

talk
to
me!

LET'S TALK EMPOWERMENT. LET'S TALK ENGLISH

Beehive

6. My Childhood

by
A.P.J. Abdul Kalam

1. Summary

'My Childhood' is an excerpt taken from the autobiography of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam titled, 'Wings of Fire'. He was born into a middle-class Tamil family in the island town of Rameswaram in the erstwhile Madras State. His home was austere, but loving. His father did not have much formal education, but had an innate wisdom. Both parents were very generous. He inherited honesty and self-discipline from his father; from his mother, he inherited faith in goodness and deep kindness. He had a very secure childhood, both materially and emotionally.

In his childhood, his close friends were from orthodox Hindu Brahmin families. As children, none of them ever felt any difference between themselves because of their religious differences and upbringing. He did encounter some discrimination from a teacher and a teacher's wife because he was a Muslim. However, these incidents were resolved. His family exposed him to the best of both the Hindu and the Muslim religions. When he grew older, he asked his father for permission to study at the District Headquarters in Ramanathapuram. His father agreed to let him go.

Check out a truly motivational speech by our eleventh President, Dr. Abdul Kalam. Click on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zd9mE0d2M9k>

2. Vocabulary

1. **Statesmen** – important politicians, especially ones that people respect
Statesmen like Pandit Jawarharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhai Patel helped build our country after independence.
2. **Autobiography** – a book written by someone about their own life
Mahatma Gandhi's autobiography is called 'The Story of My Experiments with Truth'.
3. **Erstwhile** – former, in the past
Gayatri Devi was the **erstwhile** Maharani of Jaipur.

4. **Formal** – not casual, official or important gathering
The meeting with the Prime Minister is always a **formal** occasion.
5. **Innate** – within you, quality you are born with
My mother has an **innate** goodness.
6. **Ancestral house** – family house passed down from generation to generation
I live with my grandparents in our **ancestral** home.
7. **Austere** – simple
Gandhiji lived a very **austere** life.
8. **Inessential** – not necessary
The shops have stopped stocking all **inessential** items.
9. **Luxuries** – great comfort, provided by expensive and beautiful things
She had got so used to the **luxuries** provided in the palace that she could not leave it.
10. **Necessities** – things that are needed, especially to live
The orphanage provided all the **necessities** of life, but no affection and warmth.
11. **Materially** – physical comforts, relates to money and wealth
Worldwide, life in this century is **materially** oriented.
12. **Emotionally** – in a way that relates to feelings
She spoke **emotionally** about the hardships she had to endure during her childhood.
13. **Erupted** – to burst out suddenly or explode
The bomb suddenly **erupted** and injured many people in the market.
14. **Provision** – (supply with) food, drink, or equipment
There are **provision** stores in each colony in Delhi.
15. **Princely sum** – generous amount (here, ironic)
The little boy selling balloons at the street corner earned the **princely sum** of twenty rupees per day.
16. **Anna** – an old Indian coin, worth about six paise now
I found an eight **anna** coin in my grandmother's purse.

17. **Isolated** – alone, apart from people and things
The Antarctic is a very **isolated** continent.
18. **Allied Forces** – the armies of the U.K., U.S.A. and Russia during the Second World War
The **Allied Forces** won the Second World War against Germany and Japan in 1945.
19. **Emergency** – something dangerous or serious, such as an accident, that happens suddenly or unexpectedly and needs fast action in order to avoid harmful results
The pilot of the plane was forced to make an **emergency** landing on the state highway.
20. **Declared** – publicly said or admitted
The government **declared** that the price of petrol would go up by Rs.2 the next day.
21. **Casualty** – a person or thing that suffers as a result of something else happening
She lost her job, a **casualty** of the slowdown of the economy.
22. **Suspension** – put on hold, not allowed to do for a short while
Vimla was very angry about her **suspension** from school, even though she admitted that she had stolen money from a classmate.
23. **Bundled** – a number of things that have been fastened or held together
The clothes were all **bundled** together and wrapped up in a dirty sheet.
24. **Distributed** – gave something out to several people, or spread or supplied something
She **distributed** the blankets to the homeless people sleeping on the pavement.
25. **Wages** – earnings, money made day to day
Daily **wage** workers on farms have no earnings during the monsoons.
26. **Surge** – a sudden and great increase
The heavy rains led to a **surge** in the water level of the river.
27. **Inherited** – to have biological characteristics that have been passed down from parent to children; also money and property passed down to children
All living organisms have **inherited** genes from their ancestors.

