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Nijeke Jano

A COMIC BOOK SERIES

This is the second in a series of comic books of the "Nijeke Jano" or "Know Yourself" package of communication materials for adolescents. This series deals with various health and development issues and concerns of adolescent boys and girls.

The comic book series is centered around the Hossein family and their adolescent boy Sajjad, age 15, and girl, Shanu, age 13 who live in a small town in Bangladesh. The adolescents' father, mother, Aunt Rina, and mischievous little brother, Babu, are also important characters of the series. Hedayet is a teacher in the Hossein household and Sajjad and Shanu have many relatives and friends. These enthusiastic, energetic, and adventurous adolescents struggle to learn how to handle their concerns and problems, with some help from adults.

This series addresses a range of adolescent health issues with a special focus on reproductive health. Foremost, the series seeks to help adolescents gain the knowledge and life skills needed for positive behavior development. These skills include problem solving, decision making, critical and creative thinking, dealing with conflict and emotions, self awareness, and empathy, among others. Some of the health topics covered in the series include: emotional and physical changes in puberty, conception and pregnancy, avoiding early marriage and early pregnancy, preventing HIV/AIDS and other Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), and avoiding substance abuse, as well as other important health issues.
This second comic book talks about breast development and menstruation, common concerns of adolescent girls in Bangladesh. In the story, Shanu and her cousin Nasima have their first experiences with breast development and menstruation. Following her grandmother’s traditional ideas and misconceptions, Shanu tries to use a false cure to ease breast development discomfort. Eventually both Shanu and Nasima come to understand that menstruation and breast development are part of growing up and that menstruation happens to all women. With the help of their family and friends, Shanu and Nasima overcome their concerns and fears.

The "Nijek Jano" comic book series has been developed by the Bangladesh Center for Communication Programs (BCCP) with technical support from the Health Communication Partnership based at the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health/Center for Communication Programs and UNICEF. The comic book development involved an extensive process of design workshops with Adolescent Working Group members, writers, artists, researchers, adolescents and programmers as well as formative research with adolescents, parents and community leaders throughout Bangladesh. We hope you enjoy this story.

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Dear adolescent friends,

This comic book on breast development and menstruation has been written for you and for all adolescents your age. We hope you will like the story and the characters. The story is humorous and entertaining with facts for adolescents.

You will surely read this comic book with great interest and attention. The following is a set of questions for you. After you finish reading the book, go through the questions and either think of the answers yourself or discuss the answers with others. This will help you to focus on the story and the messages that we want you to know.

- What is the subject matter of the story?
- Who are the characters in the story?
- Who do you think are the central characters in the story? Why?
- How old are Shanu and Nasima?
- What problem did Nasima face?
- What problem did Shanu face?
- What do you know about breast development and menstruation?
- Who did you find out about breast development and menstruation from?
- What kind of advice did Grandmother give to the girls? Was it all correct advice?
- How did Shanu try to solve her problem with breast discomfort?
- What would you have done if you were in Shanu’s or Nasima’s position?
- How can others be encouraged to treat menstruation as a normal process?
- What did you learn from the story?
Characters in this story

**Sajjad**: Adolescent boy, 15 years old
**Shanu**: Adolescent girl, 13 years old

**Rina**: Sajjad and Shanu's aunt, works at the school
**Babu**: Sajjad and Shanu's younger brother

**Anowar Hossein**: Sajjad and Shanu's father, shopkeeper
**Nazma Hossein**: Sajjad and Shanu's mother

**Hedayet**: Lodging master at Sajjad and Shanu's house

**Grandmother**: Anowar Hossein's mother, Sajjad and Shanu's grandmother
**Nasima**: Sajjad and Shanu's cousin

**Lily**: Circus girl
**Bittu**: Circus monkey, Lily's playmate

**Masum**: Sajjad's friend
The circus has come to Shanu and Sajjad's town.
Shanu's cousin Nasima has come to the house with their Grandmother. Nasima is not feeling well.

The circus has come!

I know, I know. Maybe we'll meet some monkeys like you.
Nasima, get up. It's morning.

The circus is in town.

What's happened to you Nasima?

I have pain in my lower abdomen.
Oh dear. You know, I also feel pain in my breast.

Sometimes I also feel a little itching.

Girls, come for breakfast!
The family gathers for breakfast.

Circus? At your age, girls should stay at home ...

The circus has come. May we go?

