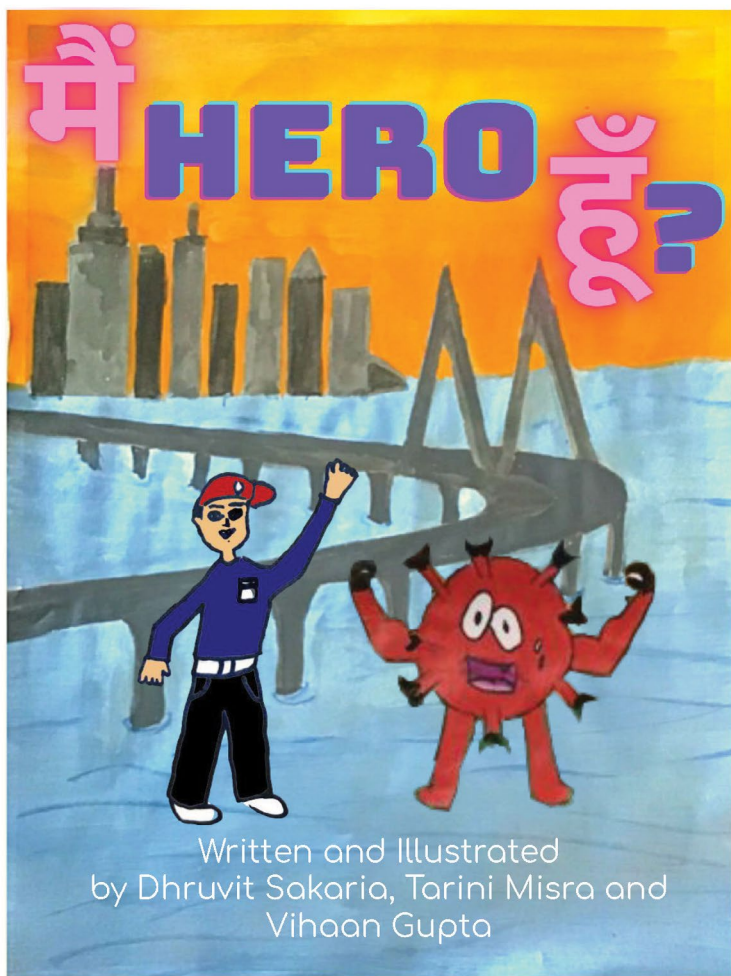
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Main Hero Hoon? - A Picture book

The Cathedral and John Connon Middle School

Written and Illustrated by: Dhruvit Sakaria,
Tarini Misra and
Vihaan Gupta

Mentor: Ms. Kanika James



Written and Illustrated
by Dhruvit Sakaria, Tarini Misra and
Vihaan Gupta

Rationale

When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, and India was forced into a state of lockdown, we were not able to purchase common necessities such as groceries, pharmaceuticals and technological devices from retail shops.

Mumbai was the worst-hit city in India with more than 18% of the country's total cases and 55% of Maharashtra's total cases. When we were informed about this project, a story about delivery men was not the first one that came to our mind. We didn't know anything about their lives and thought the topic would be altogether boring.

However, as we progressed and interviewed various delivery workers we got a deeper insight into their daily experiences and it inculcated a new and developed understanding of the lives of delivery men and their importance in ours.

We feel that the people of Mumbai need to know, understand and appreciate the importance of delivery people, like we have. They are the helping hands each one of us need in our daily lives, specially through the lockdown, and they make sure that our products reach not only with care but also within a short period of time.

As The Wire, an opinion and research based website quoted, "In the days that followed India's national lockdown, delivery workers for app-based food delivery services like Swiggy and Zomato, which were identified as an essential service in many states, have been instrumental in ensuring social distancing, work from home and a sense of normalcy during the lockdown."

During this lockdown, many people have had their birthdays and celebrated many festivals. Due to the lockdown, we have all missed celebrating them the way we did every year. We have been able to exchange birthday cakes, sweets and gifts for all these special occasions only with the help of the various delivery services.

Social distancing is the only way to drastically cut down these numbers. We had to stop leaving our houses, but this was very hard to manage as we all needed to buy essentials. This is where the delivery people came into the picture. They have been risking their own safety so that we can get all that we need, without leaving our homes and putting ourselves and others at risk. Not all heroes wear capes-the delivery men have left no stone unturned in fulfilling their responsibilities.

Karan left his **tiny** home in Mira Road and set off for his company warehouse in the **suburbs** of Bandra, astride his **SCOOTER** just as the **SUN** rose. It was another **ORDINARY** day for him, with the same

ORDINARY wearing-out schedule. *Karan* went inside and collected the **PARCELS** to deliver. On his way out he asked his boss politely, "Sahab, **MASK** kab milega?????" His boss **denied** his statement

saying, "**NAHI**, ek aur nahi."

Karan then exclaimed "My previous one tore! How do I go outside?

It's not **SAFE**."

His **QUESTION** was left unanswered as his boss gestured for him to carry on.

Challenge 1:
Difficult Boss

WAREHOUSE

Left without another option, *Karan* took out his handkerchief and tied it around his face, hoping he would stay safe. As he headed towards his **SCOOTER**, a **DARK SHADOW** fell on him making him wonder what colossal object was blocking the **SUNLIGHT**. A hand appeared, and then one **SLIMY** finger signalled for him to come close.



Now we, as readers would be APPALLED at this sight but something drew *Karan* to the obtrusive figure. It was a

DeFormED germ-like figure.

The figure grunted,
"Greetings!
I am THE

**C
O
VIRUS
O
N
A**



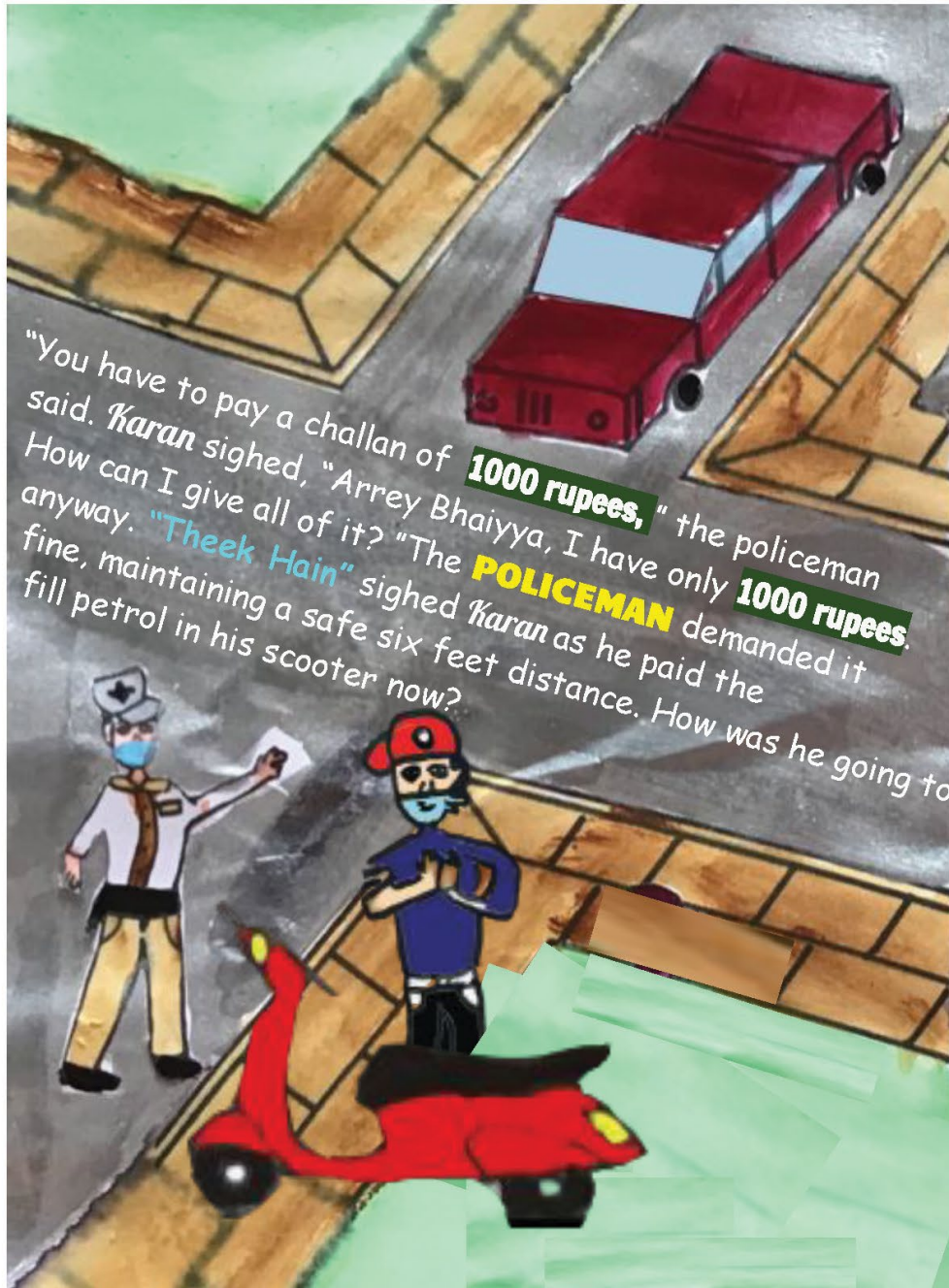
TERRIFIED at the sight of the **ferocious Monster**, **Karan** jumped on his **SCOOTER** and **rode off**, not realising that he had left his **Helmet** behind. Just to be safe, he applied some sanitiser on his hands. And immediately the coronavirus shrunk and ran away. He turned a corner and then reached his **DESTINATION**.



He delivered his first **PARCEL** and continued on his way. As he was nearing the next location, a **POLICEMAN** standing on the corner threw him a **DIRTY LOOK** and signalled for him to pull over. "**Helmet** kahan hain? You **DELIVERY MEN** always take us for granted."



**Challenge 2 :
Hefty Fine**



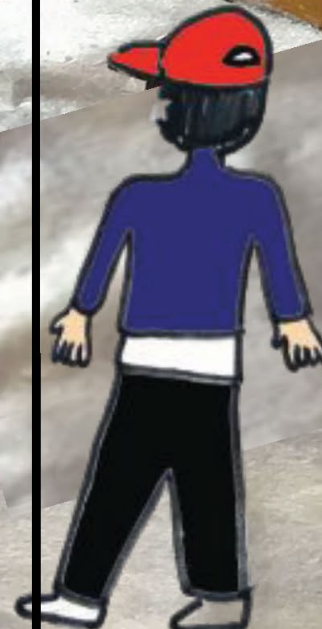
He stopped at the building **gate** in Peddar Road. While delivering the **PARCELS**, Karan saw his customer's **ANGRY** face.

"Why haven't my other items arrived??" the **stone-hearted** customer said, "Always a mistake!"

"**Sorry** sir. Aapka **PARCEL** kal tak deliver ho jayega." *Karan* replied.