28. **Characteristics** – features that define typical or noticeable quality of someone or something
Each plant has unique **characteristics**.
29. **Socio-economic** – matters relating to customs and wealth
Socio-economic disparity in India is very wide, Mukesh Ambani is at one end, and a starving beggar is at the other end.
30. **Environment** – the conditions that one lives or works in
The **environment** in the school made the children very happy and eager to learn.
31. **Authority** – the moral or legal right or ability to control
The teacher had no **authority** to declare a holiday for the whole school.
32. **Self-discipline** – the ability to make yourself do things you know you should do even when you do not want to
She had great **self-discipline** and woke up early each morning to study.
33. **Orthodox** – Old fashioned, observing traditions day to day
Many people in India are quite **orthodox**, so arranged marriages are still quite common.
34. **Upbringing** – the way you are treated and educated when young, especially by your parents, and the effect this has on how you behave
Sita's **upbringing** was very strict and she had to study and rest at fixed times.
35. **Priesthood** – the position of being a priest
The **priesthood** of the local temple was taken over by Mohan.
36. **Transport** – the movement of people or goods from one place to another
The school will arrange for the **transport** of the students from the school to the railway station.
37. **Catering** – providing food and drink at an event, e.g. wedding
My friend is an excellent cook, so she started **catering** for small events.
38. **Ceremony** – formal acts, often fixed and traditional, performed on important social or religious occasions
The marriage **ceremony** was held on the terrace of the house.
39. **Sacred** – considered to be holy and deserving respect
Everyone takes a dip in the **sacred** Ganga river when they visit Haridwar.

40. **Could not stomach** - could not accept
My mother **could not stomach** the thought of my dropping out of school to get married.
41. **Accordance** – following a rule, law, wish etc.
In **accordance** with her father's wishes, she applied for a government job.
42. **Downcast** – sad, without hope, looking down with eyes
She was **downcast** at the news of her brother's failure in his exams.
43. **Weeping** – crying
The lost child was **weeping** and wanted his mother and father.
44. **Impression** – an idea or opinion of what something or someone is like
The movie on Rani of Jhansi left a deep **impression** on me.
45. **Respective** – belonging separately of each of the people mentioned
Students should list their **respective** options for sports in the school office by this afternoon.
46. **Incident** – an event that is either unpleasant or unusual
After the **incident** of stone throwing all the roads into that area were blocked.
47. **Summoned** – to order someone to come or be present at a particular place
The police **summoned** Mr. Desai to the police station to question him about the robbery.
48. **Social inequality** – an unfair situation in society when some people have more money, opportunities, etc. than other people
We should all work to remove **social inequality** in our country.
49. **Communal** – shared by a group of like-minded people
India was a truly secular country but recently there have been many **communal** riots.
50. **Intolerance** – refuse to accept beliefs different from yours
We must teach our children to shed **intolerance** and embrace brotherhood.
51. **Bluntly** – to speak bluntly is to speak without trying to be polite or considering other people's feelings
I **bluntly** told my father that I wanted to study more and did not want to get married immediately.

52. **Apologise** – to tell someone that you are sorry
Rahul had to **apologise** to his teacher for using bad language in front of her.
53. **Quit** – to stop doing something or leave a job or a place
She had to **quit** her job and move to her village to look after her old parents.
54. **Regret** – a feeling of sadness about something sad or wrong or about a mistake that you have made
The manager of the hotel **regretted** that there were no rooms available.
55. **Behaviour** – the way that someone behaves
The children were on their best **behaviour** when the Principal was going round the school.
56. **Conviction** – Belief
We must learn to question our **convictions** instead of holding onto blind beliefs.
57. **Conveyed** – to make ideas, thoughts, feelings etc. known to somebody
The documentary film **conveyed** information about smoking.
58. **Ultimately** – in the end
Ultimately you have to decide whether you want to travel today or not.
59. **Reformed** – to make a change in behavior
We need to **reform** our education system so that students are better prepared for jobs.
60. **Rigid** – stiff, unrelenting
My grandmother was **rigid** in her belief about the advantages of child marriages.
61. **Segregation** – keeping apart
During the Mughal rule in India, **segregation** of men and women was normal.
62. **Conservative** – not usually liking or trusting change, especially sudden change
Rita belonged to a very **conservative** family and was not permitted to go out alone.
63. **Rebel** – a person who does not like rules or authority, and shows this by behaving differently from most people in society
She was a **rebel** when she was a teenager and dyed her hair pink.

