



TO CLEAN A CREEK

based on a true story

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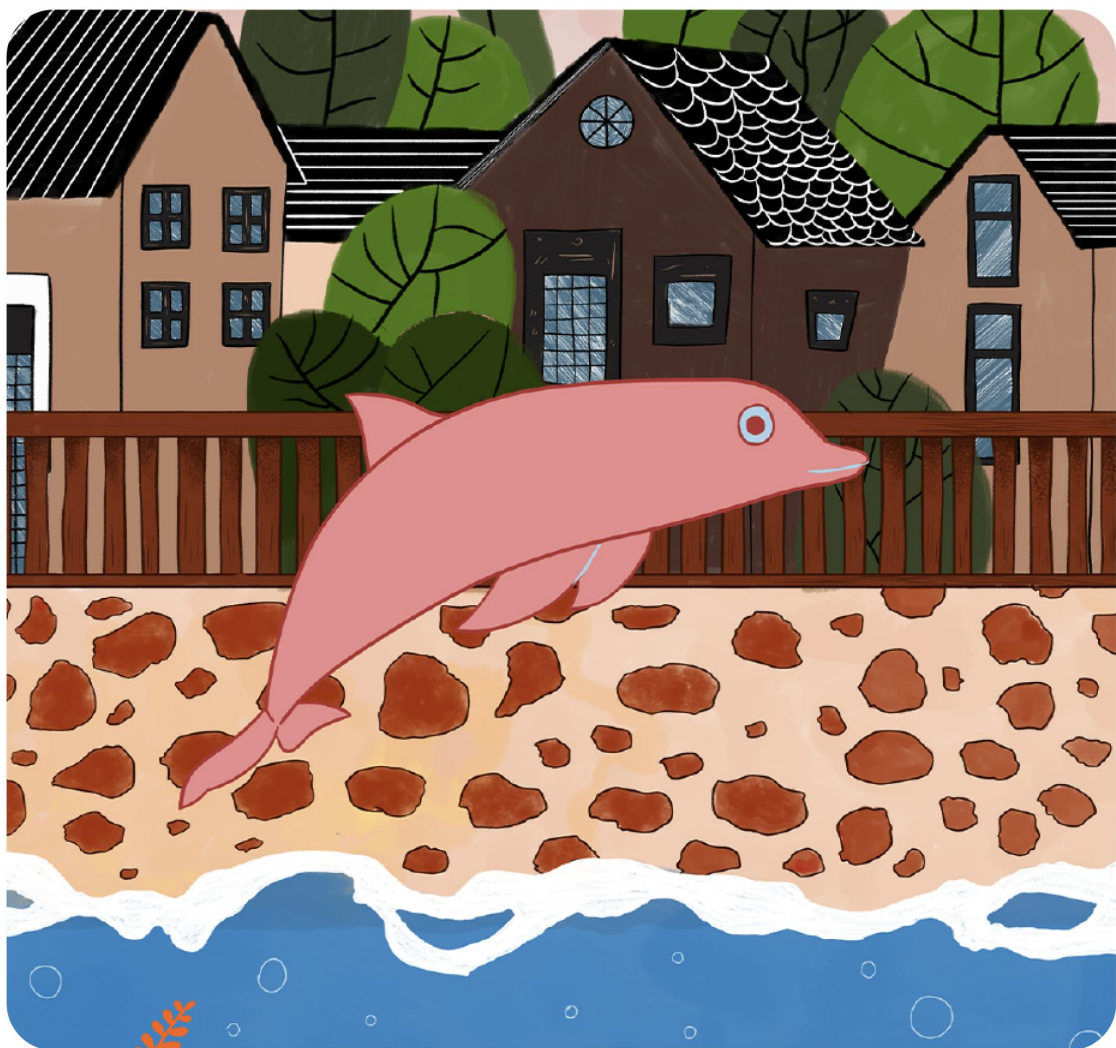


This story is dedicated to Milena Cayres.

To Clean a Creek is inspired by the true story of a young boy in Brazil who was saddened by the trash in and around the river near his home. Determined to take action, he inspired the people in his community to work together to clean up the river and restore the natural beauty of the area.

This children's picture book is the result of a collaboration between Ashoka and Worldreader. It is intended to inspire children everywhere to become Changemakers and encourage adults everywhere to support them in their journey.

The Araguaia River is one of the biggest rivers in Brazil. It is the home to thousands of animals, like bright blue and yellow Macaws. River dolphins swim and play in the water, and there are many different coloured fish.



In one town, a 13-year-old boy named Rhenan walks along the river every day. But looking at the river makes him worry because there is trash everywhere. He sees plastic bottles, old clothing, and empty food packages. The water looks dark and ugly.



