

Title: Reminiscing on an Odd Dhaka Childhood

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Level: Upper-Intermediate to Advanced

Genre: Non-fiction (Childhood, Games)

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Now, being in the position to look back, I see what a queer childhood I had. Take this for example. Except for school, my childhood games were mostly played indoors with other kids in the apartment building in which we lived, in Dhaka. I didn't enjoy playing with other girls because every game was almost always the same: dolls, utensils, a **guest** comes to the house, they **cook**, they serve food, they talk about family, and "THE END". Nobody moves. They often took **rice**, water, *chanachur*, vegetables, and even **mud** to make it more like a real-life setting. The **dirt**, the water, and the leftover vegetables repelled me. It was too monotonous to be a game to me.

Influenced by their older siblings, it seems the **imagination** of some Bangladeshi kids, at that time, was saturated with the **patterns** of Hollywood action films (although both Hollywood and its **films** were carefully kept from their sight, for **obvious** reasons). My childhood best friend was a little boy with the wildest imagination. He had a huge **collection** of stickers of wrestlers, and his **resources** included **toy guns**, tanks, helicopters, a **series** of little soldiers of different colours, a **globe**...and whatnot!



Two childhood friends 'hanging out' together at the end of the day

He played the secret agent, and I played the spy. Both of us planned different missions **during** the **afternoons**. We drew pseudo **maps** of our building. Different apartments were chosen for different missions. We **checked** our **weapons**, and carried out our attacks on the unseen 'enemy'. When the mission began, and all the way throughout, my friend continued singing his signature tune as background music. (Years later, I was to discover it was **probably** a **tune** from the movie 'Top Gun', but till then, I believed it to be the music from some video game I was not acquainted with.)

We always had another **companion** on our missions, a girl from the third floor. It was not that she enjoyed our one-sided game very much, but we happened to **persuade** her, every time we played, of our need for a villain. It was her part to play the helpless victim, and be gunned down at the end of every mission. Yes, it was **cruel**, but to us it was necessary.

Now, as I look back, the secret missions seem as ludicrous as the girls' games with their utensils and fake food: too childish, replete with political undertones. It almost makes me shy away from the memories, because of its level of **foolishness**. Yet... somehow, there was a degree of **amusement** and cuteness in all that. As time goes by, it so happens that childhood friends are lost to age, but for a '90s kid, it wasn't all that bad a childhood.

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### Learning Activities

#### **Vocabulary**

#### **1. Words from the second 1000 high frequency General Service List.**

|            |             |         |            |             |          |
|------------|-------------|---------|------------|-------------|----------|
| afternoons | amusement   | checked | collection | companion   | cook     |
| cruel      | dirt        | during  | films      | foolishness | guest    |
| guns       | imagination | maps    | mud        | patterns    | persuade |
| probably   | rice        | toy     | tune       | weapons     |          |

## 2. Words from the Academic Word List

globe                      obvious                      resources                      series

3. **Off-list words** (These are not so common in English, so students can check them in the dictionary if they need to, but they should not spend time learning them until they already know around 80% of all the words in the General Service List and the Academic Word list.)

|                |               |                |              |                |                 |               |             |               |             |                |
|----------------|---------------|----------------|--------------|----------------|-----------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|----------------|
| acquaint<br>ed | apartm<br>ent | cuteness       | dolls        | fake           | helicopt<br>ers | huge          | kid         | leftove<br>r  | missi<br>on | monoton<br>ous |
| movie          | pseudo        | queer          | repell<br>ed | replete        | ludicrou<br>s   | saturat<br>ed | shy         | sibling<br>s  | sided       | spy            |
| stickers       | tanks         | undertone<br>s | utens<br>ils | vegetab<br>les | victim          | video         | villa<br>in | wrestl<br>ers |             |                |

### Comprehension Questions

1. What does the expression “*the wildest imagination*” mean?
2. The writer tells us that the third child did not enjoy the games she (the writer) and her childhood friend played, so why did the girl agree to take part? (Which word helped you to answer this question?)
3. Which expression means that over time, the relationships between childhood friends change?
4. What is the difference between a ‘*victim*’ and a ‘*villain*’. Why do you think the writer refers to the third child as a ‘*victim*’?

### Critical Thinking Questions

1. **Analysing and Evaluating:** Why do you think the writer preferred to play with a boy, even though she was a girl? Do you think that childhood games train children to accept certain gender roles in their adult life? Should parents ensure that their children play with

all kinds of toys, regardless of their gender, or should girls be given ‘girls’ toys, and boys given ‘boys’ toys? Explain the reasons for your answers in English.

2. **Evaluating:** Which are better for children, indoor or outdoor games? Why? How important is it to experience the natural world as a child? For city children, how can parents ensure that their children have healthy outdoor experiences in the natural world? In your view, where is the best place for a child in Bangladesh to grow up (in the city, or in the countryside)? Why? Explain your answers in English.

3. **Applying:** What kinds of games did you play with other children when you were younger? In what ways did those games shape or affect you then, and now? If you have children, how can you ensure that they play in a constructive way? What kinds of games would you NOT allow your children to play, and why? Explain your answers in English.

4. **Applying:** The famous American writer Mark Twain once said “Life would be infinitely happier if we could only be born at the age of eighty and gradually approach eighteen.” If you could choose to remain at only one age in your life, what age would you choose, and why? Explain your answers in English.

5. **Creating:** Try to recall some of your favourite childhood games. Think, especially, about the games that children commonly play in Bangladesh. With a partner, create a list of rules or instructions, in English, that explain how to play one of these games. Take turns to explain these to another pair of students. If you are able to do so, try playing the game with each other, using only English as you take part.

### **All skills**

Choose any of the questions in the Critical Thinking Questions section above, and write a few paragraphs explaining your answers. Share your writing with a classmate (reading) and ask and answer questions, in English, about what you have written (speaking and listening). Use as many words as you can from vocabulary lists one and two above as you do this activity.