

## **Apu (Bandopadhyay's novel *Pather Panchali*)     Imaginative**

**Character**     Apu, a young boy, is the main character in this tender novel that tells the story of his family's uprooting from their rural home. Apu is the younger of two children, and as a boy he is indulged in a way that his sister is not. We have a glimpse of his character when he seeks to defend his sister from their mother's unfair accusations and demands that she do extra work. Apu is allowed to play freely and he explores the natural world around him, delighting in the flowers, animals and trees that surround his village in rural Bengal. His imagination needs little stimulus to operate, as when he picks up a small piece of wood and pretends it is a variety of objects he uses during play. He is also very bright, learns to read quickly and loves to listen to stories being told by his mother or his teacher. His relationship with his older sister brings out his essential goodness. He is pained when he sees that she, as a girl, is made to work harder than he is and that she is scolded for playing when she has household duties. His love for his sister and his imagination are entwined in his promise to show her a moving train, which he has seen on a trip with his father but which she has not (although they both saw a puff of smoke from a train). This desire to take his sister with him on his real or imagined journey runs through the second half of the book and provides a touching conclusion. After his sister dies of pneumonia, the family decide to leave and take a train. Apu would have taken great pleasure in this journey but not it only reminds him of his promise to his sister, a promise that cannot be fulfilled.

### **Activities**

Apu spends most of his time wandering around the countryside, exploring the beauty of nature, with or without his sister. He sits for hours listening to his mother tell stories, and at other times he reads the musty books his father keeps in an old trunk.

### **Illustrative moments**

*Imaginative*     After their mother scolds her, Apu follows his sister Durga when she runs out of the house and across the fields. Suddenly they stop and watch a huge grey cloud rise on the horizon and then realise it is a train. Apu is captivated. This is the thing that transcends his local world, the means by which he can travel to other worlds, the vehicle for him to realise his dreams. As the author explains, 'Mere awareness of distance was enough to fill his little mind with a feeling of wonder and make him happy. [...] He could not explain what he felt, but whenever he thought of things or places that were a long way off he seemed to be lifted out of himself and transported to another world.'

*Affectionate*     Apu's deep affection for his sister and mother is demonstrated in a scene when he accompanies his father to a distant village. When he sees the large house of his father's friend and the food they serve, his first thought is that he would like to bring some back to his sister and mother. He secretly saves some of the coconut sweet because they had never tasted it.

*Reflective*     Apu is forced to reflect in a moment of shock toward the end of the story. His sister has died and the family are packing up to move when Apu finds a jar that his sister had hidden away. And inside he finds a necklace that she had stolen from a neighbour, the same necklace that she swore she had not taken when her mother scolded her and Apu defended her. Now Apu must reassess everything he had thought about his sister.