At school, Rhenan asks about the dirty river. “You wouldn’t want trash in your house,” says his teacher. “Think about the poor animals!”

For days, Rhenan couldn’t stop thinking about the river. It doesn’t seem right to him that this big, powerful river is filled with trash. “It’s hurting the animals in my area,” he thinks. “And it’s also hurting the families who live here.”

Then Rhenan has an idea.



The next morning, Rhenan talks to his mother about his plan for the river. He wants to go around his town and ask for everyone's help. Maybe if they all work together, they could clean up the river!

Rhenan's mother loves his idea, "I believe the most important thing for you, Rhenan, is learning how to change things that you care about. That will stay with you forever." She tells him she will help him all along the way.



The next day, Rhenan goes to the police department. And then he goes to the Mayor's office. He visits other schools, and offices, and businesses.

Soon he has a very big group of people who like his idea!

They all decide to meet at the river the next week. On the day of the river cleanup, Rhenan is excited - but he is also nervous. What if no one shows up?

But when he and his mother arrive, there are almost a hundred people there, including many of Rhenan's friends.



Over an entire day, they all work together to clean up the trash. They pick it up off the shore of the bank and pull it out of the water.

When they are done, they have picked up almost a tonne of trash - that's the same weight as a car!

As they work, Rhenan notices how everyone is laughing and smiling. "It feels good to help our community," he thinks.



Once they have finished cleaning, they all talk in a big group. “We want to stop this problem from happening again,” says one woman.

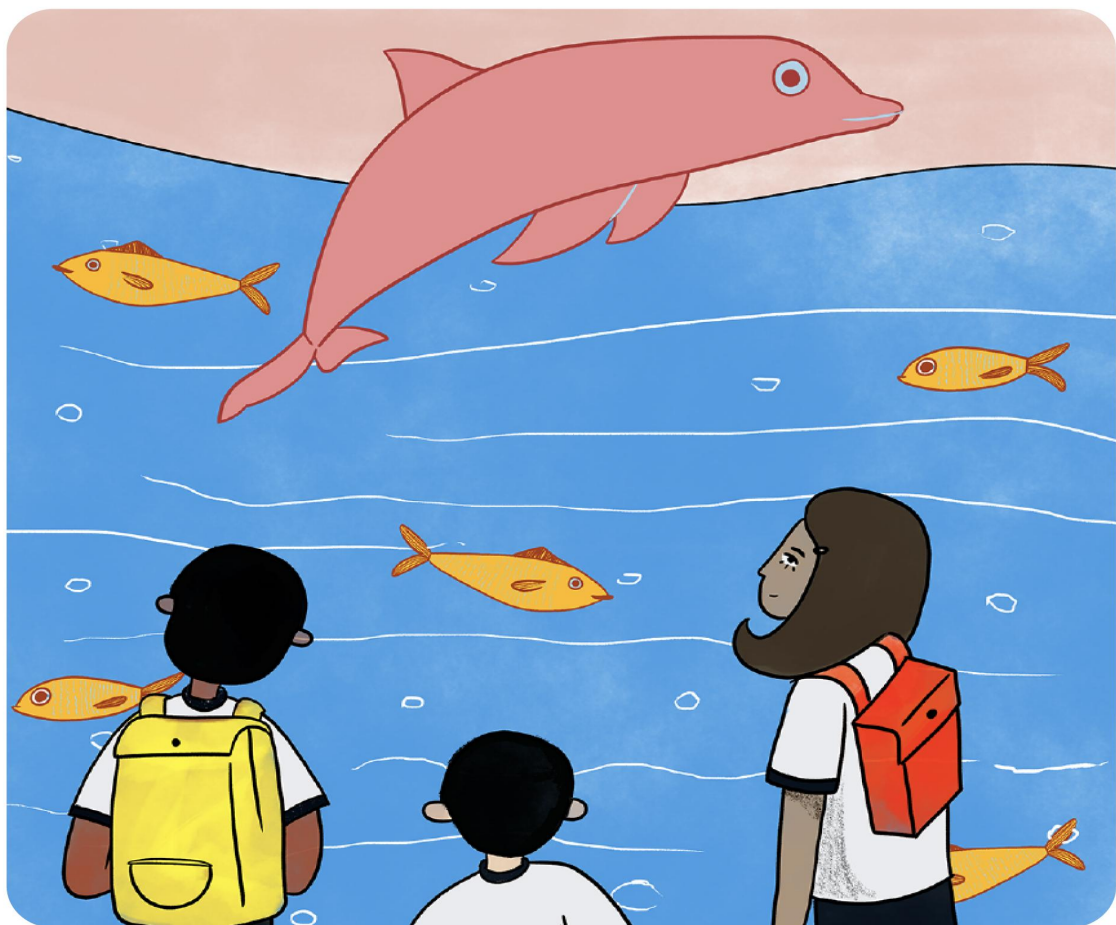
The town decides to start with education. They want to teach everyone why throwing trash in the river is harmful.

