

The Teaching Of Values Through The Use Of Indian Epics.

In India, children are exposed to values and ethics through the oral tradition of story telling. Instead of telling a child, "You must obey your elders!", adults in the family use examples of characters in epics and tales to teach the same. The epics, Ramayana and the Mahabharata are examples of stories most commonly used to teach the ideals of Hinduism to children at a very early age.

The same oral tradition can be modified in the classroom to demonstrate the use of Indian epics and tales to teach values and the ideals of Indian tradition.

The Ramayana in itself is voluminous and it would take days to read, since it has short episodes that are covered in detail. The version mostly told is a simple one and is available in written form too. The one that is used for the purpose of this lesson is one that I remember being told as a child.

Ramayana

There was a king of Ayodhya called Dasharata who had three wives, Kausalya, Kaikeyi and Sumitra. After several years, he had four sons born to him of these three wives. Rama was born to Kausalya; Bharata to Kaikeyi and twins, Lakshman and Shatrughan, were born to Sumitra.

The boys grew up and were trained in the arts of warfare and the administration of the kingdom. Rama in the meantime, was married to Sita, the daughter of King Janak.

By this time King Dasaratha had grown old and decided to cede his throne to his eldest son Rama. This set off a streak of jealousy in Kaikeyi, who wanted her son, Bharata, to be the King. She asked the King to grant her two vows that he had promised her when she had saved his life several years ago. The vows were -

- Rama be sent to the forest for 14 years of exile*
- Bharata be crowned King of Ayodhya.*

The King was grief-stricken, but had to fulfill his vows and put forth these requests to his son Rama. Rama agreed to the orders of his father and stepmother and made preparations to leave for the forest. His wife, Sita, was determined to accompany her husband in exile. Lakshman, the other brother, also decided to accompany Rama in order to assist him in his travels.

Bharata, all this while, was visiting with his grandparents, and was unaware of these happenings. King Dasaratha, overcome by grief, died, and Bharata was called back to rule over the kingdom. On his arrival he was made aware of the situation that had befallen his older brother, Rama, and was furious with his mother for having allowed this to happen. He departed immediately for the forest in search of his brother's entourage. On reaching them, he beseeched his brother to return and be king of Ayodhya. Rama refused on the grounds of commitment to his father's wishes. Bharata was just as adamant, and vowed not to ascend the throne and took back the sandals of Rama, which he placed on the throne, and ruled in his brother's name..

Rama, Sita and Lakshman, completed their 14 years in exile and returned to Ayodhya (after several escapades and interesting episodes in the interim) and Rama, finally ascended the throne of Ayodhya, as its rightful sovereign.

This story can either be read aloud to students or it could be read in small groups and they can work on the activity together. Before they read the story, they need to be told to think about the various characters in the story and the qualities that each of them embodies.

In their groups, they will work on the Fishbone Activity sheet, where they will list the various characters and alongside it, write in short the qualities of each one of them. Once they are done with it, the class can share their thoughts and see how these qualities correlate to the values and ideals that are taught by families all over the world. It can be pointed out that various cultures teach values different ways, and this is one way that it is done in India.

Concluding Activities

- * The students can choose one of the characters in the epic and describe him/her and give reasons to support their choice.**
- * They can choose other stories from their culture and see what values and ideals are portayed in them.**

These can be shared in the class by each and every one of them.

Fishbone

Topic:

