

## Reading A



## The Girl Who Asked Why

This story happened really long time back, but it is still very relevant.

Girls were taught to cook, to take care of the family, and then married off. Studying was off-limits to girls.

In those times, there lived a girl. She was a little different. She always had lots of questions in her mind.

When she was little, her mother wanted her to learn cooking.

The girl asked her mother, “Why should I learn to cook?”

Mother said, “So that you can feed yourself when required.”

The girl said “Fair enough”, and learned to cook.

After some time, her mother wanted to teach her household work.

The girl again asked, “Why?”

Mother said “so that you can be self-dependent.”

The girl said “Fair enough!”, and she learned the household chores.

Then one day, her parents told her that they will be marrying her off soon.

She asked, “Why?”

“Because all girls get married at this age”, said the parents.

“Everyone does, and so should I? That’s not a good reason. I am not going to marry.”

The girl’s determination surprised her parents. Other parents could have forced the girl into marriage, but her parents didn’t.

So, now the girl had enough time in her hands. As her father was a teacher, she joined her father's academy. There she learned several hymns and their meanings. She asked questions and learned even more. Soon, she surpassed her father in knowledge.

One day, an invitation arrived. It was from the king. The invitation was for the brightest scholar in the academy. As it happened, the king wanted to compile all the knowledge in the universe into books. To get the inputs, he had invited scholars and philosophers from all over the world.

There was a discussion in the academy about who to send for this conference. After a lot of thought, they all agreed that the girl was the brightest scholar in the academy. So, the girl was sent to the conference.

When the girl reached the conference venue, she was taken aback by the grandeur. She noticed a large number of men, but hardly any women among the delegates.



She climbed the dais to take her seat. Suddenly, there was a huge uproar. People in the audience were staring at her.

“A woman, who thinks she can sit on the scholars’ panel”

“Preposterous!” screamed someone.

“Look at her clothes, so provoking. I don’t think she is female of good reputation.” declared another.

“Stop her! It’s a sin against god.”

Everybody looked at the king for a solution.



The king pondered for a moment.

“Girl, there is some misunderstanding. A woman can’t sit on the scholars’ panel, unless she is accompanied by a man.”

“Pardon me, Your Grace! But I was invited to join the discussion.” said the Girl.

“I don’t remember inviting you.” said the King.

“You sent the invitation for the brightest scholar in my academy. I am the brightest in my academy. On the invitation there was nothing about only male scholars being allowed.” answered the girl.

The king gave a little chuckle.

“You have made a good point. I have no objection.” said the king.

“But I don’t think a woman can join the discussion.” murmured one of the women in the audience.

“Why?” asked the girl.

“You will not feel comfortable around so many men” answered another woman.

“I have no problem; my focus is on my work, not men”.

“You don’t have to do this. You are not bad looking, you can marry some wealthy gentleman.” advised one elderly.

The girl ignored him.

“Let us have a discussion. If the scholars have objections, they can debate with her. If she wins, she can join the panel.” said the king.

Several liked the solution. They were sure that the girl will be humiliated by the scholars.

The scholars on the dais discussed among themselves, and selected an elderly scholar as their representative.

“So, by joining the discussion, what you want to prove? That, women are better than men?” asked the elderly scholar.

“No, sir. I don’t want to prove anything. I am here to join the discussion, to quench my thirst for knowledge. Like all of you.” said the girl, fearlessly.

“But greater knowledge is not for women.” said the elderly scholar.

“I beg your pardon, Sir, but why?” asked the girl.

“Because female intellect is weaker than men.” said the elderly scholar.

“Says who, Sir?”

“It is written in the hymns.”

“May I ask, who wrote those hymns?”, asked the girl.

“The hymns were written by our forefathers.” said the elderly scholar.

“By forefathers you mean, our male ancestors?”, asked the girl, again.

“Yes, of course. By our male ancestors”, said the elderly scholar.

“How did our forefathers know that women have a weaker intellect?”

“They noticed” said the elderly scholar, irritated.

“But how, My Lord? Give me an example, how did they notice?”, asked the girl again.

“I don’t remember.” said the elderly scholar.

