



A traditional story

Read this **story** from India about a tree, and answer the questions in complete sentences. The writer explains that, as a child, she often heard this story told on a special day in March – the Day for Brothers – when “all sisters in India pray that no harm comes to their brothers.”

The Mango Tree (Part One)



In a small town, there was a small house in which lived a young man, his wife, and the young man’s sister. This small house had a small garden at the back in which grew a small mango tree. One day the young man’s wife came to him and said, “Look here, I’m fed up with our situation. Your sister ...”

“Have you come here to complain about my sister again?”

“What can I do? I know it’s quite useless ... My complaints fall on deaf ears, anyway ... I’m just ... so angry with your sister. I get up early in the morning, draw water from the well, light the fire in the kitchen, cook breakfast, wash and scrub pots ...”

“Don’t go on,” said the brother. “I’ve heard it all before.”

“And what does your lazy sister do all day? Nothing ... nothing ... she lolls about in the garden, watering her mango tree, talking to it, clearing away dead leaves, and feeding it manure and mulch ...”

“That isn’t all she does. She comes in and talks to me. Just an hour ago, she was playing chess with me.”

“Just because she adores you, doesn’t mean you should ignore her faults. You must tell her to leave that ... silly mango tree alone, and come and help me with the housework. I really think we should marry her off. That might teach her to be more responsible.”

Since the sister was of marriageable age, the brother could not really object. He knew though, that he would miss her very, very much.

A marriage was arranged.

Why did the young man’s wife complain to him?

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What does the writer mean when she writes that the marriage was arranged?

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Now read part two of the **story**, then answer the questions.

The Mango Tree (Part Two)

When all the ceremonies were over, and the sister was about to leave with her groom to lead a new life in a new town, she turned to her sister-in-law and said, "Dearest sister-in-law, I'm going to miss my mango tree so much. Would you please do me a great favor and look after it for me? Please water it well and clear the weeds that grow in its shadow."

"Oh, well, yes, yes," answered the sister-in-law.

Once the sister had left, the sister-in-law turned to her husband and yelled, "Did you hear that? Did you *hear* that? Did you hear your selfish sister? She didn't say that she was going to miss you. She didn't say that she was going to miss me. She *did* say that she was going to miss her mango tree!" She decided then that she was going to ignore the mango tree. The mango tree irritated her just as much as her husband's sister had. Now she could be rid of both.

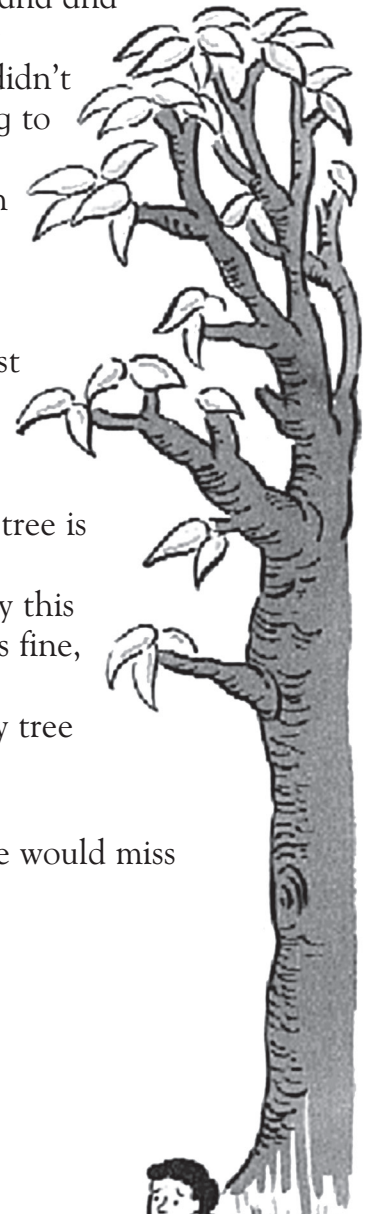
As the days passed, the unwatered, uncared for mango tree started drying up and its leaves began to fall.

At the same time, the brother, who had been a strong, robust and healthy young man, began to lose his appetite and get thinner and weaker.

One day, a letter arrived. It was from the sister and said, "Dearest brother and sister-in-law. I hope all is well and that my tree is green, and that my brother is in good health."

The remaining leaves of the mango tree were quite yellow by this time, but the sister-in-law wrote back, "Dearest sister. Your tree is fine, but your brother has not been feeling so good."

Soon another letter arrived from the sister. "Are you sure my tree is green? And how is my brother?"