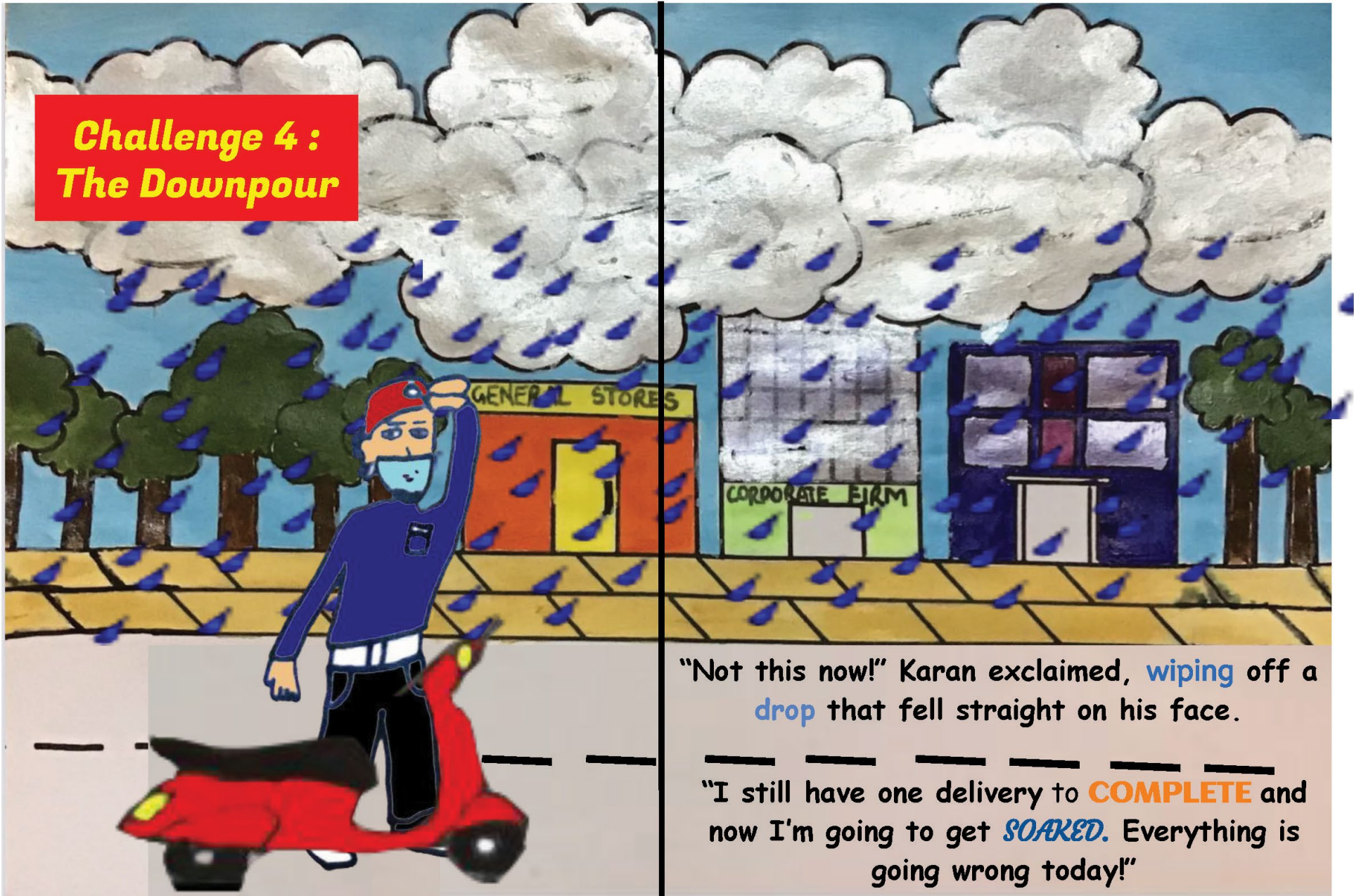
Challenge 3 : Dissatisfied Customer

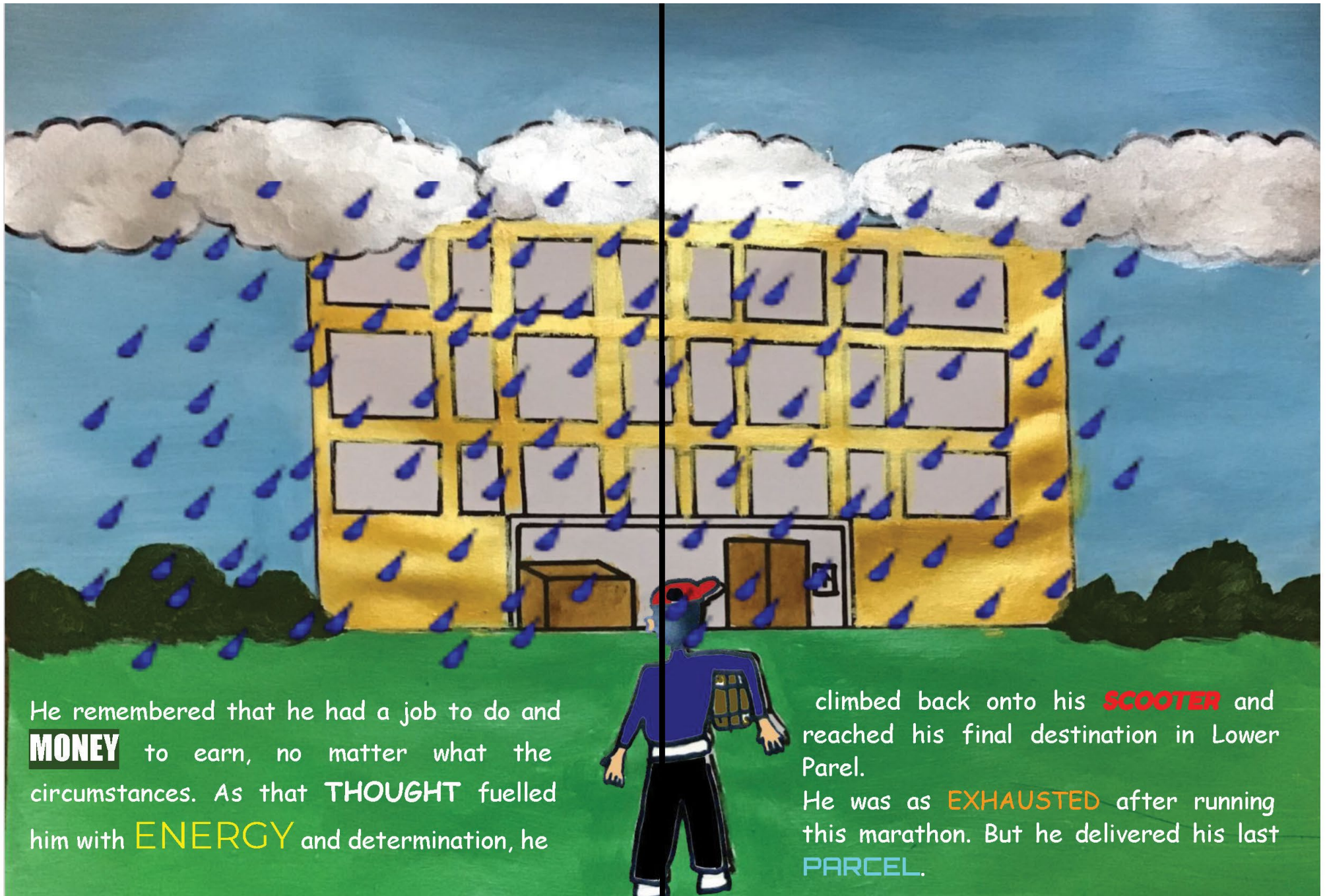


He wished that his customers would be **GRATEFUL** for what he was doing for **MUMBAI**.

"Someone's having a bad day," said the familiar **RASPY** voice of the **germ**. "I'm here to make it **WORSE!**"

Challenge 4 : The Downpour





He remembered that he had a job to do and **MONEY** to earn, no matter what the circumstances. As that **THOUGHT** fuelled him with **ENERGY** and determination, he

climbed back onto his **SCOOTER** and reached his final destination in Lower Parel.

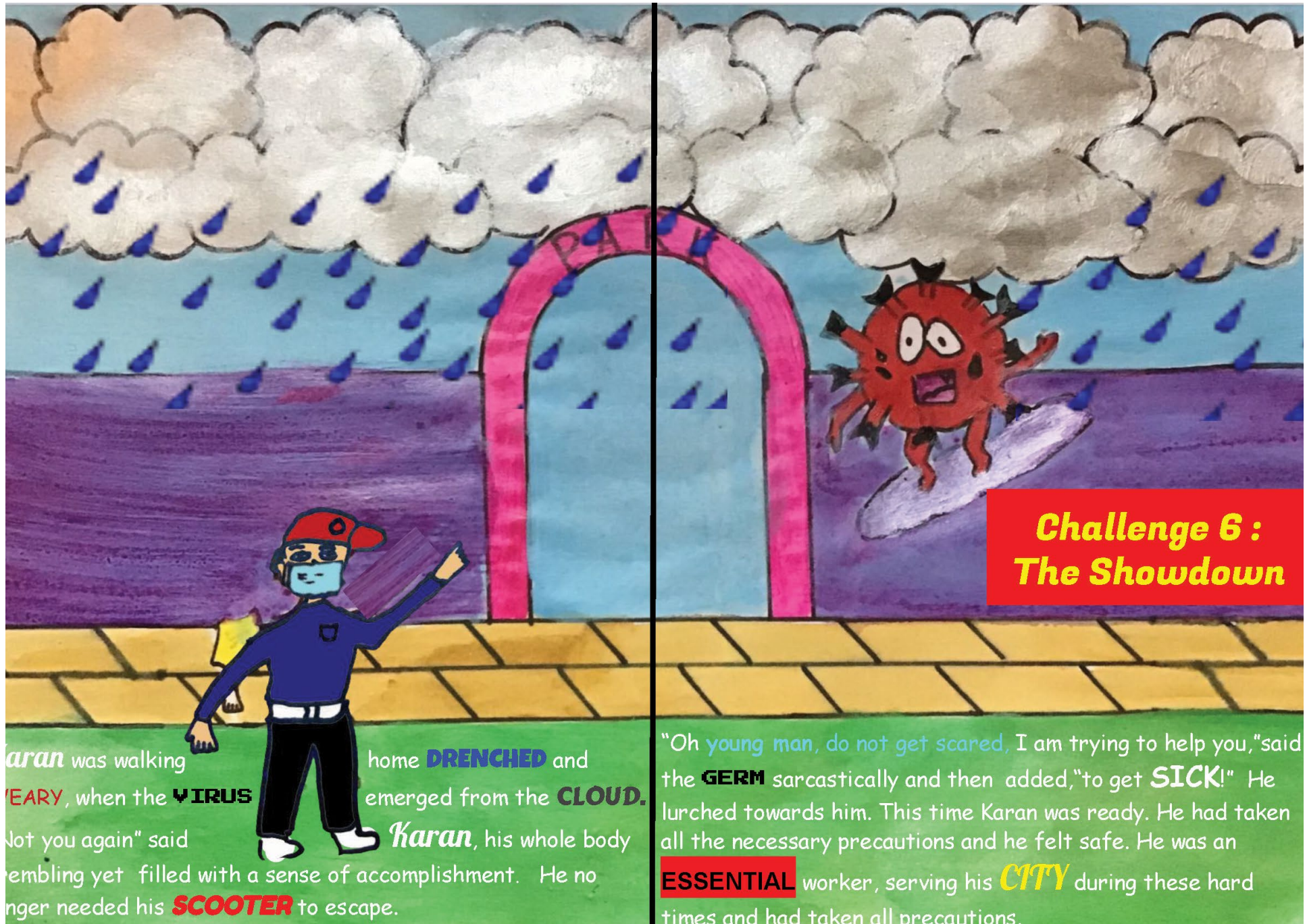
He was as **EXHAUSTED** after running this marathon. But he delivered his last **PARCEL**.

As *Karan* left the building, his engine began spluttering. His **SCOOTER** was almost out of petrol. Just what he needed! Karan asked a **TAXI DRIVER** where the nearest petrol pump was. Two kilometres away! He rode off sighing.

"**500 rupees**" the man at the petrol pump said. He reached into his pocket and then remembered that he was out of **MONEY**. What now? He would have to walk all the way home and lug his now-useless **SCOOTER** too!

