

Grandfather Gandhi Readers' Theatre

Cast of Characters

All characters may be cast/read by boys or girls.

Narrator: Conveys much of the action

*May use as many Narrators as needed, given the size of the class/participants

Gandhi: Older man, spiritual leader. Peaceful and warm.

Arun: Young boy, Gandhi's grandson. Angry and confused.

Inner Voice: Shares Arun's internal thoughts

*May use as many Internal Voices as needed, given the size of the class/participants. If only 2 are used, place one to right and one to the left of Arun.

Father: Arun's father, proud.

Tutor: Arun's teacher, disapproving.

Chorus: Lines given to everyone in the readers' theatre, creating a chorus of some of the most important lines.

Script

Gandhi: (reads letter) December 17, 1945

Chi Arun,

I think of you every day, but especially today during silence. Do you spin carefully at least 160 rounds daily? Is the yarn even? Do you yourself fix the spinning-wheel? Do you keep a daily account? If you keep this one promise you will learn a lot.

Blessings to all of you from,

Bapu (pronounced Ba-poo)

Arun: We arrived at Sevagram, (pronounced SeWgram) Grandfather's service village, dusty and dirty. Father insisted we be taken straight to Grandfather's hut.

Inner Voice: Bapuji (pronounced Ba-poo-gee) sat serenely on the floor. I hung back, afraid to be in his presence, but Ela took my hand and we rushed to him. We bent to touch his feet, a sign of respect.

Arun: Grandfather gathered us to him in a big hug. He smelled of peanut oil.

Father: *Arun walked the entire way from the Wardha station.*

Gandhi: *That walk is a test of character. I am impressed.*

Inner Voice: My heart swelled as big as a balloon. I had made Grandfather proud.

Narrator: That evening, I floated to dinner. The tin bowls and utensils we used clanged, making a funny sounding music. I ate spoonful after spoonful of boiled pumpkin. It was mushy and bland and I didn't like it, but what I liked less, was sharing Grandfather.

Chorus: Sevagram (pronounced SeWagram) was filled with people. Three-hundred and fifty followers lived here.

Narrator: For the rest of the night, even as I washed and readied myself for bed, my dinner sat like a lump in my stomach.

Inner Voice: The Gandhi name was much to live up to. I had passed my first test, but there would be others. What if I failed?

Narrator: Mother ushered Ela and me to bed. The air was so thick and hot, to keep cool we slept under the stars.

Inner Voice: I tossed and turned, wondering what the next day would bring. Finally, I fell asleep, after even the earth seemed to quiet.

Narrator: The next morning, everyone awoke at 4 am. With the dark of early morning wrapped around us, we prayed. Silence filled the air.

Inner Voice: Everyone was still but I was fidgety. The peace of prayer felt far away.

Inner Voice: I was glad that when the sky turned the deep orange of a tangerine, it was time for chores.

Narrator: Ela headed off with Mother to wash vegetables.

Narrator: Father went with his team to clean the toilet buckets that needed to be emptied, washed and put back for use.

Arun: My cousin, Kanu, and I went off to weed the garden.

Chorus: And Grandfather, he worked too, sweeping the floors of the mud huts.

Arun: After chores, it was time for lessons.
I met my tutor.

Tutor: *We have much work to do.*

Arun: Someone, maybe even Grandfather, must have told him I didn't speak Gujarati well.

Inner Voice: At home, I spent my study time practicing John Wayne's swagger. But here at Sevagram (pronounced SeWagram) there would be no movies. There wasn't even electricity. No one knew who John Wayne was!

Inner Voice: I'd tried to get the other kids to play bank robbers and Sheriff, but the only game anyone was interested in was soccer, which ended up being okay. I was good at soccer, better than I was at Gujarati. (Pronounced Goo-jar-tea)

Narrator: That first week went by in a blur. I saw Grandfather many times, but for most of the day, he worked in his hut. Whenever I got a chance, I'd run a stick along the fence post outside, waiting for some alone time with the *Mahatma*, but I was always shooed away. Idleness was not allowed.

Narrator: Early in our second week, Grandfather found me. I didn't have to go looking for him.

Gandhi: *Will you walk with me?*

Chorus: There was always some aide, official, or follower around but this morning there was no one. *Maybe this is chorus, as it conveys noise & bustle of ashram?

Arun: *Lucky me!*

Narrator: I set off after Grandfather. His stride was quick, and each time he raised his walking stick he asked me a question. He asked about my older sister Sita, about how Ela was behaving, and about life in South Africa and the cruelty that came with being separated by race.