They also plan to help the river by planting more trees along the riverbank for birds and insects to live in.



At the end of the day, everyone starts to applaud. They're proud of the change that they've made - and the river rushes along beside them, clean and clear.

"We wouldn't have done it without you," they say to Rhenan. "Thank you for inspiring us to create change! What should we do together next?"



To clean a Creek

Activities



Activity 1: Listening Walk

Age Group: All ages

Skill: Empathy, Active Listening

Materials: None

Why? Throughout most of human history, a person could expect to live in one place and hold one job, interacting primarily with others of the same religious and cultural practices. Today's world demands that each of us practice empathy: the ability not simply to feel what another is feeling but to understand another's feelings. That's not something you have or you don't have, and it's not something that can be learned in an hour and memorized. Instead, cultivating empathy is part of daily practice. That practice can start anywhere by listening to others and observing the people and things around you.

How? Go on a Listening Walk with your family. Encourage everyone to listen and observe the space around them. Stop often. Throughout the walk, ask each other questions and listen closely without judgment. Change up who is leading the group so that everyone has a chance to take the lead on the walk.

Some questions you could ask are:

1. What do you hear?
2. What do you think the bugs/birds are doing that you hear?
3. What sounds are coming from animals?
4. What sounds are coming from people?
5. How does your body feel right now?
6. What do these noises make you think of?

Activity 2: Changemaking Walk

Age Group: All ages

Skill: Empathy, Respect

Materials: Trash bag, gloves

Why? Empathy cannot be learned in isolation; it must be modeled by parents, educators, siblings, and friends. Modeling activities of changemakers along with children enables adults to lead by example while demonstrating in real life how small actions can make a big difference. Practicing an activity together as a family or classroom strengthens the changemaking muscle in all of us.

How? After taking your Listening Walk, think about your surrounding environment, including your house, street, and neighborhood. What street, yard, or river could you clean up for a few minutes each day? Think like Rhenan; what would he do? Go on another walk with your family or a few of your friends. Pick up and throw away any trash you see to beautify your community.

Questions to discuss:

- How did it feel to throw away trash you see?
- Why is it important to pick up waste?
- Rhenan invited a lot of his friends and neighbors to help him clean up the river by his home. How can we get others to pick up trash to make our community a better place?

Activity 3: My Changemaker Storybook

Age Group: 3-8

Skill: Creativity, Changemaking

Materials: Paper, Pens, Markers, any art supplies

Why? Stories challenge our preconceptions, enabling us to wear the shoes of those whose experiences are different from our own. It is through stories that children first step into an imagined world, and encounter characters, circumstances, and events they would never otherwise experience. After stepping into this world, children can then begin to see themselves as the main character of their own story and take on the journey and character traits of those they read about.

How? Anyone, at any age, can create a positive change. Look back at the images of the story. Imagine yourself as a changemaker like Rhenan. Rhenan cares deeply about rivers; what do you care deeply about? What would your storybook look like? Draw and sketch out the cover of your own storybook, illustrating an idea you have for making your school or community a better place. Give your storybook a title. Share your drawing with three people you care about, such as a sibling, grandparent, or teacher. Also share Rhenan's story with them so they can read about and learn from Rhenan, too!

Some questions to think about:

1. What is a problem you or a loved one have experienced that made you feel hurt or sad?
2. What are some of the reasons that the problem exists?
3. What issues have you heard about or read on the news that you want to learn more about?

Meet Rhenan



Rhenan's journey to changemaking began with cleaning the Brejinho stream, a tributary of the Araguaia River near his hometown in Brazil. This river protects the livelihood and vitality of thousands of communities, supplying water for farms, cities, and the surrounding ecosystem. As a teenager, Rhenan recognized the interdependence of people and the planet, and protecting both requires everyone to take action. He is now activating other young people to step up for environmental justice and protect ecosystems across Brazil.

About Ashoka

Ashoka believes the ability to adapt to and drive change is essential for everyone to thrive in a rapidly changing world. Ashoka is building a global community that is laying the foundation for a world where everyone is a changemaker. At the heart of the Everyone a Changemaker movement is a vision to transform the way children and young people grow up so everyone has the power and skillset to create change for the good of all.

www.ashoka.org

About Worldreader

Worldreader believes that readers build a better world. We work with partners globally to support vulnerable and underserved communities with digital reading solutions that help improve literacy and learning outcomes for children.

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