“Doesn’t matter. Why don’t any of you scholars ask me questions to prove my weaker intellect?”

Many scholars thought of asking her questions, but feared seeing her immense confidence.

“You ask too many questions, girl!” shouted the elderly scholar. He was furious.

The atmosphere was tense.

“Sir, answer her. Why is a female’s intellect weaker than a male’s?”, said the king.

“I need to study, Your Grace, to come up with an example.” said the elderly scholar.

“Then I can’t stop her from joining the scholars’ panel. She has come here on her own merit. I will allow her to sit on the panel until you come up with a convincing example” said the king.

People were still doubtful about the girl’s worthiness. But as the discussion progressed, all doubts vanished.

Days passed. The girl took part in several discussions, asked many questions and answered many others. Other scholars were astonished by her brilliance.

When the final draft of the book was compiled, many hymns which were composed by the girl were included.

Nobody knows for sure what happened to the girl thereafter.

Some say, she constructed a book of her own hymns. Some say, she opened an academy for girls. Different people, different stories. But everybody agrees that ‘the girl who asked why’ became the first female scholar.

### About the author



**Shon Mehta** wrote her first story at age seven. ‘The Girl Who Asked

Why’ is one of the stories of her book named ‘A Tale of a Fairy Tale and other Stories’.

### Meanings in context

|              |  |
|--------------|--|
| relevant     | connected with the subject being discussed |
| off limit    | not allowed                                |
| grandeur     | grand and beautiful                        |
| preposterous | completely unacceptable                    |
| hymns        | songs of praise usually of God             |
| panel        | a group of people chosen to make decisions |
| astonished   | very much surprised                        |

### Comprehension

**I Tick (✓) the correct option.**

**1. The girl did not agree to her mother’s view that girls should**

- a) learn to cook.
- b) do household chores.
- c) marry at a certain age.

**2. The parents believed that the girl should marry**

- q) at a certain age.
- b) take care of her husband.
- c) cook and do household work.

**3. When the king allowed her to join the panel, the audience**

- a) felt happy and cheered the king.
- b) was not sure of her worthiness.
- c) left the venue in protest.

**II. The following are the comments made by the people about the girl. Put a tick (✓) on the comments that you think are correct and cross (X) the wrong ones.**

- a) She was wearing provoking clothes.
- b) She was sinning against God.
- c) She was of good reputation.
- d) She was very good looking.
- e) She was talented.
- f) She was very confident.
- g) She was not fit to be in a company of scholars.
- h) She could marry a rich person.
- i) She would feel uncomfortable in the company of men.

**III. A. Complete the grid with suitable information from the story. You may choose the words given in the box One has been done.**

|    | The actual words spoken  | Who said | What do these words show about the speaker? |
|----|--|----------|---|
| a. | "A woman can't sit on the scholar's panel unless she is accompanied by a man." | the king | He is prejudiced                            |
| b. | "Pardon me, Your Grace! But I was invited to join the discussion."             |          |   |
| c. | "But I don't think a woman can join the discussion."                           |          |   |



|    |   |  |  |
|----|---|--|--|
| d. | “So, by joining the discussion, what do you want to prove? That , women are better than men?” |  |  |
| e. | May I ask who wrote those hymns?”   |  |  |
| f  | “...Why is a female intellect weaker than a male?”  |  |  |
| g  | “I need to study, Your Grace, to come up with an example.”                                    |  |  |
| h. | “You ask too many questions, girl!”   |  |  |

**B. Which of the above utterances (actual words spoken) do you support and why?**

### **III. Answer the following questions.**

1. Why did the academy send the girl to the conference?
2. Why did the king invite scholars and philosophers from all over the world?
3. How did the girl justify her presence in the auditorium?
4. What made the king support the girl in the end?
5. "Women have weaker intellect," say the hymns. Do you agree/disagree with this view? Give reason(s).