Chorus: Eventually Grandfather asked about me.

Gandhi: *How are you finding life here at Sevagram?*

Arun: *The other kids tease me and my tutor thinks I am useless. I try hard but it is not enough.*

Inner Voice: I stopped short of saying that I didn't feel like a Gandhi, that peace and stillness did not come easily to me. Even Gurjati did not come easily to me!

Narrator: Grandfather listened and when I finished, he wiped his spectacles on his dhoti, put them back on, and looked me in the eye.

Gandhi: *Give it time, Arun. You will adjust and go on to good things. I have faith.*

Narrator: He said no more. We walked on. It wasn't long before an aide found us, and escorted Grandfather away. I should have known—there were more important things than me.

Inner Voice: The rest of the day was just as disappointing. My pencil nub shrunk to almost nothing but since we took a vow not to waste I couldn't throw the pencil away. I held it, squishing my fingers. My hand cramped.

Chorus: *Stupid pencil!*

Narrator: After tuitions, with the sun high overhead, I was glad to head to the soccer field.

Arun: I wanted to forget about the ashram rules, forget about being a Gandhi.

Chorus: We played hard as if the match really mattered. *This line as Chorus.

Inner Voice: I was about to make a goal when Suman, an older boy, shoved me. His feet stole the ball as I lurched forward and fell face down in the dirt. Blood trickled from my lip. It tasted like tin.

Arun: I snatched a rock and leapt up. *You did that on purpose, didn't you?*

Chorus: *It was an accident, Arun. Calm down.*

Inner Voice: But I didn't want to calm down. I wanted to throw the rock, to hit Suman, like he hit me.

Inner Voice: Everyone stared.

Chorus: How could he—a Gandhi—be so easy to anger?

Narrator: I dropped the rock and ran...straight to Grandfather's hut.

Arun: *Bapuji!* (pronounced Ba-poo-gee)

Gandhi: *What is it, Arun?*

Chorus: Grandfather set down his pen and pushed aside his many papers.

Inner Voice: It was wrong to come here. Grandfather had work to do, important work.
I backed up to leave and Grandfather bowed.

Gandhi: *Namaste.*

Inner Voice: He said—not to me, but to the aide.

Narrator: A moment later we were alone.

Gandhi: *Tell me what has you so upset.*

Inner Voice: I did. Out came what happened on the soccer field, getting pushed, the rock, everything. When I was done, my head throbbed. Grandfather didn't need to say it.

Arun: I'd never live up to the *Mahatma*. I'd never be at peace.

Gandhi: *Do you think Suman and Kanu never anger? Or that they never think injustices happen solely to them? Do not be ashamed, we all feel anger.*

Chorus: But that wasn't possible— not Grandfather.

Arun: *Even you?*

Gandhi: *Even me.*

Inner Voice: But Grandfather taught peace. I'd never seen him angry, not even now when I told him what I'd almost done.

Gandhi: *Let us spin.*

Inner Voice: Grandfather wasn't one for riddles, Father had often told me, but he was one for stories. One was coming, I was sure of it.

Narrator: I held the thin cotton thread between my thumb and forefinger, not moving, as Grandfather's fingers went to work.

Gandhi: *Have I not told you how anger is like electricity?*
It is. Anger can strike, like lightning, and split a living tree in two.

Inner Voice: I saw myself on the soccer field, rock in hand, ready to strike. I saw the movie cowboys and their guns.

Gandhi: *Or it can be channeled, transformed. A switch can be flipped and it can shed light like a lamp.*

Inner Voice: I saw Grandfather, speaking before thousands. When Grandfather was angry, he didn't lash out. He worked to make changes, lasting changes, for all—not just for himself.

Gandhi: *Then anger can illuminate. It can turn the darkness into light.*

Arun: *That's what you do.*

Chorus: I was sure I couldn't do the same.

Gandhi: *We can all work to use our anger, instead of letting it use us.*

Narrator: Grandfather slowly stood. He ushered me to him and together we stood at the doorway of his hut looking out—at everyone working as one.

Inner Voice: He hadn't told me I was foolish. He hadn't told me I was wrong and he was right.

Inner Voice: He hadn't even forced me to choose: lightning or lamp.

Arun: But I did choose, and I would choose, over and over, from that moment on,
like Grandfather...

I did my best to live my life as light.

Chorus: As light. As light. As light. (getting softer each time.)