

In Sahir's shoes

You will need a shoe with shoelaces to tie, or a pair of shoelaces, or ribbons or strings about the length of shoelaces. Tuck them under your chair until you need them later in the lesson.

Today we have a story to share with you. We'll be doing lots of thinking in question time, and we'll be hearing from other children, too.

Are you comfortable?
Let's get started with the story – it's about Sahir.

Sahir lives in a small village, with his mum and dad, his younger brother and sister. His father has



a job making bricks. It's a hard job, making bricks by hand, and Sahir's father works at it every day from first light until sunset. He does this so that he can buy food for his family.

On his fifth birthday, Sahir started school. He can still remember almost everything about that day. It was the day he first held a book in his hand and it was also the day he first played on the lawn. The lawn was in front of his classroom. The grass was soft and there were no stones to hurt his feet when he played 'tip' with his friends. Sahir loved school and he learned quickly. Before long he could read his favourite books all by himself.

Then, when he was eight years old, his little sister came down with a fever. She cried a lot, and wouldn't eat. So Sahir's mum took her to the hospital in a big town many kilometres from the village. They were gone for a long time. Sahir looked after his little brother and cooked the meals while his father worked harder and harder, and longer and longer at his brickmaking. Sahir missed school and he wished his little sister would come back and be well again. 'If only Mum would bring her home,' he thought. 'Then everything would be all right.' But he said nothing.

A month passed. And then, at last, his mum and his little sister were back! But Sahir could tell that something was wrong. And that night his father took him aside. 'You know, Sahir,' he said, 'it cost a lot of money for your sister to stay so long in hospital - more money than I can pay. I have found you a job a long way from here with a rug maker. You have small hands and nimble fingers - just right for tying knots. You will be a good rug maker. And the money you earn will help pay the hospital bill. I am very sorry Sahir,' he added. Sahir had been looking forward to his mum and little sister coming home for a long time. But now it had all gone wrong.



How do you think Sahir felt... when his dad said that he couldn't go back to school? Before you answer this question, can you try to put yourself in Sahir's shoes. How would you feel if you were told you had to leave your family and friends and go a long way away... where you didn't know anyone?

Let's hear what some other children think:



Ariana: I think...I would be really shocked that my parents would send me away. I've never been away from home for more than a few nights, only to camp or at my grandparents' place.

Advit: I'd be so angry – why should I be the one who goes away to work?

Mac: Sahir is the oldest child in the family.

Ariana: But how does that make it OK - he's only eight, a kid – you are not even allowed to go to work till you're much older!



What about Sahir's father? Before his mum and little sister came home, Sahir had noticed that his father had been working harder and harder. Why do you think that was?



Lucas: Maybe his father had to work harder to earn extra money to pay the hospital bill. They were away for a whole month.



How do you think Sahir's dad felt when he told Sahir that he couldn't go back to school?



Ariana: His dad would be really embarrassed because he couldn't pay the bill and so he had to send Sahir to work.

Advit: He'd feel sorry for Sahir because he couldn't go to school but the dad had to get extra money and... maybe he had no choice.

Lucas: I think the same- the dad probably had no choice, but I also agree that he'd feel really guilty.

The next day a man drove into the village in an old truck, and took Sahir away from his friends, his family, and his school. The man and Sahir drove in silence for many hours until they came to a big shed on the outskirts of a big city. As Sahir stepped inside the shed, he felt the heat of the air and coughed as he breathed in the fluff from the wool that was used to make the rugs.

He saw the children sitting on the floor in a long row in front of a wall of strings.

'What is that?' asked Sahir.

'It's a loom,' the man said gruffly.

'What are they doing?' Sahir whispered. The children's fingers moved so quickly he couldn't tell.

'Tying knots,' the man said, as if Sahir should have known.



Can you imagine what it would feel like to be in Sahir's place? How might Sahir might be feeling? Can you give a describing word?

Let's hear what some other children might be thinking.



frightened, lonely, afraid, uncomfortable, confused, homesick, worried

Sahir soon discovered that the children tied knots all day, and sometimes into the night. They were making rugs. They had to tie about a million knots to make each average size rug.



Can you tie a knot? Pick up the shoe with shoelaces or your ribbon/string/shoelace and place this in front of you.

You are going to tie the shoelaces, tying and tying again, until you get to the end of the laces. Are you ready? Have a go!

Now imagine that you have to keep on doing that for 5 hours and then, after a 20 minute lunch break, for another 5 hours.

How would your fingers be feeling? What about your hands? And what about your back?

And now imagine how it would feel if you had to tie the knots up high – with your arms raised?

You can stop tying knots now, and shake your hands and have a stretch if you need to.

Sahir's long days were spent in the big shed, tying knots. There was no time for playing and no time for reading - and anyway, there were no books - and no time even to walk in the fresh air. His back ached and his fingers were sore, but still he had to keep working. Sahir missed his family and his friends. And he missed school. He was paid 11 cents for each hour he worked and he kept wondering how many more hours he would have to work to pay off the hospital bill.



Can you imagine how you would feel if you were in Sahir's place?

Would you feel tired, bored, unhappy, helpless, lonely, scared ... what do you think?

Let's hear from some other children.



Ariana: I'd be really lonely and missing my family, especially at night - where does he sleep?



The story doesn't tell us that, why might that make a difference?



Advit: Who would look after him in the middle of the night?

Lucas: How does he get food?



These are interesting questions to wonder about to help us understand how Sahir might feel. Let's return to the story and see if we can learn any more...

It was two years before Sahir's father came to take him home. 'Oh Sahir!' he said. 'You are so thin and your skin is so pale. And you haven't grown taller – in two years you have grown no taller! But never mind – now I will take you home. You will be able to play in the fresh air and read your books. And you will be able to go back to school.' And that is what happened.

Now Sahir is back at school.



What do you think it would have been like for Sahir when he went back to school?

Before you answer, try to put yourself in Sahir's place once again. Imagine you are Sahir. You have had two years away from home and school. When you left you were eight years old and in Year 3. Now you are ten. In the two years you have been away, you have had no chance to read or write or to play sport or do maths - no chance to learn or practise anything except how to tie knots. And you look different from the other kids - you are thinner and your skin is pale and you haven't grown.



What would it be like when you are back at school?



Ariana: Your friends would be ahead of you with their school work...Would you have to go into Year 3 or go into Year 5?

Advit: It'd be awful...you wouldn't fit in anywhere.

Lucas: Some of the kids might make fun of you – and bully you – because you look weak and you mightn't have friends now.



Will you like school as much as you did before? What do you think?

Do you think you have some idea of the way Sahir and his family might have been feeling during this time?

Do you think it's important to try to understand the way other people feel...even if those people have different sorts of lives? Why do you think that?



Lucas: Well... my mum always says: 'You should think about how they might feel'.



Do you think it is important to do that?



Lucas: I guess so, because if you understand how someone is feeling, you might treat them differently.



Can you give an example of how you treated someone differently because you had thought about how they were feeling?

We heard a really interesting story today! Thank you for joining us. You might like to keep thinking about Sahir... and why it might be important to put ourselves in another person's place and think how they might feel. You might also like to have a talk to family and friends about what they think too.

Photo credit: [Michael Weibel](#) on [Unsplash](#)

Thank you to our wonderful actors Ariana, Advit, Lucas and Mac who helped us to hear different points of view. While sometimes these points of view might have reflected their own opinions, at other times they were asked to express an opposing view in order to help us think more deeply about the topic.