



FREEDOM SUNDAY

GOD'S PEOPLE
WORKING TOGETHER
TO END HUMAN TRAFFICKING

AKASH & THE PIGEONS

A story for children about trafficking with discussion questions and activity suggestions.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Penny Reeve is the author of more than 15 books for children. She is passionate about using stories to empower children to respond to the world around them.

For more information about Penny or her books, visit www.pennyreeve.com

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Alex Hammond is an illustrator and Fine Art graduate from COFA with a love of visual storytelling and comics. She's currently working towards creating a graphic novel. For more information visit alt-ink.com/ or alt-ink.tumblr.com/

NOTE FOR LEADERS

Akash and the Pigeons is obviously a made up story, but the trafficking and enslavement of children all around the world is a sad reality. This story allows you to share this truth with the children in your group. Although many details are left vague by this story, there are likely to be many aspects of it that may raise questions, concern and even sadness from the children you share this story with. Spend some time in preparation praying about and thinking through likely responses. Sometimes it is enough to just share a moment of sadness, without attempting to explain the situation away.

At the end of the storytelling time you will find a range of questions. Feel free to pick and choose which ones suit your group, or the direction your discussion is taking. There are also opportunities to pray, write and create. Again, choose the activity most appropriate for your group and session. Encourage your children to become part of the story, not to place blame, but to empower gentle age appropriate advocacy and empathetic attitudes.

For more information about children trapped in slavery, in particular in the cotton industry, visit www.stopthetraffik.org/campaign/fashion

INTRODUCTION

I'm going to tell you a story. It's a story we can be part of. A story we can help decide how it might end. Are you ready? Let's begin.

THE STORY

» SHOW FLASHCARD 1

There was once a little boy called Akash. He lived in a village beside a river with his mother, his father, his two older brothers and 2 younger sisters. His house was very small, maybe as big as your lounge room. It had walls made of mud and straw, and a roof of leaky straw. At one end of the home was his mother's kitchen area. At the other end was a wooden bed and four mattress rolls. Under the eaves of the roof nested a family of pigeons.

Every day Akash's father worked in fields that didn't belong to him and most days Akash went with him. As they worked the pigeons flew above them or gathered seed from the ground beside them. Coo coo, chattered the pigeons. Coo coo.

One day Akash's younger sister got sick. Very sick. She no longer played on the edges of the fields. She no longer danced in front of their home. As his sister grew weaker and weaker, his parents grew more and more worried. His father took on extra work, in the fields and in the village, but there was not enough money to buy the medicine Akash's sister needed. His mother visited all the big houses in the nearby area and asked for work - washing clothes or cleaning, but there was still not enough money for the medicine Akash's sister needed.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 2

Until a tall man arrived from the city. He wore shiny black shoes and a shiny gold watch. He spoke with Akash's father for a very long time. Then Akash's father spoke to Akash's mother for a very long time while the pigeons chatted on the roof. Coo coo coo.

Then the man handed Akash's mother some money. Enough money to buy the first lot of medicine for his sick little sister. Akash's father told Akash to go with the man. He was told there was a good job in the city for boys like him. Boys who worked hard. And he could earn enough money there for the rest of the medicine his sister needed, and maybe even - if he worked hard - a soccer ball.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 3

So Akash left the village by the river and waved goodbye to the house about as big as your lounge room, and the pigeons that nested underneath its leaky roof. Then he went with the man with the shiny shoes and caught a bus, followed by a train, that took them away from the fields to places where houses were much bigger than your lounge room, and some even grew up close to the sky. On and on and on they travelled until the air smelt trapped and dirty.

They left the train and the man took Akash's hand and led him through the city. There was no grass, there were no trees and the river they crossed was thick and full of rubbish. Eventually they arrived at a building with grey green walls squished up against many more exactly the same. The man took Akash inside where another man was waiting. This man gave the man with shiny shoes some money. Lots of money. More money than Akash had ever seen. Far more money than it cost to buy medicine for a sick girl. And the man with the shiny shoes put all this money in his pocket and walked away.

Akash was taken to an upstairs room and told to work. But this was not like working with his father. It was not like working in the fields with the sun and the pigeons. In

this room with boarded up windows there were 40 other boys. Tired boys. Dusty boys. Boys with unsmiling faces.

» **SHOW FLASHCARD 4**

They sat on the floor with fabric in their laps and needles in their fingers. They didn't even look up when Akash entered the room. They were busy sewing, embroidering patterns and flowers and sparkly sequins onto T-shirts and dresses.

The man pointed to a space on the floor between two older boys. They taught Akash how to thread his needle. They taught him how to sew lines and circles and attach sequins as he stitched.

All afternoon Akash sewed. When it was late he was given a bowl of tasteless food. Then he sewed some more. When it was very late he was told to lie down and sleep. When it was still dark he was told to wake up. Then he sewed some more.

All day long, everyday that came and went, Akash sewed. He pricked his fingers many times, but was told to keep working. If he was too slow he got in trouble. He sewed sunshine but never felt it. He sewed flowers but never smelt them. He even sewed pigeons flying across the fabric. He wished that they were real and could travel home to tell his family where he was.