.... and learn household chores.
Grandmother is right. You have to learn a lot about cooking, cleaning, and sewing. Also you should learn math very well. As your lodging master, I'll see that you do.

If the girls go to the circus and have some fun, what's wrong with that? It's good for them.

Mother, things have changed since I was a boy.
I want to go to the circus, too.

I'm also going to the circus with my friends. We can accompany Shanu and Nasima.

Okay. Shanu and Nasima can go to the circus.

Your mother and I are going to your Uncle's home in Mirzapore.

Grandmother will take care of you.
I want to go to the circus.

No, Babu. You are coming with us.

That way they will have some peace.

Babu, today I have some work at school. When you come back from Mirzapore, I'll take you to the circus, Okay?
Okay, but will you really take me to the circus?

Yes, I will.

These days children are overly spirited.
Shanu and Nasima arrive at the circus in Ali’s rickshaw.
The girl's show is excellent.

The monkey is good too!

Let's go and talk to her.
What's your name?

Lily.

THON..THON.

PAA..PU..

He's Bittu.

Oh Bittu, don't be naughty!
Where do you live?

I travel around the whole country doing circus shows with my father.

This circus is my home.

Nasima suddenly feels pain in her lower abdomen. She gets scared.
What's the matter? Where are you going? The act is not over yet.

Why do you look so scared?

I don't feel very well.

I'm going home. You can stay.

I'm going with you. After dropping you at home I can come back.
Where are you two going?

Nasima is feeling unwell.

I'm dropping her off at home. I'll come back with Ali.

Do I have a serious disease?

Do you still have that pain in your stomach?

I think so, I mean, yes Shanu ....
What has happened to Nasima?
I don't know what happened. She said she had pain in her lower abdomen.

How many times have I said that it's bad for girls to just wander around?

You girls would not have had any problems if you had stayed at home.

I agree. They shouldn't have gone to the circus.
Hedyet, why don't you mind your own business? You don't have to concern yourself with the girls' affairs.

Grandmother, have I said anything wrong? At this age girls...

You should be quiet. The girls are not your concern.

What has happened? Please tell me.

I'm bleeding... and it doesn't stop. I feel very scared.
Nasima, come inside.

Don't sit on my bed.

Nasima is going to be alright, isn't she Grandmother?

Yes, of course. Her time has come.

Oh no! Nasima can't die!

Oh dear! What did I say and what did this girl understand?
Grandmother, what has happened to her?

Nasima is no longer a child. She's becoming a woman. Someday soon, your time will also come.

What are you saying?

Your mother will explain everything to you when the time is right. You have nothing to worry about.

Grandmother, I sometimes feel pain in my breasts. It also itches.

Oh, that's nothing, Shanu. You're growing up. It will eventually go away.
If the pain is too much, you can rub some mud from a rat’s hole on your breasts to ease the pain.

Can I go back to the circus with Ali now? I’ll tell Sajjad that Nasima is okay and....

...I’ll bring candied pickle for Nasima.

Okay, you may go. But don’t bring back any candied pickle for Nasima. It’s forbidden for her to eat candied pickle at this time.
Shanu returns to the circus.

Ali bhai, wait for a moment. I’ll be right back.

Lily, what are you doing now?

I have a break and am playing around with Bittu.
Lily, let's go to the riverside. The riverside is very beautiful.

What's happening? Why are they going to the riverside?

Shall I follow them? ..... But, what if the rickshaw gets stolen?

Sajjad bhai!

Shanu has gone to the riverside.
Meanwhile, back at home.

What is happening to me, Grandmother? Am I going to die?

No, my dear.

You are growing up and becoming a woman.

What do you mean?
All girls experience this when they become women.

When I was your age, I also had the same experience.

Oh, Grandmother! I was so scared!

Everything is going to be alright. You need to rest.

These next few days you have to stay at home. During the days when you bleed don’t go near bamboo trees or bushes.
Is this a disease, Grandma?

No, but when you are bleeding, you should not eat fish, meat, milk or eggs.

Why, Grandma?

If you eat fish, your blood will smell bad.

Lie down. I'm bringing a clean cloth for you. Wear it in your pants to catch the blood.

Why?
Meanwhile Shanu and Lily approach the river.
Let's climb down to the river.

If you go down such a steep bank, you could break your bones.

If we hold each other's hands, it won't be so difficult.

Okay, let's go.
Hui! Hui!

Bittu, be careful!
This looks like a rat hole.

