

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

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CHILDREN OF THE MOUNTAINS / TOO BALDARY (1953)

Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997)

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OVERVIEW

Author Tugolbay Sydykbekov (1912–1997) was a Kyrgyz writer born in Keng-Suu, in present-day Issyk-Kul Region. Because his official birth date was unknown, he later chose May 14 as his birthday through a family tradition involving his daughter selecting a date at random.

He studied at the Agricultural Technical School in Frunze (1928–1931) and later at the Central Asian Veterinary Institute in Ashgabat, the capital of Turkmenistan. He worked at the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* (1931–1936), served as a consultant for the Union of Writers of Kyrgyzstan (1937–1947), and worked as an editor at *Kyrgyz mambas* publishing house (1949–1951).

In the Soviet period, he was labeled a “nationalist writer,” but his earlier Stalin Prize recognition limited political repression against him. He supported objective study of Kyrgyz history, promoted the development of the Kyrgyz language, and openly criticized official shortcomings, leading some scholars to describe him as a Soviet-era Kyrgyz dissident.

Sydykbekov remained a major figure in Kyrgyz literature for nearly seventy years and died in Bishkek on July 19, 1997.

Literary career He began his literary career as a poet. His first poem, *Who Are These People?* (*Bular Kimder?*), was published in the newspaper *Leninchil Jash* on May 1, 1930. Soon afterward, he wrote *The Old Komuz Player* (*Chal Komuzchu*), which appeared in the magazine *Chabuul*. His first poetry collection, *Struggle* (*Kurosh*), was published in 1933, followed by *Heroes* (*Baatyrlar*, 1936) and *Poet-Nightingale* (*Akyn-Bulbul*, 1938). During this period, he also began working actively in prose. Like many writers of his generation, Sydykbekov’s early works reflected social changes in Kyrgyz society, including the new socialist system, labor, and changing social relations.

In 1937–1938, his novel *Keng-Suu* (*Keng-Suu*) was published in two volumes, becoming one of the first novels in Kyrgyz literature. In the 1950s, he revised it and republished it as *Among the Mountains* (*Too Arasynda*), with volumes appearing in 1955 and 1958. During this period, he also wrote *Poet-Nightingale* (*Akyn-Bulbul*, 1938), the essay *Ala-Toodon Jetoo* (1939), the poem *News from the Night Watchman* (*Tun Jarchysynan Kabar*, 1939), and the verse tale *The Greedy Father* (*Ach Koz Ata*, 1940). His collection of stories *During the War Days* (*Sogush Kundorundo*, 1943) reflects wartime unity and patriotism during World War II. Between 1938 and 1940, he wrote the novel *Temir* (*Temir*), published in 1946, depicting the establishment of Soviet power in southern Kyrgyzstan. His novel *People of Our Time* (*Bizdin Zamandyn Kishileri*, 1948) marked a major stage in his career. It was first published in *Sovettik Kyrgyzstan* (*Ala-Too*) and later in Moscow in Russian. In 1949, it received the Stalin Prize, making him one of the leading Kyrgyz writers. After the war, he contributed to children’s literature with *Mountain Children* (*Too Baldary*, 1953). Later, after *Among the Mountains*, he wrote the major novel *Women* (*Zayıptar*). Its first part, *Batiyna*, was published in 1962, and the complete version, including *Mountain Pass* (*Ashuu*), appeared in 1966. His later works include *Friends* (*Kurbular*) and *Confession* (*Syr Achuu*, 1977), focusing

on youth, and *Yimanbay's Character* (*Yimanbay Peyili*, 1980), which continues a character from *Among the Mountains* (*Too Arasynda*).

In his autobiographical works *The Road* (*Jol*, 1982) and *Over the Mountain Passes* (*Bel-Beleste*, 1996), he reflects on his life and experiences.

Novel The novel *Children of the Mountains* (*Too Baldary*) was written after the Second World War in 1953. It is one of the notable works of children's literature. It was translated into Russian as *Deti Gor* (*Children of the Mountains*), into Kazakh as *Tau Balalary* (*Children of the Mountains*), into Uzbek as *Tog Bolalari* (*Children of the Mountains*), and into other languages.

Background This novel reflects the ideological and educational priorities of the Second World War period. Education is presented as a key transformative force, shaping children into productive members of a developing socialist society. The school functions as the central space for modernization, collective labor, and social progress.

The narrative also highlights generational tension. Older figures such as Omor represent the nomadic and traditional worldview and struggle to adapt to Soviet institutional changes. This reflects the broader conflict between oral, tribal culture and modern socialist education. Although the text does not openly criticize Soviet policy, it subtly suggests the decline of nomadic traditions, including lineage systems, tribal identity, and traditional games, which are replaced by standardized schooling and socialist values. At the same time, the author preserves cultural memory through references to ancient Turkic stone inscriptions and early Kyrgyz heritage, challenging the Soviet image of Kyrgyz people as "primitive." Through Omor, the narrative also affirms the Kyrgyz warrior spirit, maintaining cultural dignity within an ideological framework.

MAIN CHARACTERS

Askar — a curious and intelligent boy interested in science, nature, and observation

Dinar — Askar's sister; imaginative, emotional, and deeply sensitive to stories and nature

Sabyr — the school principal who represents modern education, discipline, and socialist development

Omor — an older villager who symbolizes traditional nomadic values and resistance to change

Sabira — the mother of Askar and Dinar; an educated woman who supports school development

The grandmother — the carrier of oral memory who shares stories of the past, suffering, and tradition

Orusbek — Omor's son who struggles between traditional upbringing and modern schooling

Nina Leontevna, Seitova, and Tashbay — supporting adult figures involved in teaching, agriculture, and community development

SYNOPSIS

The story begins with Dinar using her grandmother's damaged glasses while studying at home. The blurry vision sparks her imagination and leads her to discover books, including Chekhov's "Vanka." Through this story, she learns about the suffering of an orphan child who is abused by a cruel master, which deeply affects her emotions and sense of justice. Her grandmother explains that such hardships were common in the past, especially for poor children, women, and orphans.

