



**Room
to
Read**


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Change
Starts with
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International Women’s Day Lesson Plan: Life Skills are Superpowers

Thank you for helping us celebrate International Women’s Day! Today, we’re shining a light on the superpowers that empower girls and women every day – life skills like empathy, perseverance and critical thinking that can be taught, but often go unnoticed.

This lesson plan will help teens better understand the meaning of life skills, challenges that girls around the world face, and how practicing critical thinking can change the trajectory of a person’s life.

PROGRAM	TOPIC	AUDIENCE	TOTAL TIME
 Based on a session from Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program	Critical thinking and making key life decisions	Fitting for teenagers, particularly Grade 12 (17-18 year olds)	45 Minutes

Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learn the basic theory of critical thinking Understand the importance of critical thinking for the girls in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program Gain insight into the realities of life for girls in Room to Read’s program and how critical thinking helps to better their lives
 Materials	A screen to display YouTube videos Whiteboard or flipchart paper and tape Markers Paper Pens/pencils Handout: Case Studies (attached)
Session Prep	Review the handouts. Print the Case Studies handout, one for each student.

Critical Thinking as a Life Skill



10 minutes

SAY

Today is International Women’s Day and in honor of this, we’re going to talk about life skills – traits like perseverance, confidence and critical thinking – in order words, ‘superpowers’ that can be taught. Room to Read, an international non-profit that helps girls graduate from secondary school in low-income communities, shared this activity to help us better understand life skills and the challenges girls around the world face and how these skills can help you.

Warm-up Activity

Here’s a video to give you a better idea of what life skills can mean:

Show this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fDSrpv5nx0I&feature=youtu.be>

So, after watching that, let’s list some life skills on the board.

[After students respond, write the skills below and keep them on display for Activity 3:]

- Self-confidence, managing emotions, empathy, self-control, critical thinking, decision-making, perseverance, communication, financial literacy, creative problem-solving, relationship building

SAY

One important life skill is critical thinking. This is a crucial skill for teens, including the girls in low-income communities around the world where Room to Read works. When using critical thinking, you can look at a problem from many points of view. Based on this, you can make smart decisions and solve problems.

For the girls in Room to Read’s Girls’ Education Program who live in remote regions in countries such as, Bangladesh, India, Cambodia, and Tanzania, it is easy to believe the stories they’re told by their parents and other people in their community. It is much harder to decide on their own if something is likely to be true and based on facts. Most of the girls in this program simply don’t know what happens in the rest of their country, let alone the world, and therefore don’t know what their rights are or what information is factual.

The skill of critical thinking – in combination with other skills – helps students ask the right questions and make up their minds about their own goals.

Like one student from Room to Read’s program once said, “We cannot choose where we came from, but we can choose our destination,” and critical thinking is a large part of that.

Activity 1: Critical Thinking as a Life Skill



5 minutes

So, what does critical thinking mean to you?

[write answers on board or flip chart]

TIP: If the group has difficulty thinking of examples, suggest:

Critical thinking takes place when we reflect on our thoughts and then evaluate the information. Someone who uses critical thinking will not believe everything they are told because they consider:

- *Type of information: fact or opinion? Has it been proven?*
- *Source of information:*
 - *Is it from someone I trust?*
 - *Qualifications of the source: is he/she likely to know the information? Is he/she an expert?*
 - *Interests of the source: does it help the source if I believe the information, in earning more money for example?*
- *Logic of the argument: based on facts or opinions? Do these facts logically lead to this conclusion? What other conclusions could I reach with these facts?*

Activity 2: Challenges around the world



20 minutes

SAY

To illustrate what kind of situations girls in Room to Read’s program face, I’m going to show you a short video. It is about a girl named Kamla from India who used life skills like persuasive communication, persistence and critical thinking to negotiate out of an arranged marriage.

Show this video of Kamla: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BSxwla7dEgI>

In the next activity, you will hear about other girls from Nepal, India, and Cambodia who face different challenges, yet still used critical thinking to overcome them.



1. Divide the group in three or four smaller subgroups and provide each group with a short “case study”. Pass out case studies (attached).
2. Ask each subgroup to read the case study carefully and discuss the challenges these girls are facing and how “critical thinking” is relevant in their situation.
3. Ask each subgroup to select one person to present the following to the group:
 - a. Shortly introduce the girl in the case study
 - b. Explain all the challenges that she faced in her life
 - c. How did critical thinking skills impact her life?
 - d. What surprised you in the case study?
 - e. What can you learn from the girl in your case study?

[Write questions on the flip chart]

Activity 3: Women We Admire [15 min]

SAY

In this last activity, we're going to expand our view beyond just critical thinking and think of other life skills like the ones we wrote on the board at the beginning of class. I want you to think of a woman in your life you admire. What life skills does she have? When have you seen her use this life skill? Why do you admire her for it? Write down your answer and when you're done share it with the person next to you.

Who would like to share the woman they chose and why?

Call to Action!

SAY

So, what did you learn about life skills today?

What are some situations you experience at school or home where you think you could use critical thinking, or other life skills?

Thank you all for participating. Room to Read has also invited you to share a photo of the woman you admire on Instagram and explain her life skill superpower. Post with the hashtag #RtRSuperWomen.

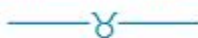
If you'd like to learn more about their Girls' Education Program, you can follow Room to Read on social media @roomtoread or visit their website www.roomtoread.org.

End of Session

Healing Hearts and Minds in Nepal

After nine years of indentured servitude, trapped in Nepal's illegal Kamlari system, Asha was freed by a local NGO and enrolled in Room to Read's Girls' Education program. She now lives with her mother and older sister, Laxmi, in rural Bardiya. The youngest of eight children, Asha and Laxmi bear the responsibility of caring for their visually impaired mother. The two sisters are the first in their family to ever step inside of a school.