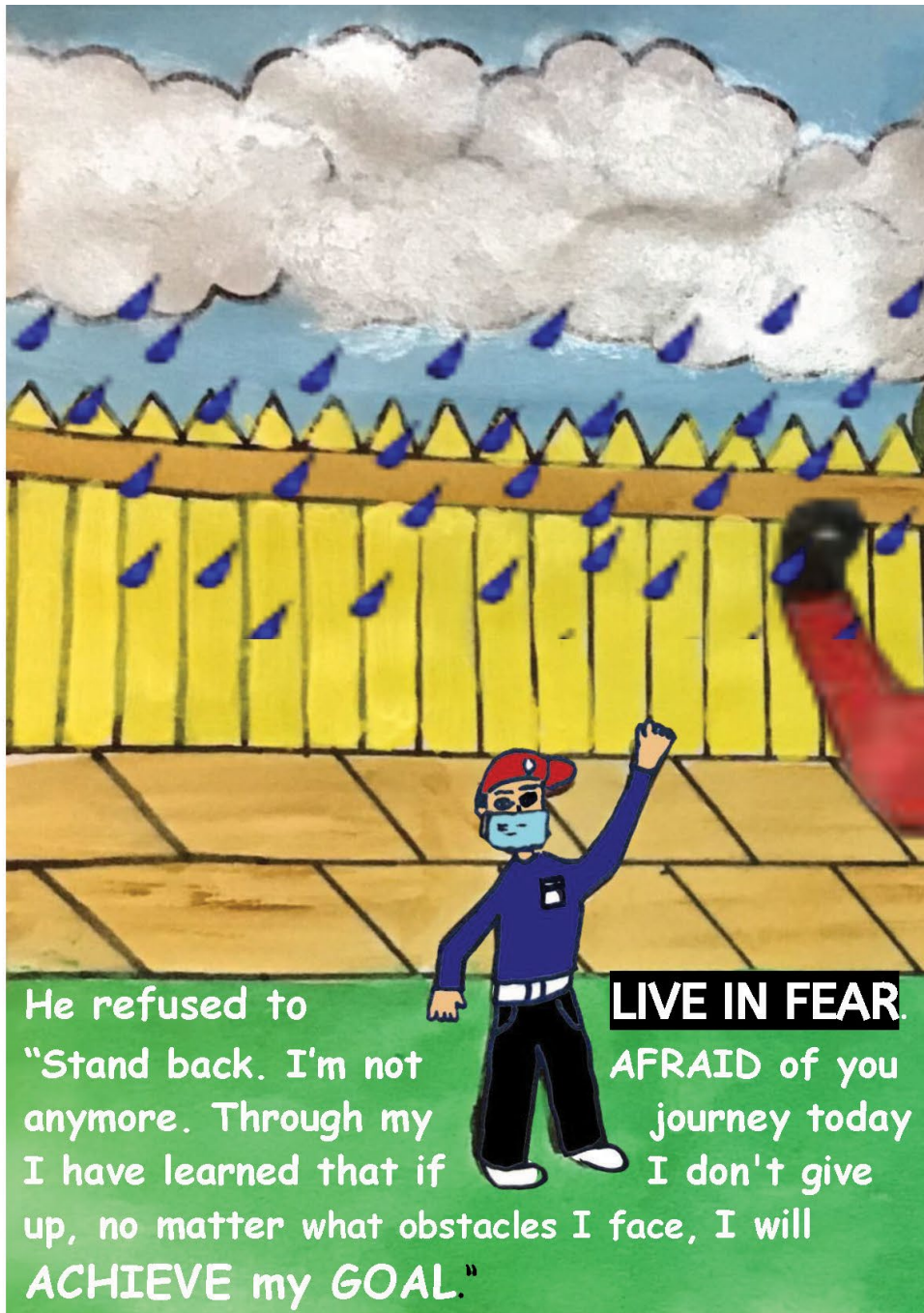


**Challenge 5 :
Broke**



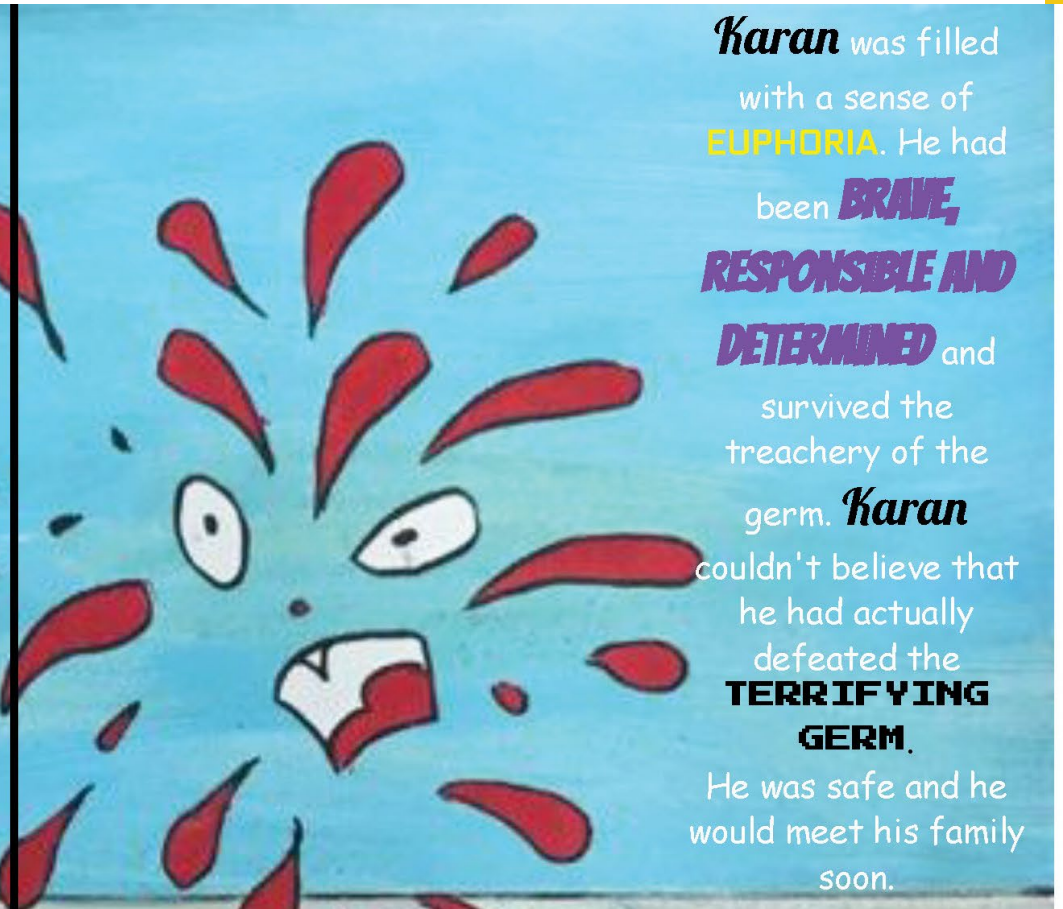
Karan was walking home **DRENCHED** and **WEARY**, when the **VIRUS** emerged from the **CLOUD**. "Not you again" said Karan, his whole body trembling yet filled with a sense of accomplishment. He no longer needed his **SCOOTER** to escape.

"Oh young man, do not get scared, I am trying to help you," said the **GERM** sarcastically and then added, "to get **SICK**!" He lurched towards him. This time Karan was ready. He had taken all the necessary precautions and he felt safe. He was an **ESSENTIAL** worker, serving his **CITY** during these hard times and had taken all precautions.





Dear reader, the **GERM** could not harm Karan as he had followed all the **safety measures** and **protocols** set by the **GOVERNMENT**. The **GERM** did not realise that and tried to come closer to him and scare him. As soon as he touched Karan something happened. He **GREW** and **GREW** and just kept **GROWING** and then **BANG!** He exploded in a wisp of **SMOKE**, taking along with him all the gloominess of the surroundings and clearing the **DARK CLOUDS** in the sky.

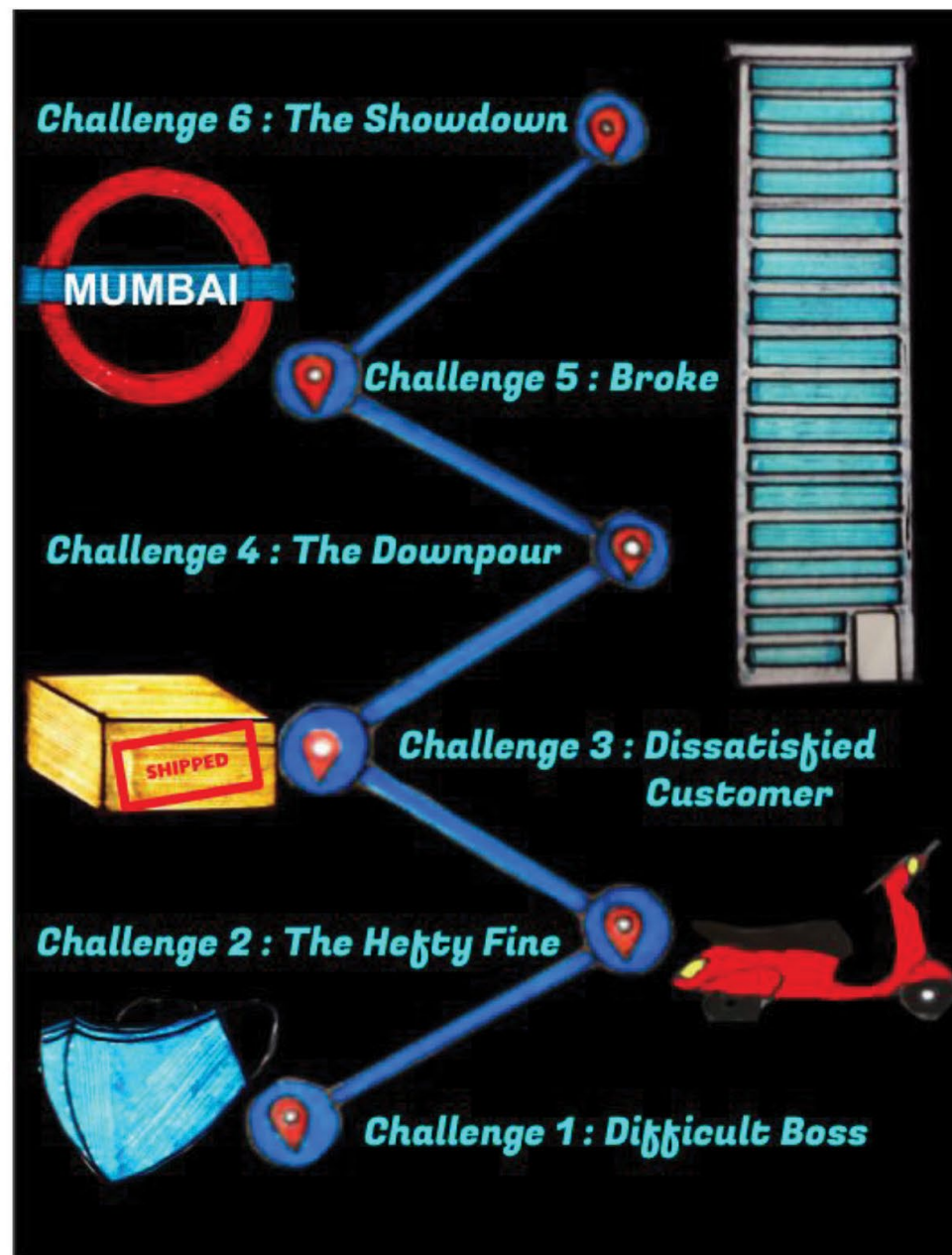


Karan was filled with a sense of **EUPHORIA**. He had been **BRAVE**, **RESPONSIBLE AND DETERMINED** and survived the treachery of the germ. **Karan** couldn't believe that he had actually defeated the **TERRIFYING GERM**. He was safe and he would meet his family soon.

Karan lugged his **SCOOTER** home, proud that he had overcome his **FEARS**. *Karan* and his family looked at the last rays of the setting **SUN** as it **SHIMMERED** upon the **BLUE WATERS**. A few meaningful words crossed his mind. "Running away from our problems is not the solution. **Being bold, fearless and believing in ourselves** is what makes us succeed. No vaccine can eliminate the **VIRUS** of doubt, only our inner **STRENGTH** can."



Karan decided that he would continue to serve his city, regardless of the consequences and earn enough money to provide for his family and pursue his dream job one day. After all he was in **MUMBAI**, the *City of Dreams*. *Karan* was proud of what he had achieved that day. He looked towards the **SUN** as it touched the horizon and said to himself, "**Mein Hero Hoon!**"



The End

Reflections

“Throughout the process of planning, writing, illustrating, and creating this book, I learnt a lot and enjoyed myself immensely. I learnt how to work with new people and trust them to do things their way. I was able to give my input, while listening to my friends’ perspectives as well. As a result, we could create a book that truly reflects each one of us. I loved trying something new and letting my creativity flow. I realised how hard it is to write a book from scratch, but working with a trustworthy team made it a lot easier. I was not only able to understand the importance of delivery workers in the community, but also feel grateful for all that they do for us. I would like to thank CaL and my school for giving me this wonderful opportunity to share my contribution in a creative and persuasive manner.”