Meanwhile, Askar explores science through experiments with seeds, observations of nature, and diary writing. He studies growth, percentages, and agricultural improvement, developing curiosity about how nature works. Both children become more engaged in learning through school activities such as planting trees, studying weather, and observing the environment.

The school becomes a central place for education and social change under principal Sabyr. The village also faces tensions between old traditions and modern schooling, especially through Omor, who initially resists education but later changes as he becomes involved in school life and his son's learning. Eventually, villagers unite to build and improve the school. By the end, the community works together in farming, education, and cultural activities, showing progress, cooperation, and transformation.

SCENES

Askar and Dinar Discover Science and Nature

Dream of Askar Askar visited a lively book fair in a growing small town. Surrounded by young people, he admired the books and felt excited, as if he were attending a festival. He considered buying a multi-volume work when suddenly a loud noise filled the sky. A huge airplane appeared, and the crowd cheered. Askar felt himself rising into the sky while holding a book and flying above the town. A camel appeared beside him, and he traveled over wheat fields while a teacher watched him. Suddenly, he fell from his bed and woke up. It had all been a dream. His grandmother and a cat were quietly standing nearby.

Askar and the Experiment with Seeds Askar woke up and played with a cat before turning to his experiment with jars of seeds. He carefully checked how many seeds had grown and compared the expected results with the actual ones. He explained the concept of “percentage” to his grandmother using simple Kyrgyz terms and showed how some seeds had failed to sprout. Askar suggested adjusting the amount of seed so that the harvest could reach one hundred percent efficiency. His grandmother struggled to understand the idea but listened patiently. Eventually, she told him to focus on his studies instead of complicated calculations. She worried that too much thinking might bring trouble, while Askar remained excited about science and improving farming methods.

Askar and the Puppy, Flowers, and Questions of Life Askar played with his puppy, Oqjetpes, in the countryside and observed spring flowers blooming after the snow had melted. He reflected on why flowers had such short lives, while some plants survived much longer but attracted less attention. When the puppy damaged the flowers, Askar gently stopped it and showed care for nature. Later, he wrote in his diary and asked why beautiful flowers bloomed briefly and disappeared quickly, while thorny plants lived longer. Askar began to think about life, fragility, and natural balance, revealing a child’s deep curiosity about existence and time.

Curiosity About the Natural World Askar and Dinara carefully observed nature both at home and in their surroundings. Dinara imagined the saplings brought from the village as a large forest and spoke about them with excitement. Askar listened quietly, trying to understand her imagination and thoughts. For both children, everything they saw became a source of learning. The arrival of spring, with nature coming back to life, especially captured their attention. They began to notice plants, weather, and animals more closely and tried to understand how the natural world changed.

Outdoor Learning and Discovery At school, the students participated in a tree-planting activity led by their teachers. They learned about nature, soil, water, and how plants grew over time. Dinara asked many questions about clouds, rain, and the sky. The teacher explained that clouds were formed from water vapor and later brought rain to the earth. This helped the children better understand natural processes. Outdoor learning increased their curiosity and interest. Askar also observed everything carefully and began to reflect on how nature worked and how everything was connected in the environment.

Learning Progress and Responsibility Through School Projects

Comparing Villages and Understanding Progress Teachers and students climb K k-D b  hill and begin a school tree-planting project. Director Sabyr compares two nearby villages, one developing and green, the other still poor and undeveloped. The children discuss why some places progress while others do not. Teachers explain that development depends on hard work, unity, and care for nature. The students look at the land and imagine how their own school area could become greener and more beautiful in the future. They begin to understand the importance of improving their environment together.

Learning from Nature The children start planting saplings under the guidance of teachers and a caretaker named Tashbay, who explains how to plant trees properly without damaging the roots. Sabyr organizes the students, with younger children carrying saplings and older ones digging holes. Dinara asks when the trees will bear fruit, and the teacher explains that growth takes time and patience. The children

work with excitement, learning by doing. By the end of the day, the school area begins to look like a small young forest, full of hope and future growth.

The Tree Planting on K  k-D  b   The school students and teachers gathered on K  k-D  b   Hill to plant a school orchard. The director explained that one side of a nearby village was green and developing, while the other was poor and backward. He asked the students to think about why this difference existed. The children answered that lack of work, poor leadership, and the absence of tree planting were the reasons. The director encouraged them to improve their own land by planting trees. Together, they began planting seedlings carefully and learned how to take care of them. The activity became a lesson about hard work, unity, and building a better future through effort.

Discussions During the planting work, the children and teachers discussed farming, water, and nature. They learned that even cold regions, such as Siberia, could grow fruit trees if people worked hard. The teacher explained ideas from famous scientists who had improved nature through effort and innovation. The students became excited and curious about how plants grew and how different trees could be grafted together. The narrator wrote in his diary that the school garden had become part of their future. He felt that nature and people could grow together. The hill looked new and alive, and the students felt happy and inspired by their shared work.

Dinar Learns Compassion through Reading and Family Stories

Grandmother's Glasses and Dinar's Imagination Dinar used her grandmother's old glasses while doing homework alone at home. The lenses were slightly damaged and made everything look blurry and greenish. Because of this, she struggled to write clearly and often adjusted her view, copying her grandmother's habit. At first, she was annoyed, but soon she became curious and started imagining a different world through the glasses. She felt as if the letters came alive and her thoughts became more creative. Dinar dreamed about becoming a doctor, teacher, or agronomist. She also explored a book she found and became fascinated by a writer named Chekhov and his story *Vanka*.

Understanding the Story "Vanka" When her grandmother entered the house, Dinar continued reading the story with growing emotion. At first, she struggled with the text, reading both with and without the old glasses, and was often confused. Gradually, the story captured her attention deeply. She became upset about the orphan boy who was mistreated by his master. Feeling angry and emotional, she questioned her grandmother about why adults hurt children and who the "master" was. The grandmother tried to explain but also became confused by some of the details. Dinar retold the story of Vanka, a lonely orphan who wrote a letter about his suffering, and she felt deeply moved and almost cried.