Shanu, get back!
“Aii Aiii”

“eep”

Don’t move!
Even with the slightest movement, the snake may strike!

hiss

“eep”

hissss
Shanu, what are you doing down there?

Why are you here?

I was just playing with Bittu and Lily.

This isn't a good place to play. Don't you know there are snakes around here?

Thanks for such good advice.
Shanu, tell me, why did you put your hand into that snake hole?

I thought it was a rat hole.

But why would you put your hand in a rat hole?

For the last few days, my breasts have been aching and itchy.

Grandmother said that if I rub on some mud from a rat hole, I'll be cured.

Mud from a rat hole? Do you think it is medicine?
Oh, Shanu, this is a very wrong idea. The pain in your breasts is temporary.

You're growing up. Your breasts are growing and that's the reason for the pain.

How long will it last?

This pain will come and go and then one day it will completely go away.

Yes. Many girls experience this, but not everyone.

Did this happen to you?

Does it mean I am sick?
No. This is not a disease. It's natural.

But, I'm still worried about Nasima. Will you and Bittu come with me and talk to Nasima to cheer her up?

After hearing this from you, my worries are over.

Of course I will. Let's go.

PAA.. PU..

We're going home to cheer up Nasima.
The girls reach Shanu's home.

Rina Auntie, you've come home!
Nasima is sick. I've brought my friends Lily and Bittu to visit her.

Let me see what has happened to Nasima.

Nasima, what happened?

I had to come back from the circus.

Why?

I'm becoming a grown-up.
Oh! I guess you are the right age. So when did the bleeding start? Did you get clean cloths to use?

Yes. Grandmother is taking care of me. She has told me to rest and that I shouldn't sit on her bed.

Mother, why did you forbid her to sit on the bed? What's wrong with her sitting on the bed?

No, no .... not on my bed.

No. But sometimes we follow old superstitions, even if they don't make any sense, is it right?

I don't know what's going on...
Have you had your lunch?

First she needs to be comforted. I'm taking care of her as I did for you.

Mother, it's very good. But now she needs to eat plenty of food, like dal, rice, fish and vegetables. There's no restriction.

Where did you get these ideas?

I've learned them from the school. Did you happen to tell Nasima that this bleeding is natural for girls of her age?
Yes, Grandmother is taking good care of me.

Okay, fine. But let me be sure. The monthly bleeding is called menstruation and it starts when girls are 12 or 13 years of age and continues until age 45 to 49.

For how many days will this bleeding continue?

It continues for four to six days. It happens once in every twenty eight days or so.

Is this a disease?

No. Menstruation is not a disease. It’s a natural occurrence.
Why is it bad to eat fish at this time?

It's not bad at all! That's just a misconception.

Mother, you taught me that eating fish is forbidden at this time.

No, it's not right, Mother. There's no need to restrict any food during menstruation. Rather, more proteins such as dal and fish should be eaten since a lot of blood is lost.

Yes, that's right.

Will I be able to go to school?

Yes, during this period you can play, go to school, do everything normally.
Alas! How things are changing.

Mother, you want the best for us but nowadays we are learning many new things in school and college which you did not have a chance to learn.

If the girls can stay clean and can change their clothes every four to five hours, they have no problem going to school.

But it's difficult to find a clean sanitary latrine for girls at school.

That's changing too. Just today, we started to build a new sanitary latrine for girls at your school. It will have soap, water, and privacy so girls can take care of their needs.
Father, Mother and Babu return home in late afternoon.

He! He! Monkey, do you eat bananas? Want to go to the circus?

Shanu! Shanu!

What’s happening here? Has the circus come into the house?

This is the circus girl, Lily, and her pet monkey, Bittu. Nasima fell ill, so they came to pay her a visit.

Sister-in-law, we need to talk.

I’m going inside. Babu, come with me.
Nasima has had her first menstruation.

She didn’t know what was happening to her. At first she was very scared but Mother has taken good care of her.

Nasima’s trousers will have to be washed clean with soap and dried in sunshine. In the dark, germs can get into the clothes.

In the sunlight? What next? How shameful!

Mother, this is necessary! Germs are destroyed in sunlight. Cleanliness is very important during menstruation.
Nasima, Shanu. It's our fault that we did not discuss these things earlier with you. It should have been explained to you so you would have been prepared.

Yes, we should have told you about menstruation before it happened. Poor Nasima .... You will get more information on this from this booklet about the changes during adolescence.