“Throughout the making of this book, I learnt that if we cooperate and work together we can persevere through difficult situations and face them. I also learnt how to use new apps and developed on my social skills as, this was the first time, I got to interview someone during the pandemic and came to know about their lives. It was truly an enriching experience. I would like to thank CaL for this opportunity. They really helped in the progression and formatting of our book and provided us with regular feedback to complete this humongous but enthralling task. It helped me improve my grammar as I polished the use of figurative language which I’m sure will help me in my academics. Most of all I also came to realise the struggle of authors and illustrators throughout the world and would really like everyone to appreciate their work.”

“This book has taught me that when there are more people with ideas from a different perspective your output turns out to be better. When we pick a book, we might like or dislike it but when an author picks up his or her book, it’s not just a book but a memory. Each word symbolizes something, maybe a learning or an experience. This project has given me a new definition of teamwork. I would differ from the old adage ‘Too many cooks spoil the broth’. When you have someone else working with you, you get that support, you can rely on that person for anything and a deep sense of trust and respect is built. I’m not going to ever regret this, no matter the difficulties and the last moment pressure. I’m really grateful to CaL and my school for giving me this opportunity.”

Be a Warrior, Not a Carrier - Picture Book

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High School, Baner, Pune

Authors: Sayee, Sarvesh, Jay & Shriya, Illustrator: Sarvesh

Mentor: Ms. Sona Kapoor Ma'am

Rationale

Social responsibility is not only important in the corona pandemic, but is an integral part of our life. We can stop spreading many viral diseases like T.B, swine flue etc by behaving responsibly. We can see many people who do not follow traffic rules, pollute the river, throw garbage in public places like gardens, bus stands and even on the roads and behave irresponsibly. In this pandemic, many people were not following proper precautions such as wearing masks and gloves, following social distancing, etc. As a result, Covid-19 started spreading as fast as the speed of lightning. Even if Covid was spreading rapidly, people did not even seem to care about precautions. This caused danger to the society. As, this story had actually happened in our city. So, we decided to share our feelings and experience with everyone. So, we thought to write a

story on social responsibility and to spread awareness about it.

Why this story is relevant to our city?

It was 9th March, the last day when we went out. After that, we were in lockdown because of Covid-19. Day after day we were getting news about the Covid-19 positive patients from different areas.

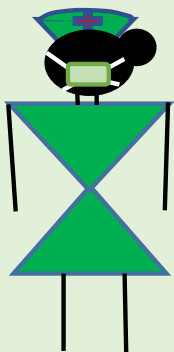
In Pune, in the initial two months the situation was under control. But suddenly the number of cases started increasing rapidly.(ref. 1) As the days passed, Pune had maximum number of cases and had become a hotspot in the country.(ref. 2) In the news we saw that people were not maintaining social distancing, not wearing masks, over-crowding shops for groceries and vegetables without social distancing and were roaming on the

streets as if no such virus existed in the world. (ref. 3) As a result, the virus which had entered as small as a needle, spread as far as a banyan tree. All the hospitals were full, no beds were available for the patients. Even the medical staff was not sufficient to treat the patients.(ref 2) After this hazardous situation, people realised the importance of social distancing, wearing masks etc. The behaviour of the people changed and they started taking proper precautions. The number of cases started reducing.

This is exactly what happened in the story. The story we wrote is based on a true story that happened in Pune city.



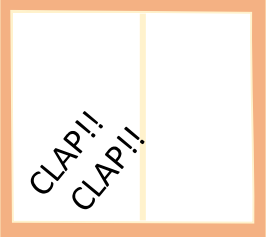
INFORMATION ABOUT THE ACTUAL PERSON/S, CONTEXT/S



Name in the story:– Rita
Real name:– Jyoti
Age:- 25 years
Occupation:- Nurse
Work experience:- 5 years



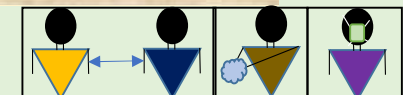
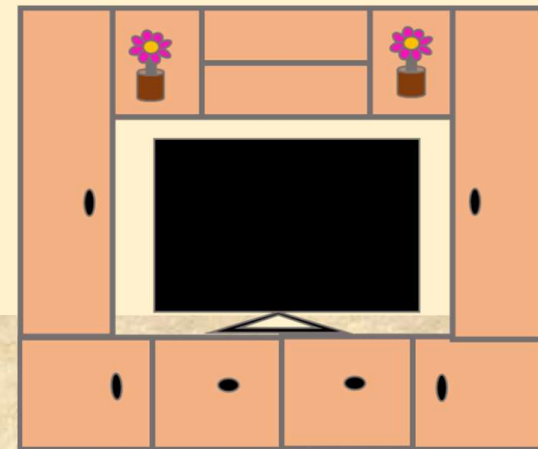
Name in the story:– Ramesh
Real name:– Ramesh
Age:- 27 years
Occupation:- Ward boy
Work experience:- 3 years



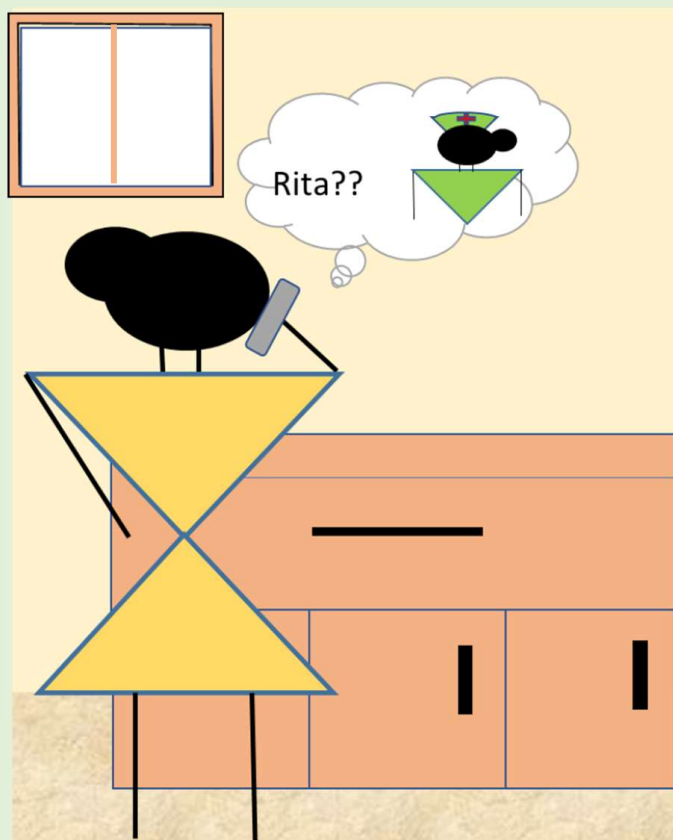
CLAP!!
CLAP!!

Oh! It's another humdrum day because we were in a phase of lockdown . At first we were frustrated but slowly started to adapt to our newly routine life.

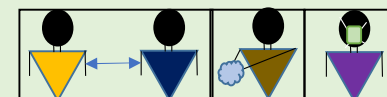
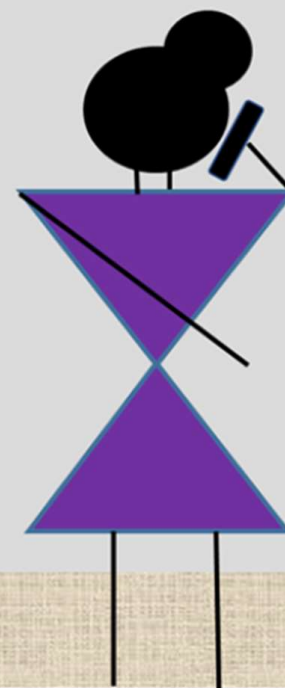
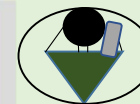
In the evening we were having tea and were alert by some loud clapping sound. A questioning look instantly appeared on our faces, Celebration in Corona?

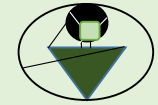


In a moment my mother called Mannu Aunty.

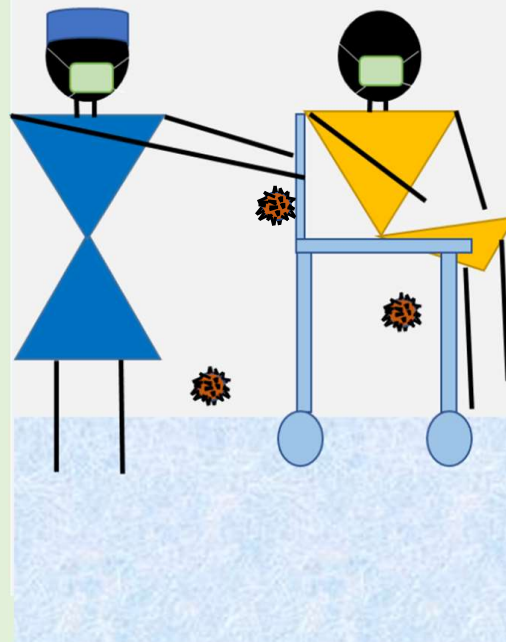


She replied that in the neighbouring society, all society members were welcoming Rita who had recovered from Covid-19. Rita was a nurse in a famous hospital in Pune. She served the patients from the start of the pandemic.

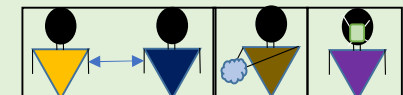


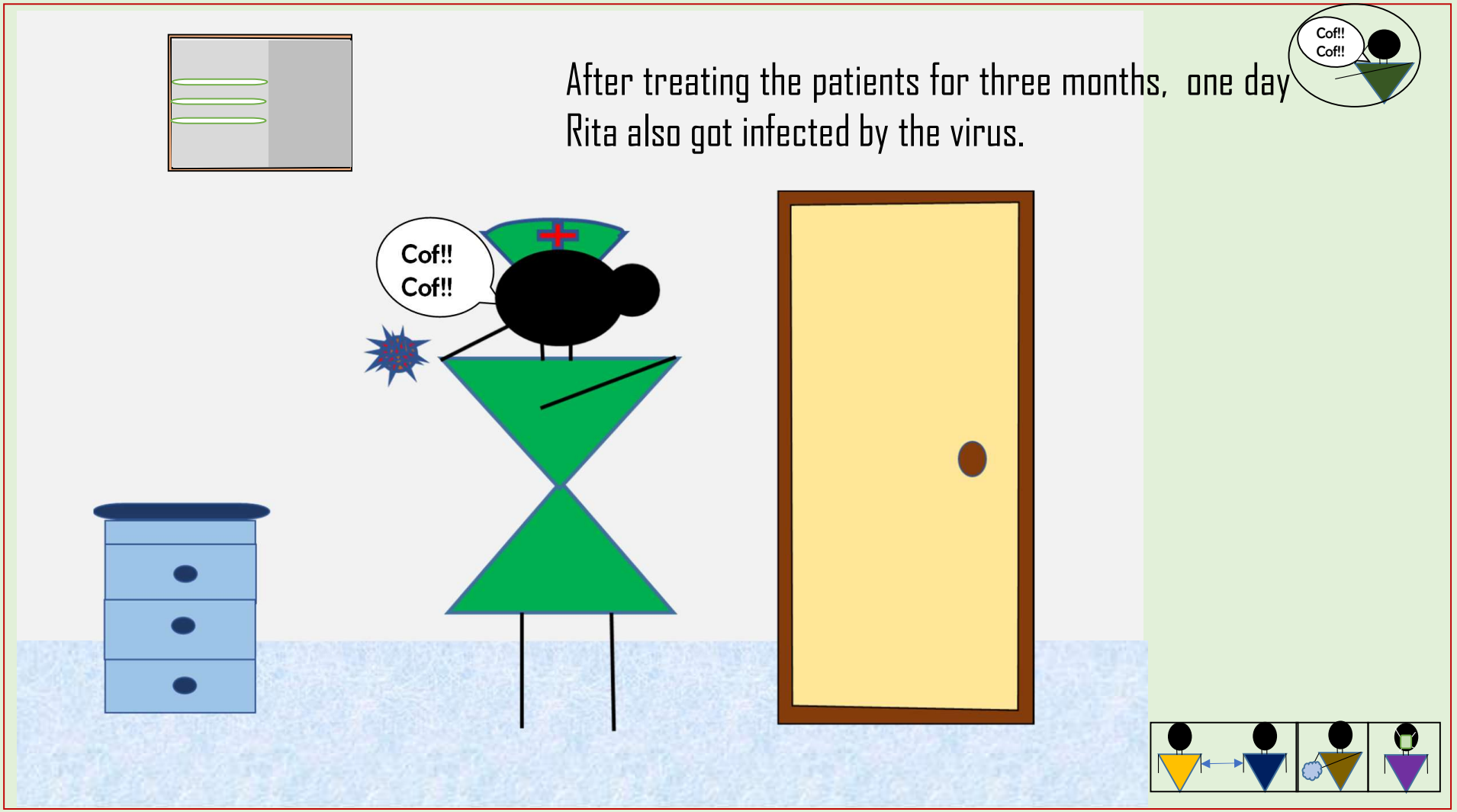


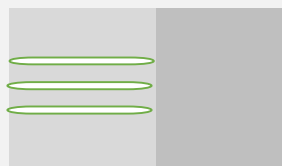
Though Rita was recovered from the disease she was worried about Ramesh, the ward boy who worked with her during the Pandemic.