The Pain of a Child Worker Under Oppression The child read the story of Vanka, a poor orphan who was forced to work under a cruel master. He was beaten, insulted, and treated without kindness, as if he had no value. He was given hard tasks, little food, and no comfort, which made his life full of fear and exhaustion. The child imagined his loneliness at night, writing a letter to his grandfather while crying. The grandmother explained that in old times poor children suffered silently because they had no protection or rights. The child felt deep sadness and began to understand how suffering grew from injustice and lack of humanity.

Generations of Hardship and Silent Suffering The grandmother remembered a past filled with illness, death, and poverty. Families lost children to disease, and people lived with constant fear and grief. Women and orphans suffered most, often forced into painful marriages or labor. The child listened and felt overwhelmed by the weight of these memories. She realized suffering was not only physical but emotional—people carried sorrow for a lifetime. Even writing and speaking about it brought tears. The grandmother explained that society had improved, but the memory of pain must not be forgotten. The child understood that suffering had shaped the past and should teach compassion for the future.

Dinar Reads the Diary and Understands Feelings Dinar slowly reads Askar's diary but cannot fully understand it at first. She flips the pages quickly, curious about strange words about school groups, swimming practice, and reports. The writing describes children learning to swim, falling, getting hurt, and

an old man named Omor who speaks sadly about the past and changes in life. At first, Dinar just sees confusing lines, but then she begins to feel the emotions behind them. She notices laughter, regret, and memories of old times. Realizing she damaged the diary page, she feels sorry and gently tears it carefully. She keeps it inside her book with respect.

Plants, and Conversation Sabyr, Nina Leontevna, and Seitova walked along a narrow road near an old fenced area. The ground was dry and warming. Sunlight hit their faces, and a light wind touched their hands. Small red insects moved near the broken wall. Birds sat on a stone and then flew away when the group came closer. They talked about fast-growing trees along the canal. Sabyr said the branches could be used for making yurt poles. Seitova said she planted fruit trees before but they were destroyed. They continued walking toward Omor's house while talking.

Omor's Conflict with Modern Education

Omor and the Changing Understanding of Life Sabyr, Nina, and Seitova walked in nature as spring arrived and noticed the changes around them. They talked about trees, insects, and the revival of nature. Seitova remembered her childhood and explained that planting trees had not been valued in the past, and people were mainly focused on livestock farming. Sabyr said that their region was still developing. They also recalled Omor, who had a strict personality. Omor sometimes frightened children, but he actually cared for them. He defended old methods of education and criticized the new system. His views reflected the difference between old traditions and modern education and showed the social changes in the community.

Omor's Behavior Omor sat near his house and called children to him. He spoke loudly and told them to come closer. Some children were afraid and ran away. He grabbed boys before and made them cry. Adults complained about him. He said children must be trained strictly and should not be spoiled. He described how he was treated by his grandfather when young. Later, he stopped chasing children after people warned him. When Sabyr visited him, Omor told him to stop studying and become a local policeman. Sabyr refused. Omor spoke about work, school, and different jobs.

Omor, Education, and Orusbek's Name Omor believed that herding cattle, planting trees, and bee-keeping did not require education. Because of this, he told young people to stop studying and work instead. He had been childless for many years and had become angry with God. Later, his wife received infertility treatment after the age of forty and gave birth to a boy with the help of Russian doctors. Omor praised Soviet medicine and named his son Orusbek, taking "Orus" (meaning Russian). He did not want his child to be educated and did not send him to school until he was eight years old. The child was mocked by other children for not attending school and cried. Teachers and officials forced Omor to send him to school.

School Problems, Diary, and Visit Teachers often said that Orusbek was a naughty and difficult child. At the end of the school year, Sabyr, Nina, and another teacher visited Omor's house. They saw that there was no table or chair for studying, and the child studied by the window. Sabir had already told Omor to buy a table. Sabyr read the child's diary and learned that Orusbek disturbed other children during tree planting and mocked them. Omor was ashamed of his son. Orusbek also told students that learning Russian meant eating pork and said that his father had told him this. The teachers also scolded Omor for not attending parent meetings.

Omor's School Visit Omor went to school because Sabir told him that he did not come to meetings. The school building had been newly built after Sabyr became the headmaster. When Omor entered the school, he saw poet Toktogul's bust and became excited. He greeted the bust and said "Hello." Then he looked into a classroom where a female teacher was making children write sentences like "my father works a lot." Omor did not understand the Soviet school system because in his youth children studied with a mullah and began reading the Qur'an after six months. He saw his son's reading book for the first time and told him to read. His son read "at – ata – ka" syllable by syllable. Omor was surprised and shouted, "What kind of school is this?" Years passed, and he did not even know his son was in the 6th grade.

Argument Between Omor and Sabyr Omor entered another classroom and all the children stood up. The teacher told him that his son was in the 6th grade and asked him not to disturb the lesson. Then Omor went to headmaster Sabyr's office. He said, "You called me to the meeting, I came, but the teacher sent me away." Sabyr replied that the parents' meeting had been held the previous day. Omor immediately tried to leave. Sabyr told him to sit down. Omor got angry and said, "We gave you our child and said we would not interfere anymore. Education and upbringing are your responsibility. I entrusted my child to you, saying his bones are mine but his flesh is yours. Yet you still humiliate me in front of everyone."

Sabyr's Educational Mission and the Building of the New School

Sabyr's Memory of the First Village School As the school principal, Sabyr remembered how the first school in the village had been opened. At that time, both rich and poor people had tried to gain favor with the Bolsheviks. A former camel shed had been turned into a school building. Some people had rejected the idea, saying a shed could not become a school. A local manap (ruler) had said it was the best place for poor children and that they could study sitting on stones in the pasture. People had agreed silently. Sabyr's uncle had barely sent him to school because his mother had been ill and his uncle had wanted him to look after the cattle.

Sabyr's Education Journey and Early Career Sabir was eager to study, and when he started school he tried his best. However, local nomadic elites and religious leaders spread rumors that Soviet education would lead people to hell. Despite this, he wanted to continue his education in Frunze, but local authorities initially stopped him. Sabyr and two of his friends complained to the head of the province (canton). After this, they were finally given permission to study at a technical college in Frunze. Their teacher was a Russian instructor named Kuzmich. The school provided food, clothes, and education. Kuzmich often said that Kyrgyzstan needed new teachers and encouraged the students. After graduating from college, Sabyr worked in different regions of Kyrgyzstan.