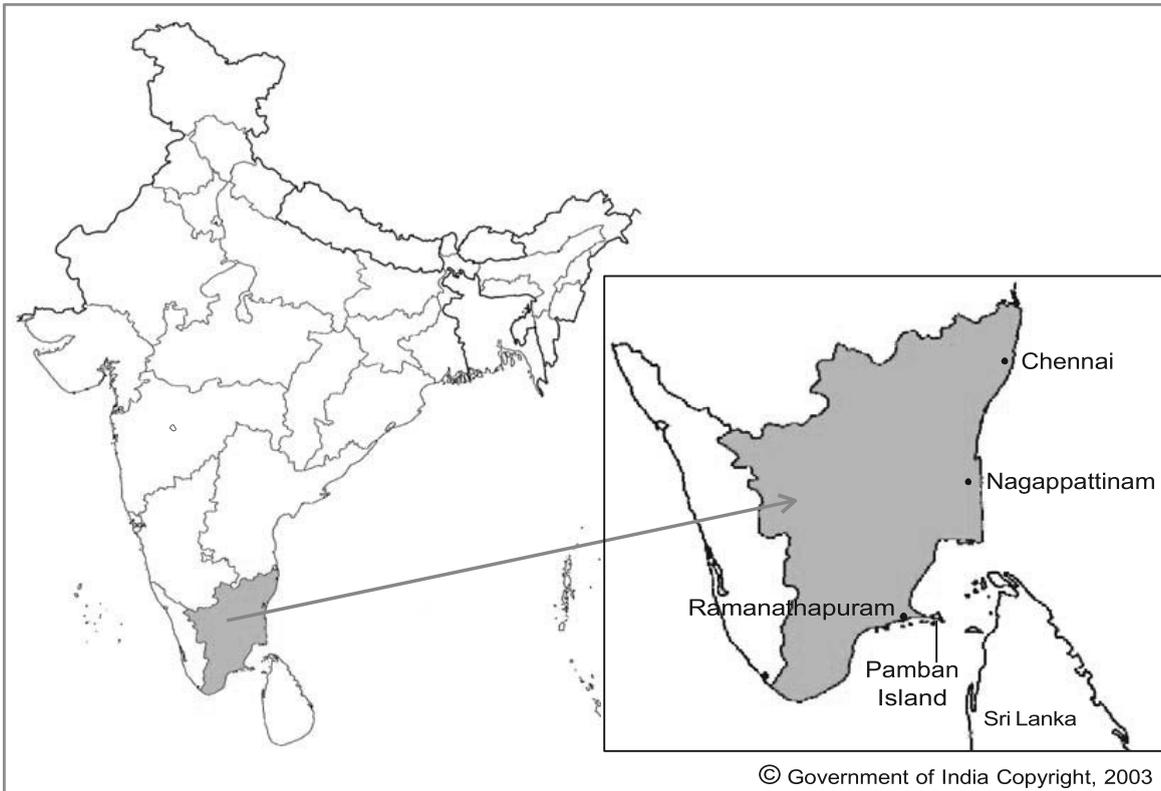
64. **Barriers** - a long pole, fence, wall, or natural feature such as a mountain or sea, that stops people from going somewhere
The Himalayas act as a natural **barrier** to stop the cold winds of Central Asia from reaching India.
65. **Mingle** – to mix with other people or things
She is so friendly that she can **mingle** easily with senior students.
66. **On par** – as good as
The specifications of these two cars appear to be **on par**.
67. **Horrified** – very shocked
I was **horrified** when I saw how much money she had spent on her clothes.
68. **Ritually pure** – kept protected from all outside influences for the observances of religion
My mother always kept her Pooja room **ritually pure**.
69. **Perturbed** – anxious, worried, disturbed
She was very **perturbed** after seeing the movie showing child abuse.
70. **Confronted** – to face meet or deal with a difficult situation
She **confronted** him when she found out he had stolen her class notes.
71. **Imminent** – something that is expected to happen very soon
After my grandfather had a heart attack, he knew that death was **imminent**.
72. **Unprecedented** – never happened before
The enormous expenditure on the latest wedding in my hometown was **unprecedented**.
73. **Optimism** – hopeful, positive outlook
She was full of **optimism** after the job interview.
74. **Permission** – allowed to do something
Ram was given **permission** to leave school early so that he could take part in the quiz competition.
75. **Quoted** – repeated the words that someone else has said or written
My grandfather always **quoted** from the Bhagvad-Gita when he wanted to teach us the right way to behave.