Rita and Ramesh were working in one of the famous hospitals. From the first day of pandemic both were serving in the hospital without fail.

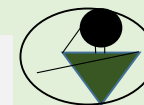
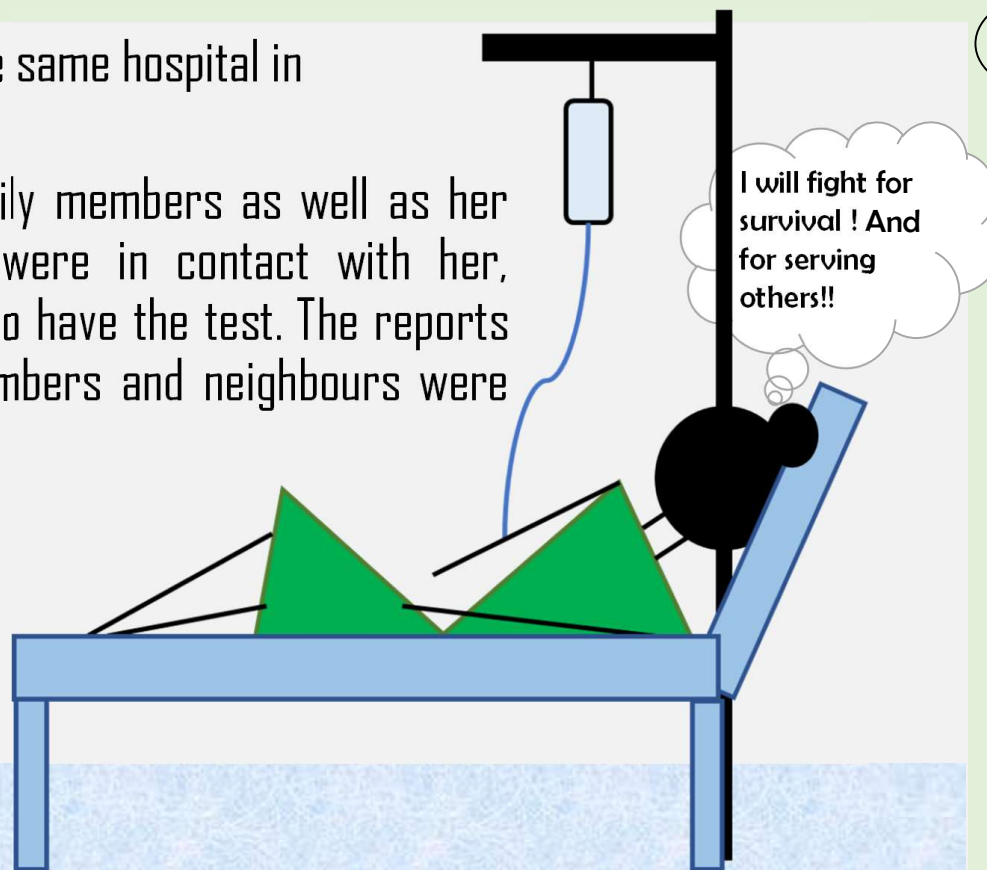
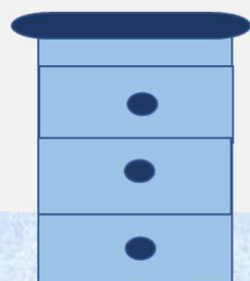
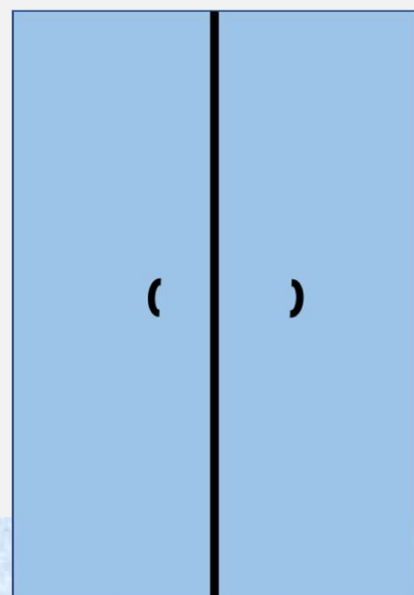






She was admitted in the same hospital in which she was working.

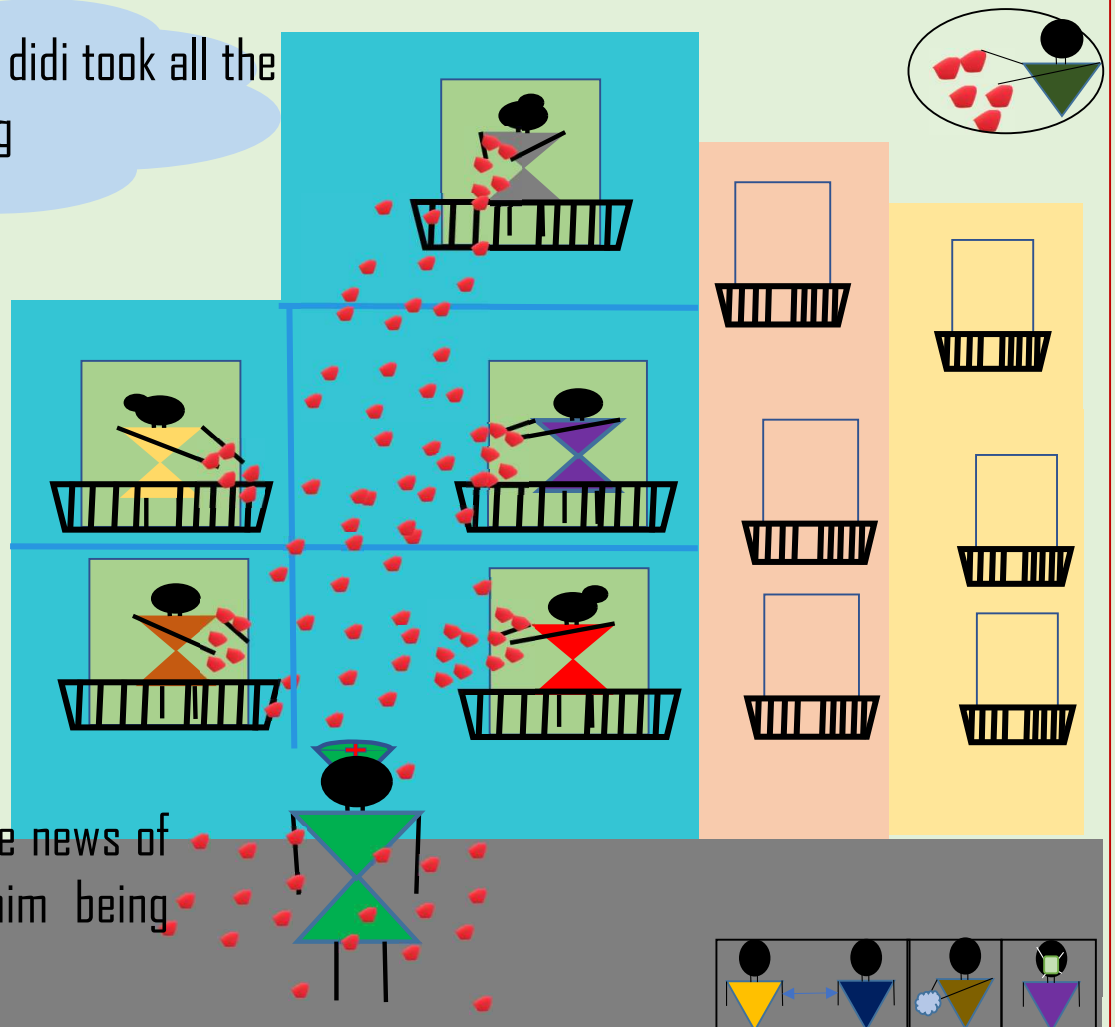
A few of her family members as well as her neighbours who were in contact with her, were also asked to have the test. The reports of the family members and neighbours were negative.



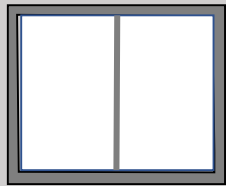
This seemed possible only because Rita didi took all the necessary precautions while performing her duties as a nurse sincerely.

She behaved responsibly and she tackled it systematically. Today everyone was welcoming her as she successfully recovered from the disease.

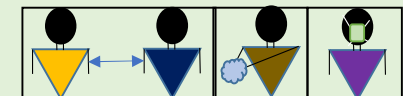
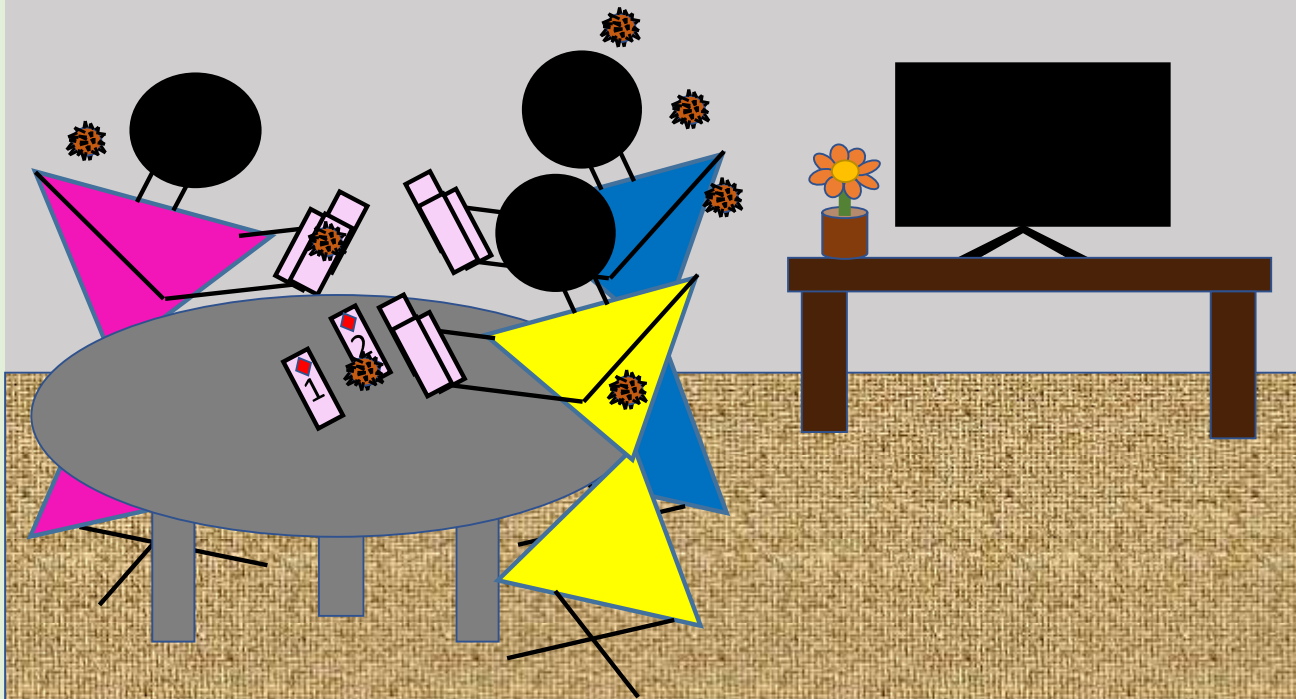
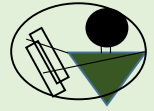
While she was admitted, she also heard the news of Ramesh's irresponsible behaviour and him being positive because of that.