Sabyr's Advice to Omor Sabyr told Omor about his memories from when he first started school in the village. Omor listened with surprise, saying things like "Really?" and "Is that how it was?" He also became upset and said that Sabyr was making his son look bad in front of everyone. Sabyr replied that if a boy broke a young tree, he might not always notice it as the principal, so parents also needed to take part in discipline and education. Omor then asked what he should do. Sabyr told him to help when trees or school property were damaged and to support the school instead of blaming it. He also reminded Omor that he had once said that too much reading could harm the brain. Finally, Sabyr added that Omor should not pass on old stories of violence, fighting, or humiliation to his son, and should stop speaking badly about the school in front of others.

Sabyr's Memories as School Principal Sabyr remembered the year 1943, when he arrived in the village as the new school principal. The previous principal had paid little attention to the school's development and was more interested in his own interests and bribery. Eventually, the villagers complained about him and reported him to the prosecutor. After taking charge, Sabyr visited the homes of all the teachers. He believed that teachers should serve as examples for both children and the community. He encouraged them to have tables, chairs, and small home libraries instead of relying entirely on the traditional nomadic lifestyle. Sabyr also felt that the school's location on the edge of the village was unsuitable. Together with the teachers, he supported building a new school at the foot of K  k-D  b   Hill, closer to where the villagers lived.

The Decision to Move the School After discussing the problem among themselves, Sabyr and the teachers went to meet the chairman of the collective farm and the head of the village council. According to the rules, such a decision had to be made together with local authorities. During the meeting, the village council chairman asked the collective farm chairman why he had never tried to move the school to a better location. The collective farm chairman replied, "Why didn't you do it yourself?" The village council chairman laughed and said that the idea had never occurred to him because the previous school principal

had different priorities. He added that only after Sabyr arrived had he begun to seriously think about improving the school.

Sabira's Support for Moving the School During the meeting, Sabira spoke up. She was the mother of Dinar and Askar. She had grown up in this village and was one of the first women to be educated in the old school. Dinar and Askar were also students at the same school. Sabira explained that the location of the school had been decided years ago by Aydar Manap. He had chosen the site because he wanted the school to be close to his own house. However, the building stood directly in the path of strong winds. Sabira remembered how, in her childhood, her hands froze during winter, and she suffered from the cold while walking home from school. Because of this, she said placing the school there had been a serious mistake.

School Construction in the Village Sabira's words were supported by the older women at the meeting. They said they were even ready to carry bricks if needed. At the end of the meeting, the villagers elected Sabira as the head of the committee to organize the school relocation work. Building the school was not easy. That summer, there was no rain and the weather was very dry. The villagers watered their fields and gardens for the harvest. For the school project, however, no one was fully prepared. Sabira, as a Communist Party organizer, called the villagers to work and said, "I will even make the kolkhoz director work." She added, "Even if stones fall from the sky this year, we will finish the school." In the end, the villagers started construction. The team leader, Mukash, and Omor carried stones while joking with each other, saying "you work," and continued building the school.

Participation of Villagers in School Construction Everyone in the village joined the school construction. Even Uzbek Tashbay, who had planned to visit his daughter in Andijan during the summer, canceled his trip and came to work. A person suffering from a measles-like illness also helped cut wood. Elderly women with little strength prepared food and drinks for the workers. The village soviet head Adyl and the kolkhoz chairman Mergen also carried stones. Mergen considered himself an elite person, but when he saw the villagers working, he also joined in. Students worked as well; Askar and other children carried bricks. Omor's son Orusbek, remembering his father's words "iron-eared camel," jokingly broke bricks. Sabir saw this and taught him the proper behavior.

Dinar and Askar's Stories Dinar and Askar were hardworking students, the children of Sabira. That day, when Omor visited the school, Dinar came home and told her grandmother about his visit. She explained how the children said that Orusbek was naughty and broke the rules. Hearing this, Omor became sad and said sarcastically, "My son is the worst child in the school, and all of you are perfect." Dinar began teaching her grandmother what she had learned from nature books. Askar also talked about plants and animals. Their grandmother warned them that they might be affected by the evil eye and told them to stay humble. Dinar was surprised to learn that her grandmother did not even know her own birth date. The grandmother said she was born in the year when a bull attacked a wolf, and that she had delivered Dinar's father in the year when a mountain deer came to the village out of hunger. She added that education is a good thing.

Community Unity, Cultural Traditions, and Celebration

Meeting at the School One day, school principal Sabyr invited Dinar and Askar's grandmother, along with Omor, to meet the students. The grandmother put on her best clothes and came to the school while remembering her son who had died in the war. Omor arrived at the school earlier than everyone else. In the principal's office, Sabyr showed them the *Ogonyok* magazine from Moscow. Omor looked at it and said, "I don't know magazines, to me everything is a book." Then he asked, "Which tribe's language is this in? Is it the Solto tribe or the Sayak tribe?" These were important Kyrgyz clans. Sabir smiled and said, "There is no tribal language, only a common Kyrgyz language." Dinar and Askar's grandmother looked at the magazine and asked, "Is this the book of the Manas Epic?" Sabyr replied, "There is no written book of Manas yet." Sabir said, "This magazine came from Moscow."

Stories, Memories, and Letters at the School Meeting At the school meeting, Omor told a story from his youth. He said he once faced a snake inside a yurt and also resisted the oppression of Aydar Manap

in the village. He spoke about how life had been difficult in the past. Dinar and Askar's grandmother shared her childhood memories, saying many children died because there was no medical treatment or education, and she appreciated that life was better for children now. Askar then read a letter from a famous Soviet scholar. It was a tradition for students to write to well-known Soviet figures, who often replied with motivating messages encouraging them to study and become good Soviet citizens.