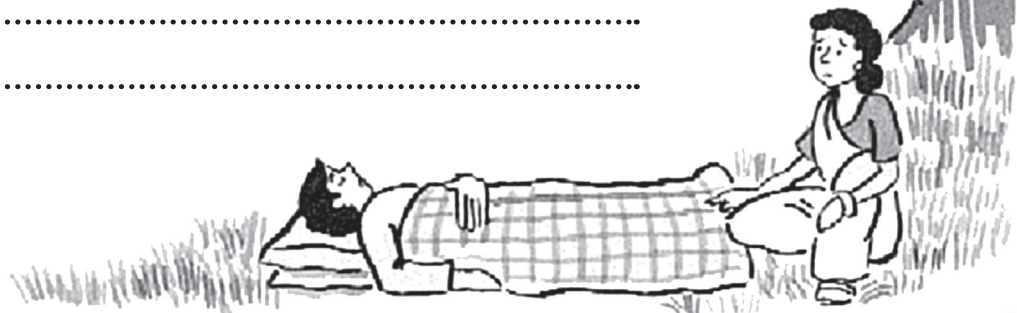


Why did the young man's wife object when his sister said that she would miss her mango tree?

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Explain why the young man's wife neglected the tree.

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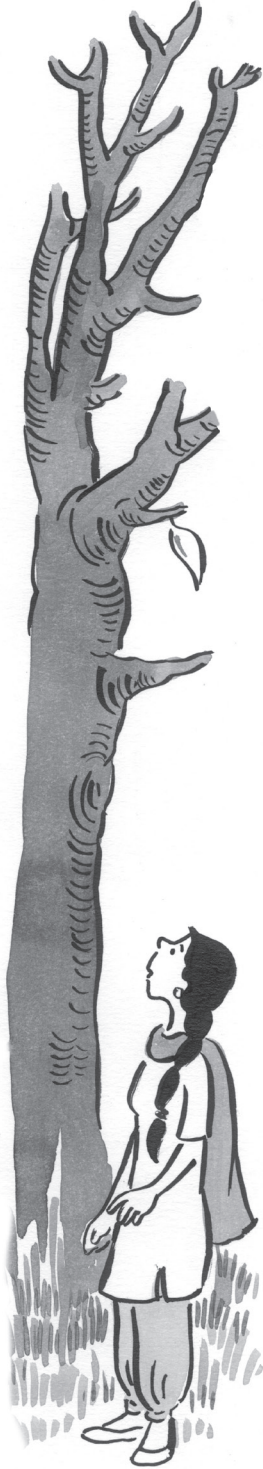




A traditional story (continued)

Read part three of the **story**, then answer the questions.

The Mango Tree (Part Three)



The mango tree only had one brown leaf on it now, and the brother was so sick that the doctors had said that he could not live. So the sister-in-law wrote back, "Your tree is fine, but the doctors have given up all hopes for your brother."

When the sister received this letter, she raced back to her small home town and went straight into the small garden to water her small tree. As she watered it, cleared the weeds around it, and mulched it, it began slowly to turn green.

The brother too, began to recover.

As more leaves returned to the tree, the brother's cheeks got pinker and his eyes became brighter. Within a month, the tree was healthy and strong.

And so was the brother.

It was only then that the sister turned to her sister-in-law and said, "Now do you understand? It was not the tree that I loved, but my brother. It was not the tree whose welfare I was concerned with, but my brother's. The tree and my brother share a common soul. It was my duty to look after them both."

From Seasons of Splendour by Madhur Jaffrey

Can you explain what "the tree and my brother share a common soul" might mean?

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How do you think the sister knew that the wife was lying when she said the tree was fine?

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Of the three characters in this **story**, whose opinions and feelings do we learn most about?

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The Mango Tree (Part One)



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“Have you come here to complain about my sister again?”

“What can I do? I know it’s quite useless ... My complaints fall on deaf ears, anyway... I’m just... so angry with your sister. I get up early in the morning, draw water from the well, light the fire in the kitchen, cook breakfast, wash and scrub pots ...”

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“And what does your lazy sister do all day? Nothing ... nothing... she lolls about in the garden, watering her mango tree, talking to it, clearing away dead leaves, and feeding it manure and mulch ...”

“That isn’t all she does. She comes in and talks to me. Just an hour ago, she was playing chess with me.”

“Just because she adores you, doesn’t mean you should ignore her faults. You must tell her to leave that ... silly mango tree alone, and come and help me with the housework. I really think we should marry her off. That might teach her to be more responsible.”

Since the sister was of marriageable age, the brother could not really object. He knew though, that he would miss her very, very much.

A marriage was arranged.

Why did the young man’s wife complain to him?

She complained because the young man’s sister did nothing all day except care for the mango tree.

What does the writer mean when she writes that the marriage was arranged?

The sister’s marriage was arranged by her brother and sister-in-law. They chose the groom and organized the wedding.