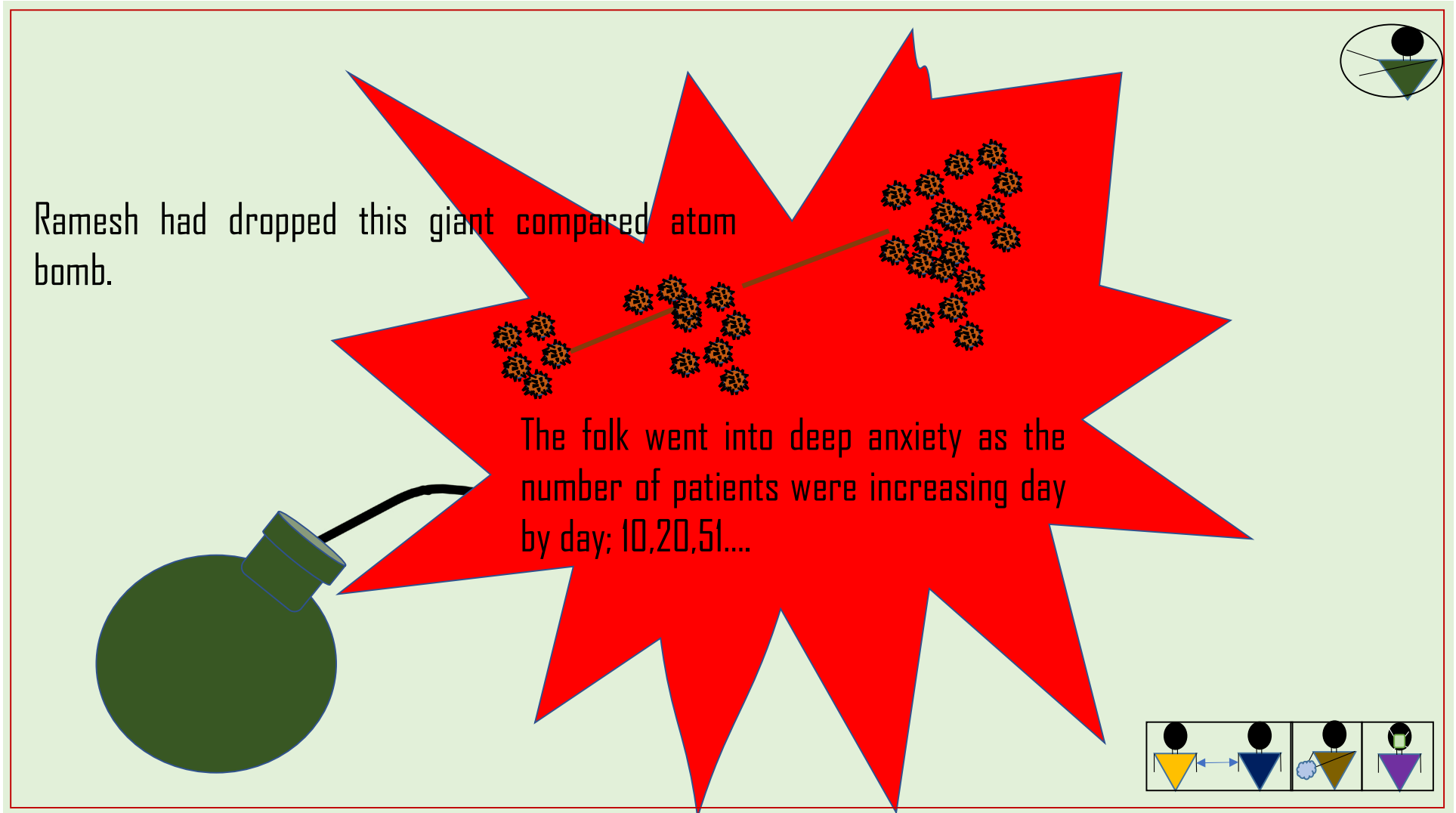


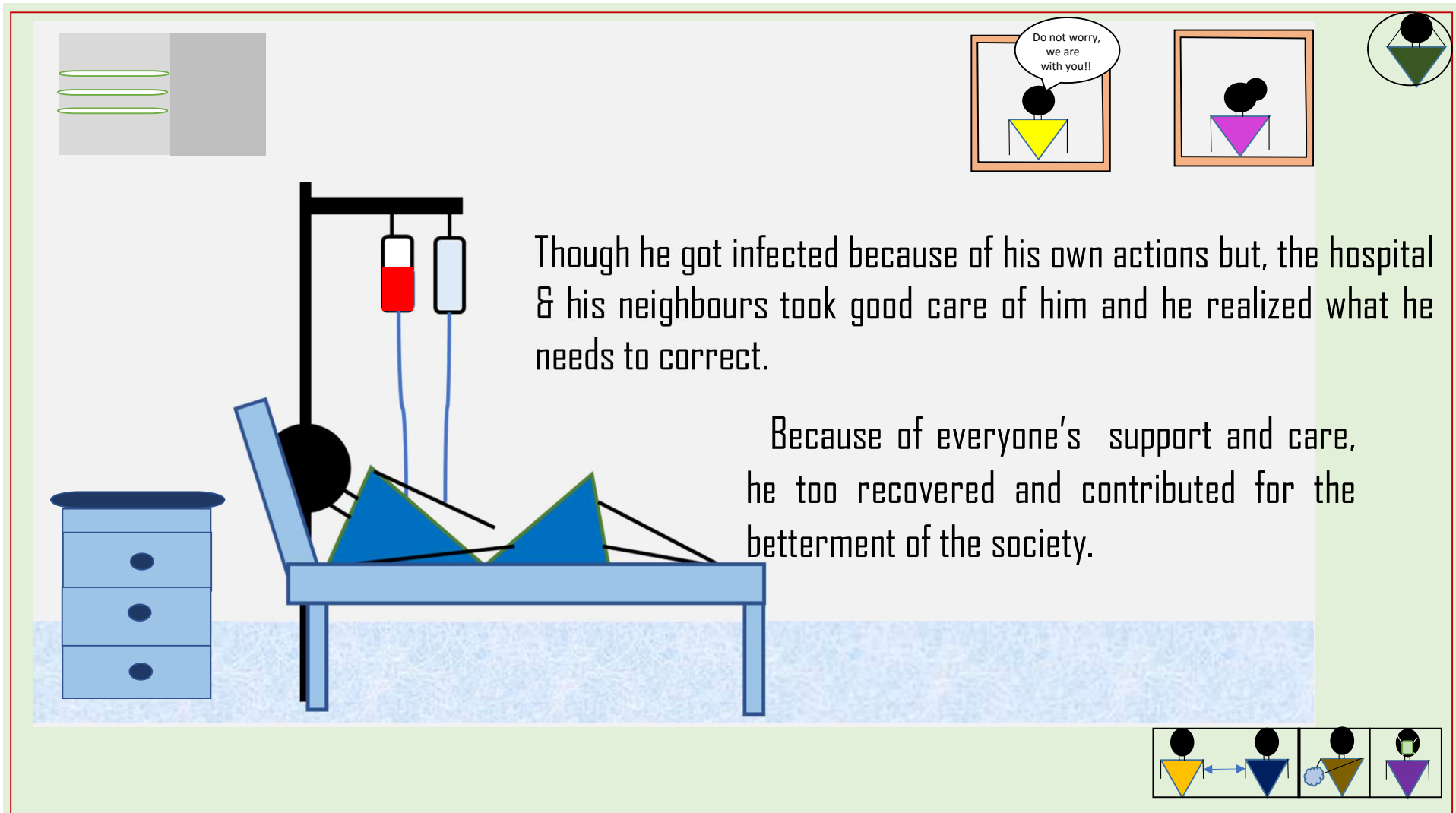
Ramesh used to play cards with his friends after coming from his duties.