Poetry Day at School Students recited the poems they had memorized. When the famous poet Toktogul's poem about Lenin and his mother was read, Omor looked at Toktogul's bust and, in a half-serious, half-surprised tone, asked, "Which tribe did Toktogul come from? Which lineage?" The principal Sabir calmly replied, "There are no tribes anymore, no lineage." Dinar read a poem to her mother. Omor's son Orusbek also began reading a poem about the Soviet Army. When he reached the second part, he hesitated a little. Omor then shouted loudly, "If you are my son, finish the poem to the end!" Sabir stepped in and said, "Omor, let us listen to your son." Orusbek continued, and his voice became stronger. Omor then proudly declared, "We Kyrgyz have been warriors and heroes since ancient times!" Everyone was happy for Orusbek, and Omor thanked the teachers. The day was recorded in the school logbook, and Omor was asked to sign it. Since he could not read or write, he left his fingerprint instead.

Stone Inscriptions and Learning in the Mountains One day, pioneer students and teachers went on an excursion to the mountains. The pioneer students belonged to a Soviet youth organization that played an ideological role in shaping children as future socialist citizens. The teachers gave lessons in the open air, teaching both nature and the history of the region.

During the trip, the students studied not only plants and trees but also large stones from ancient times. On these stones, there were old inscriptions and drawings. Inspired by them, the students also wrote Soviet slogans on the stones. Some proposed: "Long live peace," and "Let the kolkhoz prosper." One student suggested the slogan: "Workers of all countries, unite!" He explained that the working class is still exploited in many developing countries. The teachers discussed these ideas and their meaning.

Dinara's Mountain Journey and the School Trip That day, Askar and his classmates went on a field trip, but Dinara woke up late. Feeling envious, she decided to follow them and set off alone, hoping to catch up. With a dog beside her, she walked through the mountains, where she saw sheep and even a wolf in the distance. Fortunately, a shepherd searching for his flock met her and safely took her to his yurt in the pasture. Meanwhile, the children returned to school and submitted herbariums, stones, and soil samples. They signed the logbook. Dinara's grandmother waited at home, and when Askar returned, they realized Dinara was missing. The shepherd later brought her back safely.

Omor's Change Omor had also changed. He went to school principal Sabyr and asked to be assigned to guard the school garden. He began working very responsibly. He asked his wife to bring drinks for lunch and carefully protected the garden. He thought that nomadic Kyrgyz people had never experienced a settled life like this before, and now the garden made them happy. Meanwhile, the village and the school prepared to organize a harvest feast. Everyone contributed, and all preparations were completed.

Nomad Games A teacher named Sartbayev began studying ancient nomadic games. He came to the school garden and asked Omor to tell him about traditional games from earlier times, saying that children should learn and play them during the harvest feast. Omor at first suspected him and said he might just be coming to eat apples, refusing to give any. The teacher explained his purpose. Omor then listed many Kyrgyz games he remembered: "We used to play many games such as *ak cholmok*, *kara koyun dum-puldek*, *orompoi*, *jooluk tashmai*, and *toktu suramai*. Young men played horse games, wrestling, and tug-of-war. Hunters shot at targets, and heroes competed face to face." He sadly said these heroic games were disappearing and added that even wedding games were being forgotten. He wished his son would at least learn horse riding and traditional games.

Harvest Celebration at the Village The harvest celebration began in the village. Even Professor Petr Kuzmich, Sabyr's former teacher, visited the village and was invited as an honored guest. A concert and ceremony were held in the wide open garden area.

After the concert, the harvest activities started. Elderly villagers began picking fruits from the orchards. This was a new kind of festival among the Kyrgyz people. Traditional songs were performed, along with dances and various games, bringing the whole village together in celebration.

CHARACTER ANALYSIS

Askar

Askar is one of the central child characters in *Dağların Çocukları (Too Baldary)*. He represents the new generation growing up in a changing society where education, science, and collective work are becoming central values. Askar is portrayed as a thoughtful and observant boy who is constantly trying to understand the world around him through experience, experiments, and reading. Unlike traditional figures in the village, he is drawn toward systematic knowledge and rational thinking. His curiosity often leads him to ask deep questions about nature, life, and human behavior. Through his development, the novel highlights the importance of education in shaping a modern individual within a transforming community.

Curious Askar's curiosity is one of his strongest defining traits. He is always observing his surroundings and trying to understand how and why things happen. Whether it is nature, school activities, or scientific experiments, he shows a constant desire to explore. He asks questions about plants, weather, and life processes, often thinking beyond what is immediately visible. His curiosity is not passive but active, as he tries to test ideas through experiments with seeds and careful observation. This trait drives his intellectual growth and connects him deeply with the natural world. It also reflects the educational spirit promoted in the novel, where learning is based on discovery and experience rather than memorization alone.

Intelligent Askar demonstrates intelligence through his ability to understand and apply knowledge in practical ways. He does not simply memorize information but tries to interpret it logically and use it in real-life situations. For example, he explains the concept of percentages to his grandmother in simple terms and analyzes seed growth results in his experiments. His thinking is structured and analytical, showing early scientific reasoning. He is able to compare expected and actual outcomes and draw conclusions from them. This intellectual ability sets him apart from many adults around him and highlights the importance of modern education in developing rational thinking and problem-solving skills in children.

Sensitive Askar is also a deeply sensitive character who emotionally connects with the world around him. He does not only observe nature scientifically but also feels its beauty and fragility. He reflects on why flowers have short lives and why certain aspects of nature change over time. He is affected by stories of suffering and injustice, especially when he learns about the hardships of children like Vanka. His sensitivity allows him to empathize with others and develop moral awareness. This emotional depth balances his intellectual side, making him a well-rounded character. It also emphasizes the novel's message that education should develop both knowledge and compassion in young individuals.

Dinar

Dinar is one of the key child characters in *Dağların Çocukları (Too Baldary)*. She represents imagination, emotional depth, and sensitivity within the younger generation. Unlike Askar, who approaches the world through science and logic, Dinar experiences life more through feelings and imagination. Her perspective helps the narrative show how children interpret education, stories, and nature in different but equally meaningful ways. Through her reactions to literature and daily events, the novel highlights the importance of emotional awareness alongside learning.

