

Deciphering the myth of the new normal: A look through of select Post-Covid narratives for children

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Abstract

The unanticipated change in the course of life owing to the COVID-19 pandemic which is still menacing the authority of man's scientific expertise has fabricated a labyrinth of existential crisis. The importance of equally equipping every category of human race, primarily children, who deserve better care and consideration to battle against and thus survive the emergency situation is impossible to be ignored. The technique of storytelling has surpassed ages in capturing the attention of children which is also being employed as a compelling source of information and moral sensibility. Picture Stories of different forms have an exceptional power in influencing children and they still retain their glory in the era of technological revolution. Picture Stories have adapted themselves to the needs of the present, going hand in hand with the current pace of life and culture of young ones and thus prove to be an obligatory tool in teaching children social changes and realities around such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The paper takes up a thorough examination of selected fictional works for children that were constructed after the outset of COVID-19 and narrates briefly the craftsmanship with which they have spread alertness about the same.

Keywords: Post-Covid Narratives, COVID-19, Coronavirus, Children's Literature

COVID-19 pandemic has utterly shattered the normalcy of human life, challenging the entire race to struggle against and survive something that is beyond the clutches of human understanding. While the physical health and immunity are significant subjects of concern, the emotional strife to overcome political, social and economic dilemmas that accompany such a critical situation needs further attention than usual. The mature and experienced adult world themselves find it difficult to deal with the anxiety and stress ejected by the new normal which thereby explains the extent of frustration and confusion children may possibly encounter in the midst of this unpredictable situation. Kids obviously come up with a lot of questions regarding the pandemic and the related changes in their lives. Well-crafted picture stories are an efficient tool to guide them in comprehending the serious circumstance that altered their course of life as well as that of their elders around, in a way that suits their level

of perceiving the same. The pandemic has indeed stimulated the dawn of Post COVID-19 narratives and a lot of mentionable works have been produced targeting the young audience. The paper canvasses three selected picture stories namely *My Hero is You* by Helen Patuck, *I Have a Question about Coronavirus* by Meredith Polsky and Arlen Gaines as well as *Kovynintee* by Anjali Anil that have initiated the responsibility to spread awareness to children describing what the virus is, how it circulates and what children can do against it.

My Hero is You is written and illustrated by Helen Patuck as part of a project by IASC MHPSS RG to provide mental support to children all over the world who are affected by COVID-19 pandemic. The book is suggested to be read by an adult to a child or a group of children to aid them in grasping the condition which also offers a supplementary guide titled "Actions for Heroes". The book begins pointing to the admiration little Sara has for her mum that highlights the seriousness with which she receives her mother's words about the puzzling situation: "Sara's mum is her hero because she is the best mum and the best scientist in the world. But even Sara's mum cannot find a cure for the coronavirus." (Patuck) Sara is curious to know how the virus looks like and her mum gives a brief and simple explanation that any child of her age can comprehend without much difficulty: "... it spreads in the coughs and sneezes of people who are sick, and when they touch people or things around them. People who are sick get a fever and a cough and can have some trouble breathing." (Patuck) Sara then wonders whether it is feasible to fight a virus which is invisible and as a reply mum emphasizes the need to stay safe to be a hero.

The plot brilliantly incorporates supernatural elements by introducing a creature named Ario to build up the curiosity of kids further. Ario initiates a dream-like travel around the world with Sara during which she meets and befriends many children from different cultures and circumstances and studies their sort of handling the pandemic situation. The intermingling of traditions and situations accords the story an effortless universality and triggers unity in diversity. Salem who lives in a desert full of pyramids is aware of washing hands with soap and water and the requirement to cough on one's elbows just as village girl Sasha is a superhero in ensuring the non-transmission of coronavirus when her family gets sick. The book has not forgotten those unprivileged lot who don't even have a house to shelter themselves during the pandemic presenting a representative from a camp named Leila. The girl shares her anxiety about death which Ario clarifies and suggests the children a technique to feel relaxed: "Focus on a memory or a time when you felt safe..." (Patuck) The gang also meets a boy Kim who has recovered from the pandemic who shares the experience regarding how gently he was taken care of. The story also boosts the confidence of kids to come back to a normal life by presenting Kim as being accepted by other children without any fear after his recovery.