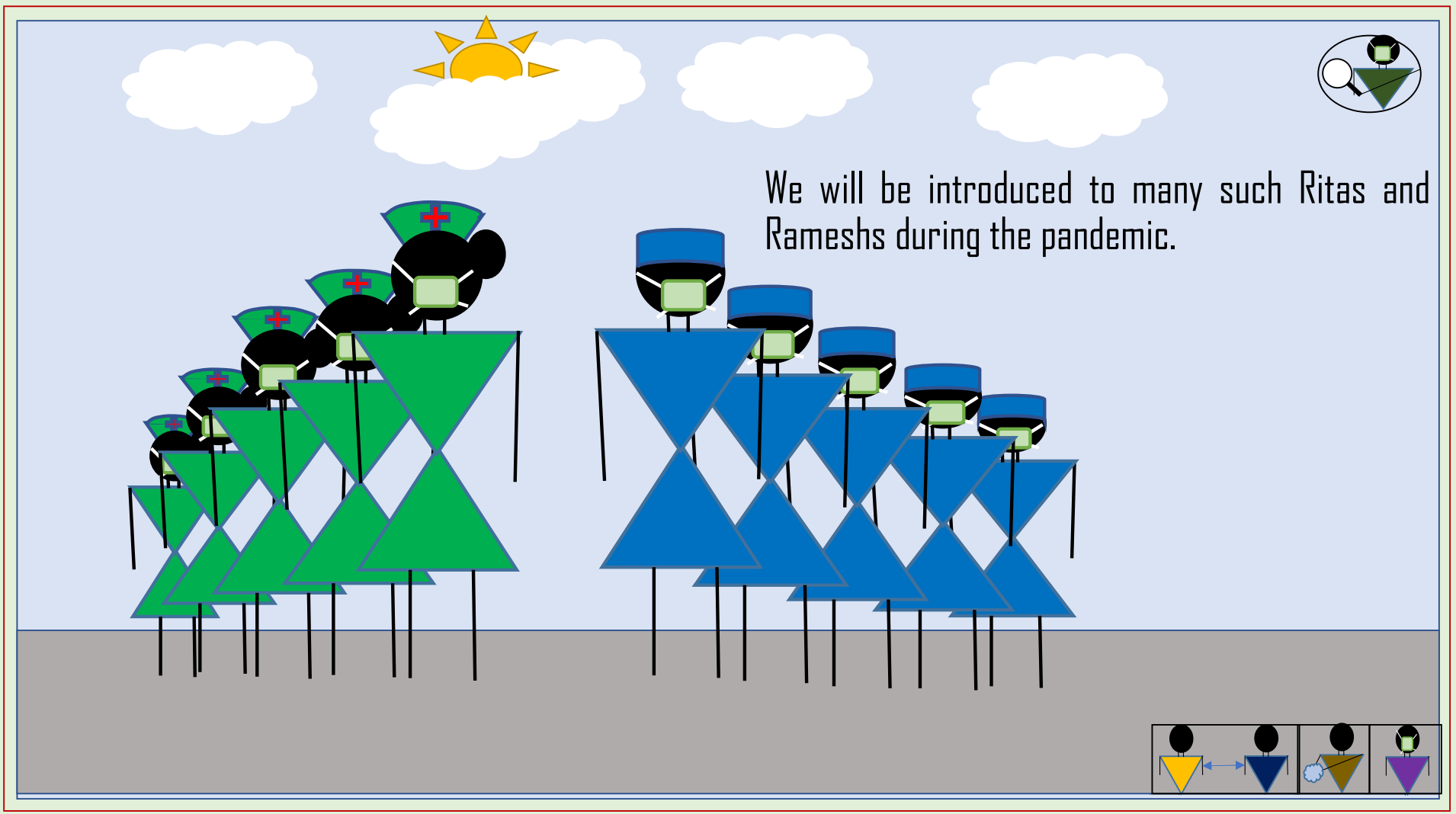


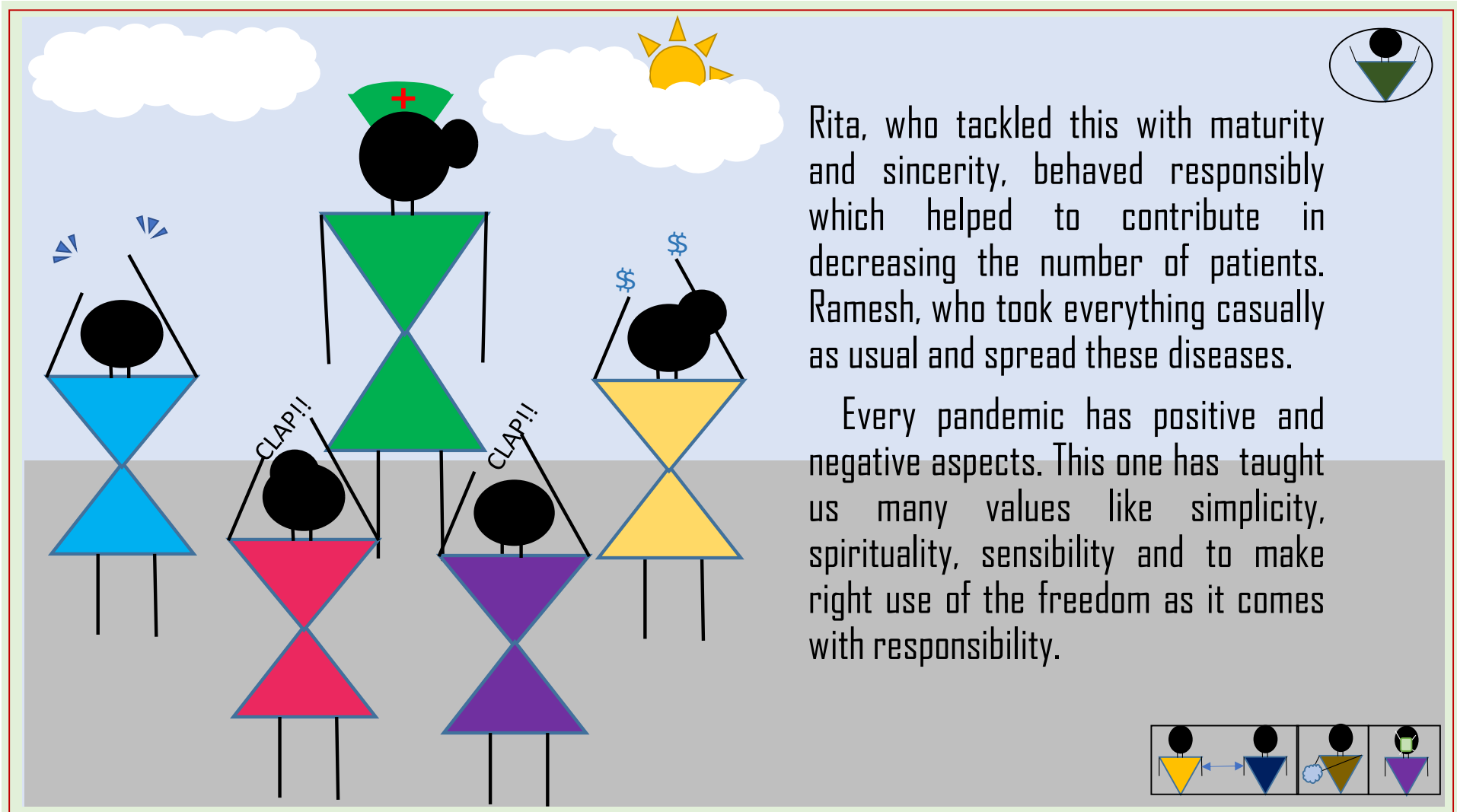
He took everything casually. No social distancing, no proper precautions.
This put everybody's life in danger!!











Reflections

“This was a great opportunity for all of us. Because of this project I came to know a lot about books. We just simply buy a book and read it but, there is a lot of hard work behind it from the authors and illustrators. Because of CAL I got an opportunity to create my own book and to show my creativity. While creating this book, I got to know a lot about technology and some new functions of software as all the illustrations were digitalized. We all learned to work in a team though we had different perspectives. Overall this was a fantastic experience. Thanks to CAL and our school for giving us this opportunity and guiding us at every level of the book.”

“The experience of writing a real life story for the first time was amazing. I experienced the hard work that is taken by an author to write a book. It is hard, but very nice experience. I loved that we worked together as a team and wrote an amazing story. Working together was indeed a nice experience. I learnt many new phrases and words which I was not aware of. I learnt how to digitalize an image with the help of technology. I came to know a lot of technology which I was not aware of. Thank you to the CAL for giving us such opportunity to show our skills and creativity.”

“Through this project my research, discussion with parents regarding the same, confidence level increased a lot. I got to know many new terms. We all team members had different ideas but after intermixing all of those we got a much better and unique output. CAL taught the writer inside me how to express real life stories. After receiving the feedbacks from my friends, I got to know the expectations of a reader which was a nice experience too. I feel really happy to be a part of CAL and tried to give the very best.”

“My experience with CAL was one of the best experiences of my entire life. It was a very fun experience and I got to learn a lot from it. I learnt a lot about English grammar, literature and creative writing but I also learnt a lot about art. I learnt how to share my ideas confidently. And, I also got to know a lot more about our beautiful world. I want to thank CAL for sharing their knowledge and for giving me this wonderful opportunity to deliver a message the people.”

Mohini Nakte - A Student

The Cathedral and John Connon School

Authors: Armaan Kapur, Gian Patel, Malika D'Cunha and Saisha Saxena

Mentor: Ms. Twila Fernandes

Rationale

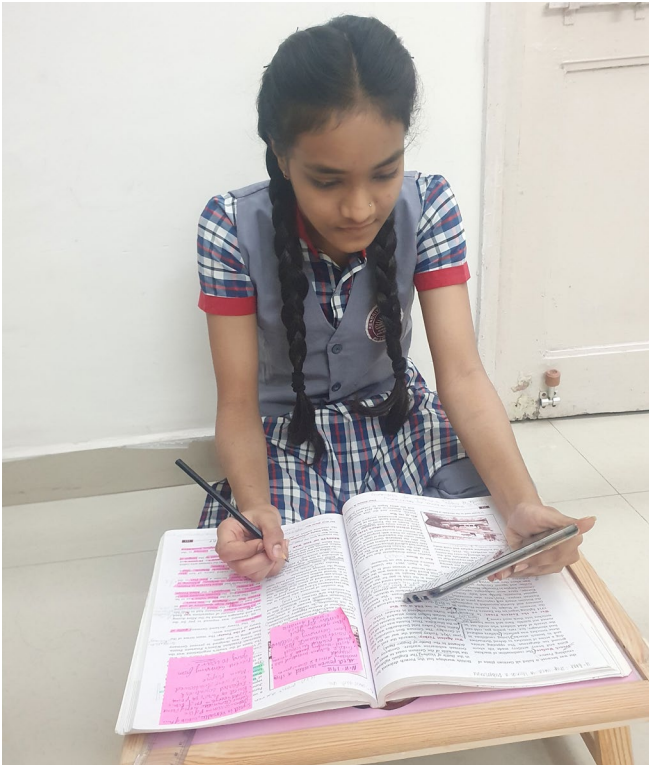
As students currently navigating the perils of online schooling, we felt very passionately about the topic of online education, and its impact on students and teachers alike. Online school takes a toll on our mental, physical and social health, as staring at a screen for hours and the constant workload keeps piling on. However, we do recognize that we have major privilege, to be able to conduct virtual education with a stable internet connection, in our own personal workspaces, with devices that we do not have to share. Therefore, we felt the need to delve a little further into the experiences of people from all walks of life, and showcase their voices and stories, and their experience with education in the midst of a global pandemic.

Mumbai, a city with a population of above 20 million (Mumbai, India Metro Area Population 1950-2020), has a student population of approximately 5.5 million in 2011 (Correspondent Mumbai univ student population grew 60% in past decade). With almost 4000 schools (Bhandary), and hundreds of colleges and 12 universities (Kaur Education in Mumbai),

it is no surprise that many were affected by the lockdown imposed in March, which only continued to extend as the year went on (Gettleman and Schultz). And while schools in some other states had reopened in the later months of the lockdown (Sen), the schools in Mumbai showed no signs of reopening, due to rising cases and reluctant parents (Gaikwad), the future of students is uncertain. In these times, we would like to delve into the physical and mental toll online schooling is taking on such a large part of the city and feel that it is necessary to draw everyone's attention to the dilemma of all the people involved in online schooling, and their hardships and struggles.

The three stories that we will be telling today is of three different persons, all involved in online education in some form or another. First, we have Idris Kaapsi, a 17-year-old student studying in the K.J Asomaiya Polytechnic Institution, whose school went virtual in June. He comes from a relatively well-off family and is eager to return to physical school. Next, we have the story of a teacher who works in the NGO 'Angel Xpress', and speaks about

navigating the difficulties of online schooling with younger students, and how they managed to continue online education even in these difficult times. Last, but certainly not least, we have the story of Mohini Nagte, a 15-year-old girl studying in the Kendriya Vidyalaya, Mumbai. She is currently facing the uphill battle of preparing for the CBSE Boards and battling financial struggles at home.



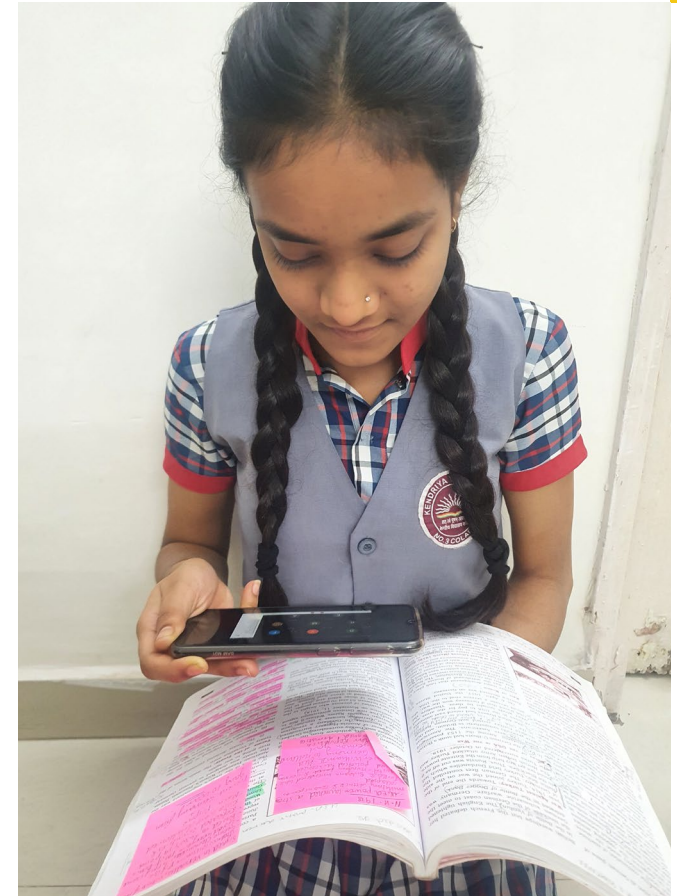
It was Monday. The first day of the week, like always the first period was Mathematics, a subject which I have always struggled with. The teacher was teaching us Graphs, she instructed us to get some Graph paper by next class. I did not have Graph paper, and all the shops that I went to were shut. I was disheartened as I knew that the class the next day was not going to be as helpful as it would be if I had graph paper. Fortunately, my next-door neighbour had recently passed out of his 12th, and was gracious enough to lend me some.

My name is Mohini Nagte and my family calls me “Pihu”. I aspire to become a great, well-educated and

renowned fashion designer one day. I was born into a Maharashtrian family, my father, Mukesh, is a driver, who has currently lost his job due to this world-wide pandemic. My mother, Pratima, works as a domestic helper, for an Indian Naval family. I have a brother, Pranav, who is 13 years old and in Class 7, however this is not as critical as an educational year for him as he does not have the essential and stressful an CBSE Board exam, which I am currently preparing for. My whole family is living on a sum of 4000 rupees. Food, bills and basic amenities are costly in Mumbai, and educational expenses only add to the burden. I am always stressed whether my education is going to retain prime importance.

I study in the Kendriya Vidyalaya, Mumbai. My online classes are currently being conducted on Google Meet, although initially there were no online classes being offered. The CBSE Board is notorious for giving a huge portion, which is practically impossible to cover in such a short span of time. I often question if I will be able to finish the portion and start revision and paper solving on time, especially with my limited resources.