Imaginative Dinar has a rich and vivid imagination that allows her to transform ordinary experiences into meaningful mental images. She often visualizes nature, school activities, and even abstract ideas in creative ways. For example, she can see small saplings as a future forest and imagines stories expanding beyond their written form. This imaginative ability helps her engage deeply with what she learns and hear. It also reflects how children interpret the world not only through facts but also through

creative thinking. Her imagination becomes a bridge between reality and inner emotional life, enriching her understanding of both nature and human experience.

Sensitive Dinar is highly sensitive to the feelings of others and reacts strongly to injustice and suffering. When she reads stories like Vanka, she becomes deeply moved by the pain of the orphan child. She is quick to feel sadness, empathy, and concern for those who are treated unfairly. This sensitivity makes her emotionally aware of human suffering in a way that goes beyond surface understanding. It also shows her developing moral consciousness. Through her emotional responses, the novel emphasizes the importance of compassion in education and suggests that understanding others' pain is an essential part of personal growth.

Curious Dinar is also curious, though her curiosity is more emotional and imaginative than scientific. She asks questions about nature, life, and stories, trying to understand why things are the way they are. She wonders about clouds, plants, and human behavior, and often connects these questions to her feelings. Her curiosity leads her to explore books and stories deeply, even when they confuse her at first. This trait shows her desire to learn and make sense of the world, but in a way that blends knowledge with imagination. It complements her emotional nature and helps her gradually grow in understanding.

Omor

Omor is one of the main adult characters in *Dağların Çocukları (Too Baldary)*. He represents the older generation that holds onto traditional nomadic values and struggles to understand modern education. Omor believes practical life skills are more important than formal schooling and often questions the usefulness of school learning. At first, he appears strict, stubborn, and sometimes harsh toward children and teachers. However, his character is not one-dimensional. As the story develops, he begins to show emotional depth, concern for his son, and gradual acceptance of change. Through Omor, the novel explores the tension between tradition and modernization in society.

Traditional Omor strongly believes in nomadic traditions and practical life experience. He values herding, farming, and manual skills more than formal education. He often doubts the usefulness of school knowledge and trusts what has been passed down from older generations. For him, life is learned through experience rather than books. This mindset reflects the older generation's resistance to modernization and ideological change. It also shows his deep connection to Kyrgyz cultural heritage and pastoral life, which shapes his understanding of how children should be raised and what kind of knowledge is truly valuable for survival in the changing world.

Strict Omor is a very strict and authoritarian figure, especially toward children. He believes discipline must be strong and that children should not be spoiled. His own upbringing under harsh conditions influences his parenting style. Because of this, he sometimes frightens children and does not initially understand their emotional needs. He expects obedience and toughness rather than emotional expression. However, his strictness is not only aggression; it is also rooted in his belief that hardship builds character. This trait highlights the generational gap between traditional methods of upbringing and modern educational approaches introduced in the village school system.

Transformative Over time, Omor begins to change as he interacts more with the school and observes his son's education. Although he initially rejects modern schooling, he slowly starts to understand its importance. His participation in school activities and exposure to teachers' ideas help him reconsider his beliefs. He becomes more supportive of his son and even takes interest in protecting the school environment. This transformation is gradual and realistic, showing his internal struggle between tradition and change. It reflects the broader social shift happening in the village as old and new values begin to merge.

Sabyr

Sabyr is one of the central adult characters in *Dağların Çocukları (Too Baldary)*. He represents the educated, progressive, and reform-minded generation working within the Soviet school system. As a school principal, he is responsible for guiding children's education and organizing the development of the school and community. Sabyr believes strongly in the power of education, collective work, and modernization. He often acts as a mediator between traditional figures like Omor and the new educational ideals introduced in the village. Through his character, the novel highlights leadership, social responsibility, and the role of teachers in shaping society.

Responsible Sabyr is a responsible school principal who takes full duty for the education of children and the development of the village school. He carefully organizes teachers, students, and community members to ensure that school activities run effectively. He does not avoid problems but actively works to solve them, whether it is school discipline, infrastructure, or communication with parents. His responsibility is especially visible in large projects such as building a new school and organizing tree-planting activities. He treats education as a serious social duty and believes that his role is not only to teach but also to guide the entire community.

Progressive Sabyr is a progressive character who strongly supports modern education, science, and social development. He believes that children should learn reading, writing, and scientific thinking in addition to traditional knowledge. He encourages curiosity, observation, and practical learning in school activities such as nature studies and farming experiments. His ideas contrast with older beliefs in the village, but he remains patient and firm in promoting change. He sees education as the foundation for building a better future society. Through his progressive mindset, Sabyr represents the new generation of leadership working to transform rural life.

Diplomatic Sabyr is a diplomatic character who handles conflicts between traditional village figures like Omor and the modern school system with patience and understanding. He does not respond with aggression but explains ideas calmly and respectfully. He listens to different opinions and tries to find common ground between generations. When disagreements arise, he acts as a mediator, helping both sides understand each other's perspectives. His diplomatic approach is important in maintaining harmony in the community and preventing conflict from escalating.

THEMES

Education

For nomadic Kyrgyz society, education was traditionally not widely available or accessible to the majority of the population. The nomadic way of life required constant movement in search of seasonal pastures, and daily survival depended on livestock breeding, herding, and practical skills rather than formal schooling. Under such conditions, education was often viewed as a luxury rather than a necessity. Opportunities for learning were generally limited to a small number of boys from wealthy, noble, or religious families who could receive instruction from mullahs or private tutors. Even then, education usually focused on basic religious knowledge rather than broader subjects such as science, history, or literature. Girls rarely had access to formal education and were expected to learn domestic responsibilities within the family.

The establishment of the Soviet education system brought significant changes to Kyrgyz society. Schools were opened in rural areas, and education became available to children regardless of their social background. For the first time, large numbers of ordinary village children, including girls, gained access to literacy and formal schooling. Education introduced new subjects such as mathematics, science, history, geography, and foreign languages, expanding children's understanding of the world beyond their immediate environment.