76. **Hesitant** – not certain

The man was **hesitant** to operate the new computer because it was different from his.

3. Activity

Find Dhanushkodi and Rameswaram on the map. What languages do you think are spoken there? What languages do you think the author, his family, his friends and his teachers spoke with one another?



4. Questions

I. Answer these questions in one or two sentences each.

1. Where was Abdul Kalam's house?
2. What do you think Dinamani is the name of? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Who were Abdul Kalam's school friends? What did they later become?
4. How did Abdul Kalam earn his first wages?

5. Had he earned any money before that? In what way?

II. Answer each of these questions in a short paragraph (about 30 words)

1. How does the author describe: (i) his father, (ii) his mother, (iii) himself?

2. What characteristics does he say he inherited from his parents?

III. Discuss these questions in class with your teacher and then write down your answers in two or three paragraphs each.

1. "On the whole, the small society of Rameswaram was very rigid in terms of the segregation of different social groups," says the author.

(i) Which social groups does he mention? Were these groups easily identifiable (for example, by the way they dressed)?

(ii) Were they aware only of their differences or did they also naturally share friendships and experiences? (Think of the bedtime stories in Kalam's house; of who his friends were; and of what used to take place in the pond near his house.)

(iii) The author speaks both of people who were very aware of the differences among them and those who tried to bridge these differences. Can you identify such people in the text?

(iv) Narrate two incidents that show how differences can be created, and also how they can be resolved. How can people change their attitudes?

2.

(i) Why did Abdul Kalam want to leave Rameswaram?

(ii) What did his father say to this?

(iii) What do you think his words mean? Why do you think he spoke those words?

5. Grammar

I. Find the sentences in the text where these words occur:

erupt surge trace undistinguished casualty

Look these words up in a dictionary which gives examples of how they are used. Now answer the following questions.

1. What are the things that can erupt? Use examples to explain the various meanings of erupt. Now do the same for the word surge. What things can surge?
2. What are the meanings of the word trace and which of the meanings is closest to the word in the text?
3. Can you find the word undistinguished in your dictionary? (If not, look up the word distinguished and say what undistinguished must mean.

II.

1. Match the phrases in Column A with their meanings in Column B.

A	B
(i) broke out	(a) an attitude of kindness, a readiness to give freely
(ii) in accordance with	(b) was not able to tolerate
(iii) a helping hand	(c) began suddenly in a violent way
(iv) could not stomach	(d) Assistance
(v) generosity of spirit	(e) persons with power to make decisions
(vi) figures of authority	(f) according to a particular rule, principle, or system

2. Study the words in italics in the sentences below. They are formed by prefixing *un* – or *in* – to their antonyms (words opposite in meaning).
 - I was a short boy with rather undistinguished *looks*. (*un* + distinguished)
 - My austere father used to avoid all *inessential* comforts. (*in* + essential)

- The area was completely *unaffected* by the war. (*un* + affected)
- He should not spread the poison of social inequality *and* communal *intolerance*. (*in* + equality, *in* + tolerance)

Now form the opposites of the words below by prefixing *un-* or *in-*. The prefix *in-* can also have the forms *il-*, *ir-*, or *im-* (for example: *illiterate* – *il* + *literate*, *impractical* – *im* + *practical*, *irrational* – *ir* + *rational*). You may consult a dictionary if you wish.

__adequate	__acceptable	__regular	__tolerant
__demanding	__active	__true	__permanent
__patriotic	__disputed	__accessible	__incoherent
__logical	__legal	__responsible	__possible

III. Passive Voice

Study these sentences:

- My parents *were regarded* as an ideal couple.
- I *was asked* to go and sit on the back bench.
- Such problems have to *be confronted*.

The italicised verbs in these sentences are made up of a form of the verb *be* and a past participle. (For example: *were* + *regarded*, *was* + *asked*, *be* + *confronted*) These sentences focus on what happens, rather than who does what. Notice that the doer of the action is not included in the sentences.

If necessary, we can mention the doer of the action in a *by*-phrase. For example:

- The tree was struck by lightning.
- The flag was unfurled by the Chief Guest.