Meredith Polsky and Arlen Gaines in their *I Have a Question about Coronavirus* tries to figure out ways to ease those tough conversations with kids about the virus that has overturned their daily course of life. Being moms themselves, they have adopted a distinctive structure that makes the picture story more alluring and illuminating. As the fourth book in the "I Have a Question" series which aims to explain those concepts to kids which parents and elders usually find difficult to demonstrate like cancer, death, divorce and so on, it meets the purpose precisely in accordance with the current situation. As it is equally important not to kindle unnecessary fear among kids while preparing them to adapt to this period of transition, the book is considerate enough to include only those questions that real children asked; not those that adults imagine they may ask. The language adopted is appreciably candid omitting any sort of metaphors. Another scintillating move by the authors is their focus on those facets of pandemic that don't lose their relevance as the nature of the confrontation is constantly changing. To exemplify further, the work focuses on emotions and impact, rather than pure facts such as giving medical advice.

I Have a Question about Coronavirus contains three parts; the first with words and illustrations, the second consisting of predominantly visual cues for those who prefer to learn so and also for those who would like to re-read the story again and finally a set of suggestions for parents and caregivers to help them guide their kids to face the pandemic. The story begins talking about how things were in the past and how unexpectedly the virus has affected the routine from a child's perspective. The discussions encompass a wide range of subjects such as defining Coronavirus as well as pandemic in general, the reasons by which people catch the disease, its symptoms, the necessity in spreading awareness, flattening the curve, concerns about future, accepting the new normal with a hopeful vision and the rest. The suggestions for parents are chiefly concerned about providing emotional guidance, careful engagement in structure and routine, sensory-based support and other essential considerations. A praiseworthy initiative from the part of the authors is their insistence on spreading consciousness of the same to specially-abled children as they tend to face huge challenges in setting themselves up with the crisis and its consequences.

Anjali Anil's *Kovynintee : Diya Gets Battle Ready* with striking illustrations from Arjun Sankar captured attention as an instagram story from a child's standpoint. The title *Kovynintee* itself is hilarious that reverberates how a child conceivably pronounces COVID-19. The protagonist is modelled on illustrator Arjun's niece Vibha, as the thought was largely inspired by a video in which she expresses her understanding about Coronavirus. The virus has been personified as a monster in order to let the children understand the concept, as most of the kids are unfamiliar with the word virus. The reading of the story reminds one of a fairy tale that never fails to grab the undivided curiosity of little ones. In conjunction with motivating the kids to understand the pandemic and the new world order, the story also persuades children to stay strong and not to give up amidst all adversities as this too shall pass some day and the world may sanguinely regain its good old regularity. The story concludes with a confident Diya who says, "You and Pa don't have anything to worry about now, Ma! I'm here to protect you from the KovyNintee Monsters. I'll be waiting for them and I'll send them flying in no time if they come in here!'" (Anil)

The plot starts with the perplexed Diya's thoughts on her parents not going to work and the shutting down of her school. Apparently, she is happy as it feels like a summer vacation but to her disappointment she is not allowed to play outside or to meet her friends. She complains that her hands have turned wrinkly as she has to wash her hands very often in accordance with her mother's instruction. Little Diya couldn't restrain herself from giggling when she heard KovyNintee from the news and thus her mamma decided to explain everything to her. Mamma tells Diya how the invisible, naughty monsters can enter home and the little one innocently offers to throw them out once they step inside. Then the mother explains to her in detail that the monsters are skilful enough to cast spells on people that can turn them as well as those around them sick. Diya gets disappointed listening to this and to cheer her up Mamma unleashes three secrets that can defeat the icky monsters. First of all, the monsters fail to find someone to harm if everyone chooses to stay inside. Secondly, the potion called sanitizer, the smell of which the monsters find burdensome can also be used against them. Lastly, when one has to step outside for necessities, masks can be used as protective shields to frighten the monsters away. The story thus overtures a singular and appealing narration that gratifies little ones with an inventive consolidation of reality and fantasy.

In the rear, man being a social animal, interactions with fellow beings from an early stage of life has an ineludible capacity in shaping his physical and psychological demeanour. Childhood being the so called early stage of orientation has been affected substantially by the COVID-19 pandemic that prevents children from their instinctual enthusiasm and exploration forcing them to remain isolated and bored. The lack of appropriate guidance and awareness

conjointly with a lack of routine may expose the future generation to erratic inconsistencies to which pertinent solutions have to be devised right away. Introducing kids to select picture stories convenient to their age and flare not only helps in developing their skills despite the adverse situation, but also creates a group of citizens of tomorrow who could patiently handle and battle against calamities such as a pandemic. The three books cleverly shafts the issue without losing the harmony, keeping the narration congruous to the little ones while responsibly transferring essential information.

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