Many Kyrgyz families gradually recognized that education could provide knowledge about nature, technology, society, and the wider world, creating new opportunities for future generations.

However, acceptance of formal education was not immediate or universal. Some members of the older generation remained skeptical of schools and questioned their practical value. Having spent their lives relying on traditional knowledge and experience, they often believed that herding, farming, and other

practical skills were more useful than classroom learning. This attitude is reflected in the character of Omor in *Too Baldary*. He initially views education with suspicion and doubts its relevance to ordinary rural people. Through Omor, the novel illustrates the tensions between traditional nomadic values and the new educational ideals that emerged during the Soviet period.

Illustrative moment: Omor believed that herding cattle, planting trees, and beekeeping did not require education. Because of this, he told young people to stop studying and work instead. He had been childless for many years and had become angry with God. Later, his wife received infertility treatment after the age of forty and gave birth to a boy with the help of Russian doctors. Omor praised Soviet medicine and named his son Orusbek, taking “Orus” (meaning Russian). He did not want his child to be educated and did not send him to school until he was eight years old. The child was mocked by other children for not attending school and cried. Teachers and officials forced Omor to send him to school.

Education through Nature and Scientific Curiosity

One of the most meaningful themes in the story is education through nature combined with scientific curiosity. Learning does not take place only inside the classroom; instead, nature itself becomes a living textbook for the children. Through observation, experimentation, and questioning, students begin to understand the world around them in a deeper and more practical way.

Nature also serves as an emotional and philosophical teacher. When Askar observes flowers blooming briefly in spring, he wonders why beautiful things often have short lives. These reflections show that natural observation leads not only to scientific knowledge but also to deeper thinking about life and balance. Similarly, outdoor activities such as tree planting on Kök-Döbö Hill teach patience and responsibility. Students learn that trees require time, water, and care to grow—just like human knowledge.

Teachers encourage students to study clouds, rain, soil, plants, and even ancient stones during excursions. By connecting lessons to real experiences, they make learning meaningful and memorable.

Curiosity becomes the driving force of progress, and the natural world becomes a powerful classroom for discovery and growth.

Illustrative moment: Askar represents this spirit of curiosity. He carefully observes seeds growing in jars, counts how many sprout, and calculates percentages to measure success. His experiment shows how scientific thinking can improve farming and increase harvest efficiency. Rather than accepting results without question, he compares expectations with outcomes and thinks about ways to improve them. This reflects a modern, analytical approach to learning. Education, in this sense, is not memorization but investigation.

Hidden Theme: National Identity under Soviet Education

While the story openly celebrates education and progress, it also carries a deeper and more sensitive theme: the suppression of national identity under Soviet rule. The Soviet Union built schools, spread literacy, and gave the Kyrgyz people access to modern knowledge, but at the same time it weakened their cultural memory, traditions, and ethnic pride. The author expresses this tension carefully and indirectly because of strict censorship, yet the message is clearly present for attentive readers.

Soviet ideology often described the Kyrgyz as a wild, mountainous people without history, writing, or cultural heritage. This narrative created an inferiority complex among many Kyrgyz, who began to doubt the value of their own traditions. Those who took pride in their ethnic identity or in the great *Epic of Manas* were often accused of nationalism. Even reciters of *Manas* were forced to remove parts of the epic that did not match Soviet ideology, damaging an ancient oral tradition that had survived for centuries.

The story hints at this loss through small but meaningful moments. Omor asks which “tribe’s language” the magazine is written in, and Sabyr replies that there are no tribes anymore. While this seems like progress toward unity, it also reflects the erasure of clan identity and historical consciousness.

The forced separation of Turkic peoples through artificially different alphabets further weakened shared cultural roots. The author subtly mourns this loss. Education brought light, but it also dimmed memory. The story therefore shows that true education must include cultural identity, historical truth, and respect for ancestral heritage.

Illustrative moment: During the mountain excursion, the students notice ancient stone inscriptions and drawings. However, these inscriptions are not formally studied in school lessons, nor are they deeply explained by the teachers. Instead of analyzing their historical meaning or learning about early Turkic writing systems, the children focus on writing Soviet slogans such as “Long live peace” and “Workers of all countries, unite!” on the stones.

This moment is significant because it shows that ancient Turkic heritage exists physically and visibly, yet it is not integrated into the official curriculum. The absence of systematic teaching about these inscriptions reflects a broader educational policy in which pre-Soviet history and Turkic cultural foundations were minimized. While Soviet education promoted literacy and modern knowledge, it often neglected or selectively presented the deeper historical roots of the Kyrgyz people.

Transformation of Nomadic Life under Soviet Influence

Another important theme in the story is the transformation of traditional nomadic life under Soviet influence. The Kyrgyz people, who had historically lived as nomads, gradually adapted to a settled, sedentary way of life. This change affected not only their economy but also their culture, daily habits, games, and celebrations.

Traditionally, Kyrgyz society was centered on livestock, seasonal migration, and horse-based games. Omor remembers old nomadic competitions such as wrestling, horse racing, tug-of-war, and hunting games. These activities reflected bravery, physical strength, and close connection to the nomad lifestyle. However, during the Soviet period, many of these traditional games began to disappear or lose importance. New forms of organized sports and school-based activities replaced them. Teachers like Sartbayev tried to revive some old games for the harvest feast, showing that cultural memory still existed but was fading.

Soviet life also introduced new holidays and collective celebrations. Instead of purely traditional feasts or clan gatherings, the villagers began organizing harvest festivals, Pioneer events, poetry days, and officially structured ceremonies. These celebrations promoted unity and socialist values rather than tribal identity.

One of the most visible changes was the shift from nomadism to sedentary life. The Kyrgyz people began gardening, planting orchards, and building permanent schools and houses. Omor himself, once skeptical, becomes proud of guarding the school garden. The orchard symbolizes this transformation: a people once constantly moving now plant trees that require staying in one place.

Through these changes, the story shows both adaptation and loss. While settlement brought stability and development, it also transformed traditional rhythms of life. The Kyrgyz learned gardening and collective farming, but their nomadic identity gradually reshaped under Soviet modernity.