To understand Active and Passive Voice better click on the link below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZd7rDVNi58>

IV. Rewrite the sentences below, changing the verbs in brackets into the passive form.

1. In yesterday's competition the prizes (give away) by the Principal.
2. In spite of financial difficulties, the labourers (pay) on time.

3. On Republic Day, vehicles (not allow) beyond this point.
 4. Second-hand books (buy and sell) on the pavement every Saturday.
 5. Elections to the Lok Sabha (hold) every five years.
 6. Our National Anthem (compose) Rabindranath Tagore.
- V. Rewrite the paragraphs below, using the correct form of the verb given in brackets.

1. *How Helmets Came To Be Used in Cricket*

Nari Contractor was the Captain and an opening batsman for India in the 1960s. The Indian cricket team went on a tour to the West Indies in 1962. In a match against Barbados in Bridgetown, Nari Contractor (seriously injure and collapse). In those days helmets (not wear). Contractor (hit) on the head by a bouncer from Charlie Griffith. Contractor's skull (fracture). The entire team (deeply concern). The West Indies players (worry). Contractor (rush) to hospital. He (accompany) by Frank Worrell, the Captain of the West Indies Team. Blood (donate) by the West Indies players. Thanks to the timely help, Contractor (save). Nowadays helmets (routinely use) against bowlers.

2. *Oil from Seeds*

Vegetable oils (make) from seeds and fruits of many plants growing all over the world, from tiny sesame seeds to big, juicy coconuts. Oil (produce) from cotton seeds, groundnuts, soya beans and sunflower seeds. Olive oil (use) for cooking, salad dressing etc. Olives (shake) from the trees and (gather) up, usually by hand. The olives (ground) to a thick paste which is spread onto special mats. Then the mats (layer) up on the pressing machine which will gently squeeze them to produce olive oil.

6. Dictation

Let the class divide itself into three groups. Let each group take down one passage that the teacher dictates. Then put the passages together in the right order.

To Sir, with Love

1. From Rameswaram to the Rashtrapati Bhavan, it's been a long journey. Talking to Nona Walia on the eve of Teacher's Day, President Dr. A.P.J. Abdul Kalam talks about life's toughest lessons learnt and his mission — being a teacher to the Indian youth. "A proper education would help nurture a sense of dignity and self-respect among our youth," says President Kalam.

There's still a child in him though, and he's still curious about learning new things. Life's a mission for President Kalam.

2. Nonetheless, he remembers his first lesson in life and how it changed his destiny. "I was studying in Standard V, and must have been all of 10. My teacher, Sri Sivasubramania Iyer was telling us how birds fly. He drew a diagram of a bird on the blackboard, depicting the wings, tail and the body with the head and then explained how birds soar to the sky. At the end of the class, I said I didn't understand. Then he asked the other students if they had understood, but nobody had understood how birds fly," he recalls.

3. "That evening, the entire class was taken to Rameswaram shore," the President continues. "My teacher showed us sea birds. We saw marvelous formations of them flying and how their wings flapped. Then my teacher asked us, 'Where is the birds' engine and how is it powered?' I knew then that birds are powered by their own life and motivation. I understood all about birds' dynamics. This was real teaching — a theoretical lesson coupled with a live practical example. Sri Siva Subramania Iyer was a great teacher."

That day, my future was decided. My destiny was changed. I knew my future had to be about flight and flight systems.

7. Speaking

Here is a topic for you to

1. think about;
2. give your opinion on.

Find out what other people think about it. Ask your friends /seniors/ parents to give you their opinion.

'Career Building Is the Only Goal of Education.'

Or

'Getting a Good Job Is More Important than Being a Good Human Being.'

You can use the following phrases

(i) while giving your opinion:

- I think that ...
- In my opinion ...
- It seems to me that ...
- I am of the view that ...
- As far as I know ...
- If you ask me ...

(ii) saying what other people think:

- According to some ...
- Quite a few think ...
- Some others favour ...
- Thirty per cent of the people disagree ...
- Fifty per cent of them strongly feel ...

(iii) asking for others' opinions:

- What do you think about ...
- What do you think of ...
- What is your opinion about ...
- Do you agree ...
- Does this make you believe ...

8. Writing

Think and write a short account of what life in Rameswaram in the 1940s must have been like. (Were people rich or poor? Hard working or lazy? Hopeful of change, or resistant to it?)