Lily, your Bittu has fallen asleep. He doesn't seem to like this discussion.

Let's go and take Bittu to the circus, then we'll give him cotton candy to eat.

No. First, let's all have some rice with dal, fish and vegetables. After the meal we can go to the circus in the evening for cotton candy.
Evening at the circus.

Why do you laugh?

Which is better? This or mud from a rat's hole?
DISCUSSION GUIDE

There are various stages in a person's life. Adolescence, the period between the ages of 10 and 19, is a time of great development and change. Adolescent boys and girls go through profound physical and emotional changes as they grow into adulthood. It is a time of curiosity and excitement but also a time for learning how to cope with fear, embarrassment, shyness and tension.

When a girl reaches the age of 12 to 13, she undergoes many physical changes, including breast development and menstruation. The onset of these changes can cause confusion and embarrassment especially if the adolescent girl hasn't been told about the physical changes before they happen. This comic book shares an experience of adolescent girls dealing with their first menstruation and breast development.

Boys also experience physical and emotional changes at this time. Another comic book in the "Nijke Jano" series called "The Wizard of Nightmares" addresses boy's issues.

At first, adolescents might not feel free to discuss these matters with others but it might relieve fear and tension to talk to trusted adults or friends. It is better to talk with someone than to keep secrets. In order to have these discussions, adolescents need to have correct and relevant information on the issues.

To address different issues of adolescence, a package of materials has been developed including:

- Question and answer booklets
- Videos featuring adolescents discussing issues
- Video facilitators' guides
- Comic books
- Radio programs
- Television programs

All these materials are intended to raise awareness and encourage positive behavior among Bangladeshi adolescent boys and girls age 10 to 19 years, regardless of marriage or school status. The materials also strive to address issues of hard-to-reach adolescents, especially working adolescents in domestic or commercial sectors.

The story theme

This second comic book talks about breast development and menstruation, common concerns of adolescent girls in Bangladesh and how they can come to understand them as normal processes.

Objectives

Using the entertainment-education approach, this lively, interesting and appealing story conveys messages specifically for adolescent girls and more generally for adolescent boys, family members, parents, teachers, opinion leaders and service providers. The comic book can be effectively used to:

- Stimulate discussion among adolescent girls on the facts of breast development and menstruation, which are a natural part of growing up.
- Encourage girls to maintain sanitary practices when they are menstruating.
- Encourage girls and their families to eat a balanced diet rich in protein without restriction during menstruation.
- Convince them that no treatment is needed for breast development or menstruation and there is nothing to worry about.
- Create awareness among parents on breast development and menstruation, and that girls should be told about these physical changes before they happen.
- Encourage adolescent girls and boys to discuss their problems more openly with peers, teachers, parents and family members.
- Advocate for clean, sanitary latrines for girls at schools.

Outlets for comic book
The comic book will be made available in classrooms, bookshops, school libraries, and public libraries. Furthermore, this comic book will be promoted through adolescent clubs and other important places.

Group Discussion
Group discussion allows adolescents to discuss the story with others. One member will facilitate the discussion, allowing others to join in with their opinions. This can be done in groups of six to ten. Such discussions can be arranged in same sex groups for adolescent girls and if possible, groups for boys. This guideline for asking questions can be helpful in guiding the discussion. If appropriate, discussed points can be noted and used as a reference for following meetings. Ensure maximum participation from everybody in the group by encouraging all participants to speak.

Guideline for asking questions
General questions
- Did you like the story? If yes, why? If no, why not?
- Which characters did you like in the story? Why?
- Which ones did you not like? Why?

Specific questions
- What is the subject matter of the story?
- Who are the characters of the story?
- Who do you think are the central characters of the story? Why?
- How old are Shanu and Nasima?
- What problem did Nasima face?
- What problem did Shanu face?
- What do you know about breast development and menstruation?
- Whom did you find out about breast development and menstruation from?
- What kind of advice did Grandmother give to the girls? Was it all correct advice?
- Do you have any friends or family that give old advice like grandmother?
- What did Rina tell Shanu and Nasima about menstruation?
- How did Shanu try to solve her problem with breast discomfort?
- What did Lily tell Shanu about breast development?
- What would you have done if you were in Shanu’s or Nasima’s position?
- How can girls treat menstruation as a normal process?
- How can others be encouraged to treat menstruation as a normal process?
- What did you learn from the story?
- Should girls know about breast development and menstruation before they happen? Give reasons.