Illustrative moment: A teacher named Sartbayev began studying ancient nomadic games. He came to the school garden and asked Omor to tell him about traditional games from earlier times, saying that children should learn and play them during the harvest feast. Omor at first suspected him and said he might just be coming to eat apples, refusing to give any. The teacher explained his purpose. Omor then listed many Kyrgyz games he remembered: “We used to play many games such as *ak cholmok*, *kara koyun dumpuldek*, *orompoi*, *jooluk tashmai*, and *toktu suramai*. Young men played horse games, wrestling, and tug-of-war. Hunters shot at targets, and heroes competed face to face.” He sadly said these heroic games were disappearing and added that even wedding games were being forgotten. He wished his son would at least learn horse riding and traditional games.

The Construction of the Ideal Soviet Child

The story presents childhood not as a natural stage of life, but as something shaped and evaluated by ideology. Through Orusbek’s character, the narrative reveals how the image of the “ideal Soviet child” was carefully constructed within the school system. This ideal child is disciplined, obedient, hard-working, and politically conscious. He participates in collective activities, respects authority, protects public property, and confidently recites poems about the army and the state. Such expectations create a clear standard against which all children are measured.

Orusbek, however, does not immediately fit this model. He disturbs classmates during tree planting, repeats his father’s skeptical remarks about schooling, and hesitates while reciting a poem. Teachers

describe him as troublesome, yet his behavior reflects the influence of his home environment rather than personal defiance. Raised by a father who distrusts formal education and values toughness over literacy, Orusbek stands between two systems of upbringing. His confusion is interpreted as misconduct.

The school represents order, progress, and ideological clarity, while his home carries memories of nomadic traditions and suspicion toward modern institutions. Caught between these worlds, Orusbek struggles to align himself with institutional expectations.

Through this portrayal, the author quietly questions how childhood is defined. A child who does not immediately conform is labeled problematic, yet the narrative suggests that identity develops through guidance and understanding rather than strict judgment. Orusbek's story illustrates how education in the Soviet period aimed not only to teach reading and writing, but also to mold character according to a political vision. Childhood becomes a space where ideology and personal growth intersect.

Illustrative moment: During Poetry Day, Orusbek recites a poem about the Soviet Army before teachers and villagers. When he hesitates mid-recital, the silence becomes heavy with expectation. His father shouts, "If you are my son, finish it!" revealing traditional pride and masculine pressure. The teacher gently interrupts, allowing the boy to continue on his own. Orusbek gathers himself, his voice growing firmer as he completes the poem. The audience applauds. This moment shows how the school becomes a stage where children must display confidence, loyalty, and discipline, embodying the carefully shaped image of the ideal Soviet child.

Change as Transformation of Mindset and Identity

Change in the novel is primarily depicted as a transformation in attitudes, beliefs, and social relationships. It unfolds gradually, particularly through the character of Omor, who initially resists modern education and clings firmly to traditional authority. At the beginning, Omor believes that strict discipline is sufficient for raising a child and sees no purpose in formal schooling. He distrusts teachers, avoids parental responsibility in education, and openly criticizes the school system. His worldview reflects an older generation shaped by hardship, oral tradition, and limited literacy.

However, as events progress, Omor is confronted with new realities. His visits to the school, conversations with Sabyr, and observation of his son's experiences slowly challenge his assumptions. A significant illustrative moment occurs during Poetry Day. Omor attends the school event and listens as his son, Orusbek, recites a poem. When the boy hesitates, Omor urges him to continue. Although his tone remains forceful, his presence at the event signals a crucial shift: he is no longer an outsider rejecting education but a father emotionally invested in his child's learning. At the end of the celebration, he leaves his fingerprint in the school logbook because he cannot write his name. This act symbolically acknowledges both his illiteracy and his acceptance of the institution he once opposed.

Illustrative moment: A powerful illustrative moment of change occurs when Omor begins working as the guardian of the school garden. Earlier in the narrative, he openly criticized education, avoided school meetings, and discouraged his son from studying. He believed that herding, farming, and manual labor did not require formal schooling. However, after several confrontations and reflections, he voluntarily asks Sabyr to assign him responsibility for protecting the school orchard.

This moment is significant because it demonstrates behavioral transformation rather than mere verbal agreement. Omor, who once dismissed the school's importance, now actively protects what the school has built. His careful attention to the trees symbolizes his growing respect for education and collective work. The garden, which represents the future of the children, becomes something he values and defends.

Growth

Growth is presented as intellectual, emotional, and communal development. Unlike change, which often implies a shift from one state to another, growth suggests gradual expansion and maturation. This is most clearly seen in the characters of Askar and Dinar, who represent the emerging educated generation.

Askar's intellectual growth is evident in his scientific curiosity. He conducts experiments with seeds, calculates percentages, and seeks ways to improve agricultural productivity. His interest reflects a movement from passive observation to analytical thinking. An illustrative moment occurs when he explains the concept of percentage to his grandmother using simple language. Although she struggles to understand, Askar's effort demonstrates his developing confidence and desire to apply knowledge practically.

Dinar's growth, on the other hand, is emotional and moral. Through reading the story *Vanka*, she begins to understand injustice, suffering, and compassion. She empathizes deeply with the orphan boy and questions why adults mistreat children. This reflective response marks her moral maturation. Literature becomes a tool for developing empathy and ethical awareness.

Communal growth is symbolized by the planting of trees and the construction of the new school. A powerful illustrative moment is the collective effort of villagers—children, elders, and officials—working together to build the school. The growing orchard mirrors the children's education: both require patience, care, and cooperation.

Illustrative moment: Askar explains the concept of "percentage" to his grandmother while discussing his seed experiment. He carefully compares the number of sprouted seeds with those that failed to grow and suggests improving farming efficiency. This scene demonstrates his intellectual development and scientific thinking.

The moment is particularly meaningful because it shows a generational contrast. While his grandmother relies on traditional knowledge and experience, Askar approaches agriculture through calculation and experimentation. His ability to simplify a complex concept and apply it practically reflects both cognitive maturity and confidence.