### **Vocabulary**



**I Tick (✓) the correct meaning of the underlined word in each of the following sentences.**

1. She surpassed her father in knowledge.

- a) defeated
- b) bypassed
- c) equaled

**2. The king wanted to compile all the knowledge.**

- a) save
- b) gather
- c) share

**3. She noticed a large number of men, but hardly any women among the delegates.**

- a) guests
- b) audience
- c) representatives

**4. The king gave a little chuckle.**

- a) nod
- b) cry
- c) laugh

**5. They were sure that the girl will be humiliated by scholars.**

- a) ignored
- b) praised
- c) insulted

**6. If the scholars have objections, they can debate with her.**

- a) argue
- b) fight
- c) talk

## Grammar

**Read the following.**

So, now the girl *had* enough time in her hands. As her father *was* a teacher, she *joined* her father's academy. There she *learned* several hymns and their meanings. She *asked* her questions and learned even more. Soon, she *surpassed* her father in knowledge...





As it happened, the king wanted **to compile** all the knowledge in the universe into books. **To get** the inputs, he had *invited* scholars and philosophers from all over the world.

Words in italics in the above paragraphs are **finite verbs**. *They change with number and person of the subject.* They also reflect tense and may consist of one or more than one word. 'To compile' and 'to get' are **non finite verbs**. They are called *They do not change with number and person of the subject. They do not reflect tense.*

There are many purposes for which infinitives are used.

**1. Read the following text and pick out finite and non finite verbs.**

Girls were taught to cook, to take care of the family, and then married off. Studying was off-limits to girls.

In those times, there lived a girl. She was a little different. She always had lots of questions in her mind.

When she was little, her mother wanted her to learn cooking.

The girl asked her mother, "Why should I learn to cook?"

Mother said, "So that you can feed yourself when required."

The girl said "Fair enough", and learned to cook.

After some time, her mother wanted to teach her household work.

**2. Fill in the blanks with the appropriate forms of verbs given in brackets.**

**The Fox and the Goat**

Once a fox was roaming around in the dark. Unfortunately, he fell into a well. He tried his level best \_\_\_\_\_ (get) out but all in vain. So, he had no other alternative but \_\_\_\_\_ (remain) there till the next morning. The next day, a goat came that way. She \_\_\_\_\_ (peep) into the well and saw the fox there. The goat \_\_\_\_\_ (ask) "what are you doing there, Mr. Fox?"

The sly fox replied, "I came here \_\_\_\_\_ (drink) water. It is the best I have ever tasted. Come and see for yourself." Without thinking even for a while, the goat \_\_\_\_\_ (jump) into the well \_\_\_\_\_ (quench) her thirst. Then she looked for a way to get out. But just like the fox, she also \_\_\_\_\_ (find) herself helpless \_\_\_\_\_ (come) out.

Then the fox said, "I have an idea. You stand on your hind legs. I'll climb on your head and get out. Then I shall help you come out too." The goat was innocent enough \_\_\_\_\_ (understand) the shrewdness of the fox and did as the fox said and \_\_\_\_\_ (help) him get out of the well. While walking away, the fox said, "Had you been intelligent enough, you would never have got in without seeing how \_\_\_\_\_ (get) out."

## Listening

Listen to the announcement and tick (✓) the winner in each category.

| EVENT         | RED        | GREEN  | BLUE   | YELLOW    |
|---------------|------------|--------|--------|-----------|
| Sketching     | Anju       | Kabir  | Tanya  | Ravinder  |
| Painting      | Nivin      | Sara   | Bulbul | Abdul     |
| Greeting Card | Rameshwari | Nadita | Alex   | Suraj     |
| Rangoli       | Chameli    | Renu   | Arti   | Saroj     |
| Table Tennis  | Joel       | Sima   | Tanya  | Jai       |
| Chess         | Vivek      | Kevin  | Rahul  | Dipti     |
| Caroms        | Daljit     | Bina   | Reshma | Tameshwer |

## Speaking

**i. Work in groups and describe the above picture in a few sentences. You may use the hints given below.**

*swing, seesaw, girl, boy, parallel bars, single bar, crutches, dark glasses.*

*go up and down, push, enjoy, swing.*

**ii. Give a name to each child and say what things he/she in the picture would find difficult to do. For example : Phatik (the boy in wheelchair), would find it difficult to climb a tree.**