This exercise provides your child with a further opportunity to investigate text from another culture. The text is quite long, and your child may need help and encouragement. It may help if you read the story together and then discuss its content.

Now read part two of the **story**, then answer the questions.



The Mango Tree (Part Two)

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"Oh, well, yes, yes," answered the sister-in-law.

Once the sister had left, the sister-in-law turned to her husband and yelled, "Did you hear that? Did you *hear* that? Did you hear your selfish sister? She didn't say that she was going to miss you. She didn't say that she was going to miss me. She *did* say that she was going to miss her mango tree!" She decided then that she was going to ignore the mango tree. The mango tree irritated her just as much as her husband's sister had. Now she could be rid of both.

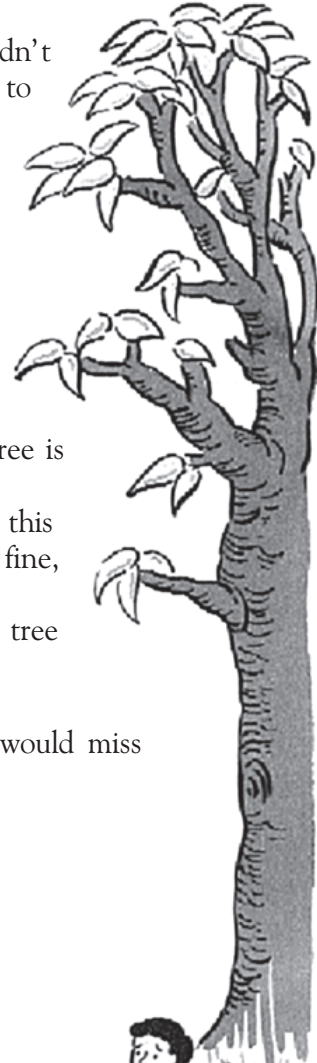
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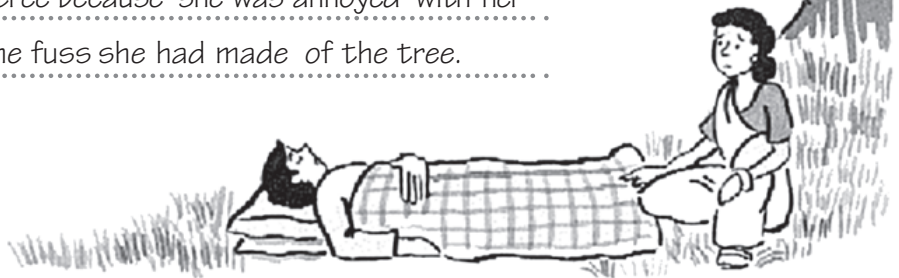


Why did the young man's wife object when his sister said that she would miss her mango tree?

The man's wife felt that his sister cared more about the
tree than she cared about them.

Explain why the young man's wife neglected the tree.

She neglected the tree because she was annoyed with her
sister-in-law and the fuss she had made of the tree.



Check your child's understanding of the story by discussing it. Talk about the portrayal of the young man's wife – are her feelings and actions understandable?

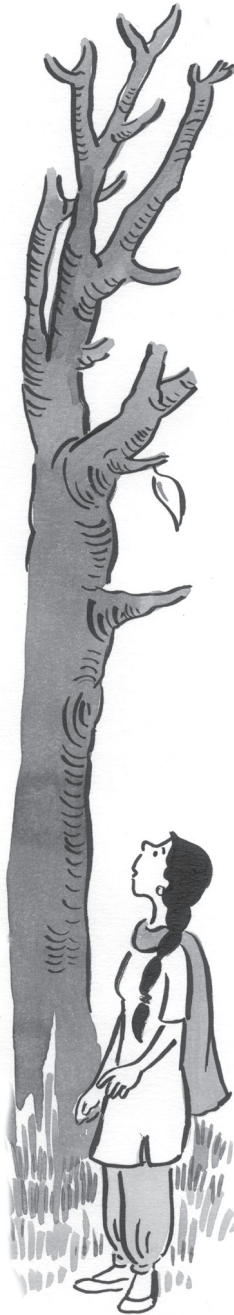
Ask your child what he or she thinks is likely to happen next.



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From Seasons of Splendour by Madhur Jaffrey

Can you explain what "the tree and my brother share a common soul" might mean?

It might mean that the tree and the brother were somehow connected.

How do you think the sister knew that the wife was lying when she said the tree was fine?

The sister knew that the wife was lying because the tree couldn't be fine if her brother was dying.

Of the three characters in this **story**, whose opinions and feelings do we learn most about?

We learn most about the opinions and feelings of the wife.

Discuss the connection between the brother and the mango tree. What does your child think of this part of the story? It may help if you discuss the questions before your child writes his or her answers.