But the pigeons he sewed on fabric were always taken away at the end of each day and new fabric given to him to sew. Over and over and over again until he no longer felt his fingers when they were pricked, and no longer dreamed about what he was stitching.

One day, after Akash had been in the grey green house for more than a year, he heard a sound at the boarded up window. It was a soft sound. A gentle coo cooing. It sounded to Akash like something he'd heard once before. Somewhere far away, in a village beside a river, under the roof of a small house about the size of your lounge room. Coo coo coo.

Akash stopped sewing. None of the other boys seemed to hear it and the manager was asleep in another room, his stick quiet on the floor. Coo coo coo.

Akash put his sewing down. He tiptoed from his spot on the floor over to the wall. He put his eye against the crack in the boarded up window. He saw a grey beak. He saw a little round eye dart quickly to look at him, as though it recognised him. It was a pigeon.

» **SHOW FLASHCARD 5**

Akash poked his finger as far out the crack as it would go - out into the sunshine, out to freedom. And the pigeon pecked him. Ouch!

Akash laughed. The first time he'd laughed since he'd left his village.

All the other boys were watching him now. Their needles still, their sewing stopped and a tiny smile tugging at the corners of their tired lips.

'Tell my mother,' Akash whispered to the pigeon. 'Tell my father, tell my brothers at school and my sisters at home. Tell the children on the other side of the world - the ones who might one day wear the clothes we are sewing. Tell them we are here. Tell them so we can be free.'

The pigeon pecked his finger again. More gently this time. Coo coo coo. It chattered as if it understood everything Akash had said. Then there was a flutter of wings and it was gone.

» **SHOW FLASHCARD 6**

That night, at dinner time, Akash saved three grains of rice and placed them in his pocket. He'd give them to the pigeon next time it came to visit. But until then, he'd

better keep sewing. Sewing sunshine and flowers and pigeons on t-shirts for children on the other side of the world.

DISCUSSION TIME

I wonder how much of this story you think is true? (Allow for various answers)

Akash is a made up character, but there are many children like him all over the world who are trapped and working as slaves. They are not paid for their work, they are not allowed to go to school, they are not allowed to play games.

Some of these children work in tea plantations and work at making the tea we drink.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 7

Some work in cocoa plantations and harvest the cocoa beans which is where we get our chocolate from.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 8

And many, many children work in other industries, like factories or businesses that make the clothes that we wear.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 9

What do you think God feels about children being trapped as slaves? (Allow for various answers)

Can you think of any slaves in the Bible?

There are many slaves mentioned in the Bible and if we read the Bible carefully, we see that God cares deeply about people without freedom. One example was Joseph, the son of Jacob. (Share a picture from a story Bible if desired.) Joseph was a Bible character who was sold into slavery. For many, many years he felt like no one knew where he was or cared about how he was being treated, but God never forgot about him. (You can use this opportunity to tell the story of Joseph in more detail if you wish. The story can be found in Genesis 37:12 - 36 and Genesis 39:1 - 57.)

Why do you think Akash, in this story, tried to tell the pigeons to tell his parents where he was? (Allow this question to generate a discussion about people in slavery not having a voice.)

Can pigeons really pass on messages like this? If they can't, who can? Do you think we could be part of real life stories like this? (Allow answers and then guide the discussion to focus on how we can raise our voices on behalf of children without a voice.)

The pigeons can't really pass on messages, but we can. We can tell other people about slaves. We can write to companies that make chocolate, or clothes and ask them to make sure nobody is being forced into slavery to make the things we buy. We can buy chocolate that is fair-trade - this means that no one has been forced into work without fair pay for the chocolate we wear.

» SHOW FLASHCARD 10

And we can pray for children like Akash and ask God to help rescue them and bring them back to their families. Let's do that now.

PRAYER TIME

Spend some time in prayer with your group. Allow the children opportunities to voice their prayers too. Some may pray for the fictional Akash - we can trust that God knows Akash to be a fictional representation of the very real children trapped in slavery.

ACTIVITIES.

TSHIRT.

Colour a T-Shirt - using the photocopiable handout included with this story encourage children to 'embroider' their 'T-Shirt' however they like. Provide a variety of colouring pencils, pens, crayons and even some sequins for decoration. Next time they go to the shops to buy an article of clothing they can hand this drawing into the shop assistant to forward onto the business CEO to highlight the fact that even children are interested in where their clothes are sourced and who makes them. Alternatively print the image on postcard sized pieces of card and send them to the head office of your favourite children's clothing brand.

NEW ENDING.

Some children might like to write their own ending to the story. Share these aloud and discuss why each child wrote the ending they did.

ACT IT OUT.

Have your group prepare the story as a skit to perform for the wider church or community. Discuss alternate endings and perform the ending you'd like to have happen.

PIGEON MESSAGES.

Pigeons can't really carry messages to families - but they were once used as mail carriers around the world. Give each child a cut out pigeon shape and allow some quiet time for reflection and prayer. Children can write simple prayers for victims of trafficking onto their pigeon shape. These can then be taken home, or hung up as a flock of prayer reminders in your room.