I do not have a laptop at home, hence I struggle to study. We do not have individual phones, and so we share. Network connectivity is extremely weak in our residence. However, I persist and aim to attend and pay attention to every class I am in, regardless of the connectivity. I find Mathematics especially Geometry exceedingly difficult to do online, especially considering the lack of stationery needed to properly practice the subject. And if I am



to pursue Fashion Designing, I need Geometry.

Life is difficult, of course it is and is filled with obstacles that constantly challenge us and sometimes break us, but in the end, we must overcome them. As an optimist, I like to believe that everything will work out in the end, if I just keep my head down and work as hard as I can. This lockdown has taught me never to give up and remain strong and has taught me how to navigate difficult obstacles.

Komal Raut¹ - A Pregnant Woman

Elphinstone Municipal School

Authors: Naaj Shaikh, Jay Yadav, Jay Karandekar and Ganesh Dabhulkar

Mentor: Mrs. Shraddha Jatin Adhikari

Rationale

It is very important to tell the story of a middle class family and how they have been affected due to Covid-19 during this lockdown situation.

The ongoing nationwide lockdown has thrown India's lower middle class people into the deep end. While the sufferings of the poor, migrant workers, farmers, even elite such as NRI stranded overseas, celebrities and others have made headlines, the Indian media and politicians often overlook the plight of the middle-class community.

It is unarguably the middle-class that comprise the workforce in metros and tier-two cities. While the suffering of the poor, the homeless, the farmers and the migrant labourers cannot be overlooked, We decided to highlight the stories of three middle-class individuals because we want to tell the prime minister and other politicians that not only poor families but also lower middle class families are suffering from this lockdown. As some people don't know about the situation that is faced by lower middle class people and some

companies take action by removing them from the job so some are going into depression facing heart attack problems etc. That's why we want to highlight the plight of these families by sharing their narratives/experiences through our story.

We are going to do this project because due to COVID 19 we are following lockdown. Every common man is suffering from some kind of problems, such as losing jobs, if they have jobs they are surviving with less salary, or not getting their salaries for a few months.

Along with this situation there is an increase in the price of daily essentials such as vegetables, groceries etc. So if middle class people like us do not have enough money, then we will be unable to purchase food. So we want to bring it to the notice of the politicians that please take action by keeping in mind the plight of middle-class people.

That's why we are doing this project.

¹Name has been changed to maintain anonymity

During this pandemic I was three months pregnant. I had routine checkups. In sonography it was revealed that the baby was not well. Doctor suggested that I take the COVID 19 test. The result drove me dismayed. I was tested COVID 19 positive. I was taken to hospital and my family members took me to quarantine centers.

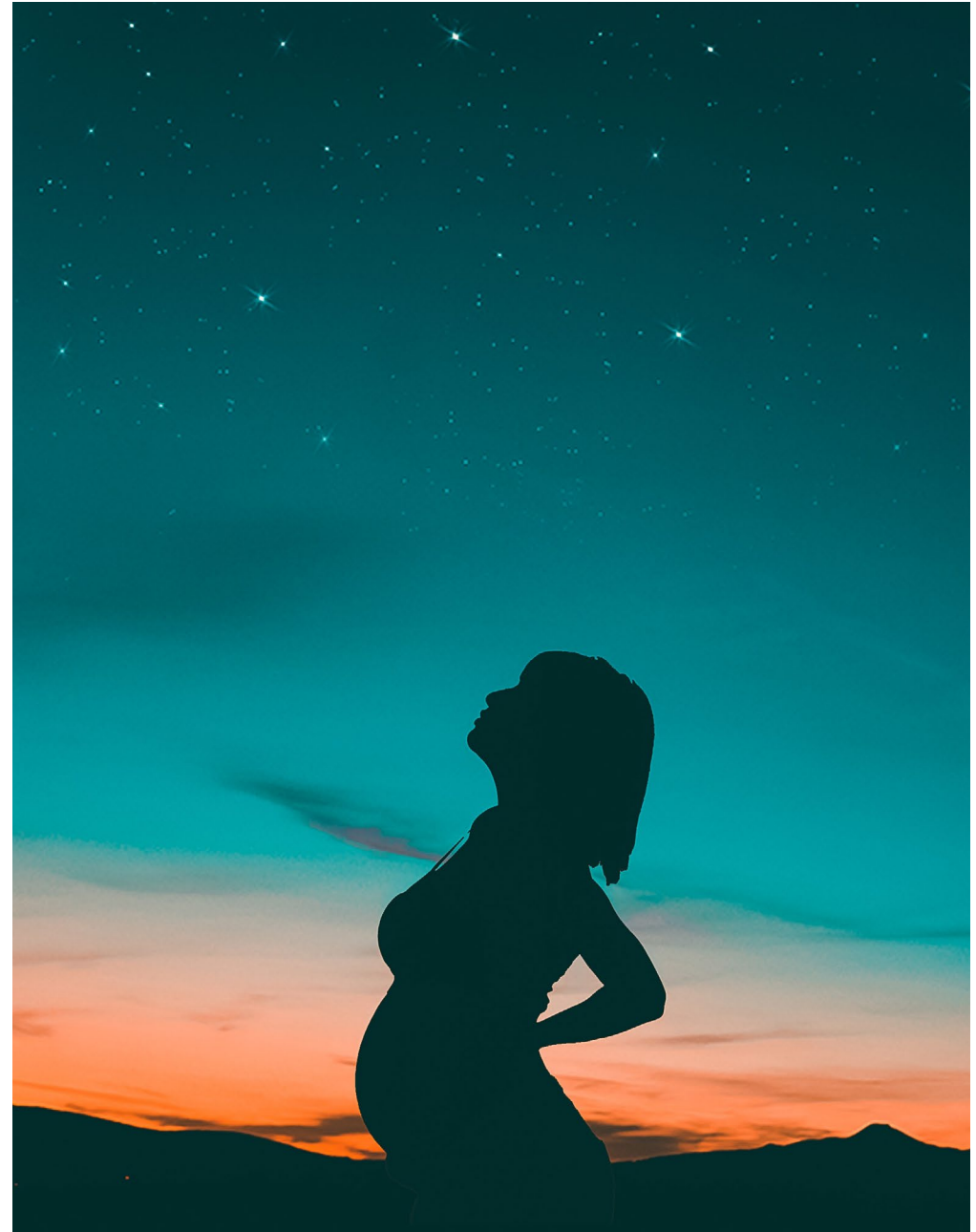
During the miscarriage my brother and mother were too affected by COVID 19. I panicked when the doctor said that the baby was no more and they had to abort the child. Because of me three lives were threatened, that guilt was hurting me. My health was worsening due to depression. Support of doctors and nurses available in the ward made me comfortable and helped me to relieve my stress.

As my health recovered it was time for me to go back to my home. I was very tensed about how my family would receive me and my fate. But when I reached there it was completely unpredictable. My family was thankful to God that I reached home safely. I was relieved when I heard that my mother and brother both went home safely after testing COVID 19 negative.

Good times were back when all were out of danger. But the thought that the terror of COVID 19 washed the soul of my baby will always put me into dark.

So I suggest to everyone that 'Prevention is Better than Cure'. Wear a mask and stay safe. Avoid going to crowded places. This is the most important thing that we could do in this pandemic situation.

Photo credit: Ilzy Sousa from Pexels



Satish Shejule - An Autorickshaw Driver

Dr. Kalmadi Shamarao High School, Ganeshnagar

Authors: Komal Jain, Sejal Karale, Anushka Gaikwad, Sanvi Kulkarni, Ikshaan Dhadse, Aneesh Achalere

Mentor: Mrs. Aarti Gosavi

Rationale

If we see around us almost all have been affected by the pandemic in some way or the other. But there are few who are leading by example and inspiring thousands in their path. A few good Indian Samaritans are winning hearts with their efforts to get a grip on their lives and rising above the pandemic constraints and helping others in need. We read about them or hear about them on television. But there are many whose efforts might have gone unnoticed, and we students have done our bit of research in finding such people around us or in our city to tell their story in the best possible manner.

With lockdowns in the country, one important challenge many people faced was how to keep one's job and continue to earn a living. The most affected were the lower-income groups and families who had only one bread earner. The figure of number of people losing jobs vary from different sources and but according to CMIE (Centre for Monitoring Indian Economy) data, in April 2020, 27 million youth between 20 and 30 years of age lost their jobs, so the figure must be much higher considering other age groups and non-salaried

people, in the following months. There were many who had difficulty in managing to feed their families on a daily basis. But among them are few who without losing hope have triumphed through the situation by finding an alternative source of earning. The stories we present will be an inspiration for others who face similar hardships and encourage them to bring their lives back on track with hard work, hope, and courage.



A person can fail many times, but he is not a failure until he gives up.

Autorickshaws play a crucial role for the mobility in urban India. Being one of the most economical modes to travel, the middle class prefer autos for short and medium-distance trips within a city. And for us drivers they are our bread and butter.

The advent of COVID-19 pandemic, and subsequent lockdown, brought a complete ban on auto

rickshaws. The virus put a break on our earnings. With most of the people commuting by their private vehicles, we were left high and dry, as very few opted for our service. The use of auto-rickshaws was limited to the informal transport of goods like fruits, vegetables, and groceries.

Earlier, I used to earn minimum Rs.700-800 a day but now even earning Rs. 200 was like a dream. Adding to this was the issue of repaying a loan, I was facing a huge financial burden.

One day when my wife was preparing for lunch and was about to knead the dough, she noticed that there was hardly any flour left. “I wonder how we will manage to have a dinner tonight.”, she said in a worried tone. I felt helpless and was clueless about what to do next. The same thoughts and questions revolved in my mind, when will the lockdown come to an end, what should I do to earn some money? I spend days worried and depressed.

Few days later, I read about Eknath Kasthe in the newspaper. He used his private ambulance for the COVID patients to drop them to the hospital. Suddenly an idea struck me, if he can then why not me? I was jubilant with this thought. I murmured, “This is really a superb idea. In this way I can earn some money as well as be of help to the people in need”. I had a word with my wife and she didn’t agree with me ferrying COVID patients. Hence, we decided why not provide service to non COVID patients who too needed attention.

This chain of thoughts set the ball rolling and overnight my rickshaw became an ambulance. Most of the patients I ferried were suffering from ailments such as cancer, had kidney transplant, and a few had chronic conditions. However, gradually realizing that if I take necessary precautions like having a protective shield between me and the passengers’ seat, I can ply the COVID-19 patients too, they too needed my help and hence I extended my service to them as well. This resulted in me earning more money and I was showered with appreciation and blessings from the patients.

Throughout this process my family has stood by me and I experienced happiness like never before.

Humanity has been through pandemics before and we’ve always won. And I am sure we will win this time too. But to make it easier for oneself and others to sail through these difficult times its of prime importance to have faith in oneself, be patient and show willingness to extend a helping hand. I saw light at the end of tunnel, so will you!

Reflections

“Doing this project taught me a lot, and really humbled me. I used to complain a lot about online education, however after seeing and listening to the struggles of Mohini, and seeing the teachers’ effort to ensure her students get the best education possible, it shows me just how privileged I am, and how lucky I am to be able to conduct online school with ease... (Writing) these stories reminded me to remain optimistic and not give up on school, as it is a privilege to be able to attend in the first place.”

“Working on CAL project was a great experience! As a team leader, I got to learn to work together, distribute tasks and follow up. I got very supporting and active team. In this pandemic situation we discussed via online meetings and it was really very different experience. Our teachers helped us in each story which we have presented. I am glad that our principal ma’am Mrs. Pallavi Naik took this project for our school. Thank you! Now just hoping that our stories will be published on the website.”

“The ongoing nationwide lockdown has thrown India’s lower middle class people into the deep end. While the sufferings of the poor, migrant workers, farmers, even elite such as NRI stranded overseas, celebrities and others have made headlines, the Indian media and politicians often overlook the plight of the middle-class community. It is unarguably the middle-class that comprise the workforce in metros and tier-two cities. While the suffering of the poor, the homeless, the farmers and the migrant labourers cannot be overlooked, we decided to highlight the stories of middle-class individuals because we want to tell the prime minister and other politicians

that not only poor families but also lower middle class families are suffering from this lockdown. (Many) people don’t know about the situation that is faced by lower middle class... That’s why we want to highlight the plight of these families by sharing their narratives/ experiences through our stories.”

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