INTERVIEWED BY: MR. TIHAR BAHADUR CHAUDHARY, COMMUNITY LEADER



Meet Asha

10th grade (Age 19)
Bardiya, Nepal
Scholar Since : 2008

Tihar Bahadur Chaudhary: Like you, I spent many years in bonded labor. Can you tell me about your experience as a Kamlari?

Asha: I first became a Kamlari when I was five years old. I worked for nine years from dawn until dusk before I was rescued.

I had four different masters, but in every household it was the same story. I was peppered with work all day with little time to rest in between. I remember spending many nights crying because I couldn't attend school like the other kids my age.

TBC: What has changed now?

Asha: Living as a Kamlari was a very lonely experience. I was far from my mother and sister and couldn't attend school because I was buried in work. When I was rescued, I thought I'd never be able to enroll in school because I had missed so much.

That uncertainty loomed over me, even as I was consumed with the joy of being reunited with my family. When I learned that Room to Read was helping former Kamlari girls go to school, I was ecstatic. Entering school for the first time was the happiest day of my life!

Education has liberated me. I now live at home with my family and am doing what I love—studying. I am pursuing my dreams.

TBC: How do you balance school with your other responsibilities?

Asha: My sister Laxmi and I take turns doing the daily chores: cooking, cleaning the house, caring for the chickens and sowing the potatoes, greens and turmeric that grow in our yard.

Laxmi and I are also responsible for earning our family's income, so we work as day laborers on the weekends, hauling bricks

and other materials at local construction sites. We earn around 200 rupees per day [approximately USD \$2].

TBC: I see. And what are your plans for after you finish secondary school?

Asha: I will continue my education, despite the difficult circumstances my family is facing. My sister and I are aware of our fragile economic situation, but we are not giving up on our dreams—not after making it this far! Laxmi is in upper secondary school now, and I am getting ready to take my School Leaving Certificate Exam [a highly-competitive national exam in Nepal that all 10th graders must pass to move on to upper secondary school].

I plan to get a job as a teacher or put in more hours as a laborer so that I can afford to continue my studies after the Girls' Education program.



Asha with her mother and sister.

TBC: What are your dreams for your career?

Asha: I want to become a doctor. To be able to heal people is something I have wanted for a long time.

All my life, I have lived in conditions where illness meant that you couldn't pursue your dreams. We are the lowest rung of society, and there are many more like us. I find it revolting that a simple illness and a lack of resources for proper treatment can rob a person of their future.

TBC: What made you so passionate about this issue in particular?

Asha: Once I was very ill, and that is where I learned how differently we—the poor—are treated by society. I couldn't move from my illness and feared my body would just freeze up. The staff at the hospital treated me without compassion, and as I glanced around, I saw that I was not alone.

That experience strengthened my resolve. I thought that if I were a doctor, I would treat my patients kindly and with great compassion. Illness is a big problem here, and there are not enough health care services. When I achieve my dream of becoming a doctor I can help improve the situation for everyone.

Entering school for the first time was the happiest day of my life! Education has liberated me. I now live at home with my family doing what I love, which is studying. I am pursuing my dreams.

TBC: You said that education has liberated you. Other than helping you become a doctor, what does that mean?

Asha: Education helps people face the world with confidence—I know from personal experience.

A while ago, Laxmi, my mother and I were living with my brother's family, and it was a very trying time. Every evening my brother would get drunk and start shouting. He wanted us to give him our earnings to sustain his drinking habit. He treated us like strangers and insulted our mother. He even tried to stop Laxmi and me from going to school, but we were resolute. We told him we would go without food, but we would never stop studying. Had I not been educated, I wouldn't have been confident enough to stand up to him like that.

About the interviewer: Tihar Bahadur Chaudhary, education advocate

As community leader of my village, I bear a great responsibility, but the most important decision I have made by far is to take a stand against the Kamlari system.

I spent 14 years in bonded labor before earning my freedom, and I will never forget when my first master said to me, "illiterate people can only herd cattle, while educated minds herd ideas, opinions and people." That thought stuck with me all these years.

Once I realized that only education can bring true freedom, I became a fierce advocate for education here in my village. I have made it my mission to ensure that former Kamlari girls get to school and am glad Room to Read is helping to achieve this goal. ∞

In 10
years
I will be
an
engineer.



I will be
a role model
for the girls of
my village.



I will
provide a sound
education for
my
children.



Meet Shabnam

11th Grade (Age 17)
Rajasthan, India
Scholar since: 2006





Shabnam at engineering college.

Engineering a Better Future

In the Mewat region of India, where Shabnam lives, the female literacy rate is only 6 percent. Most girls in Mewat do not receive a formal education and are expected instead to remain at home—looking after siblings or their own children. Shabnam made history in 2011 when she became the first girl in her village to graduate from 10th grade. She joined school after completing an intensive bridge course set up by Room to Read and our local partner organization, AMIED, and she has been thriving ever since.

INTERVIEWED BY: NOOR MOHAMMED, FOUNDER OF THE ALWAR MEWAT INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT (AMIED)

Noor Mohammed: How would you describe the village you grew up in?

Shabnam: In Mewat, education is hardly given any importance. Girls are not allowed to study at all. The general mindset of the community is that girls have to look after household affairs and bear children; school is never prioritized. At least, not until you and AMIED started working here—visiting our homes and talking to the elders in the community.

NM: So tell me, how have things changed now?

Shabnam: Well, we definitely have more girls coming to school. Also, no one in the community ever wanted to talk to our *didis*

(social mobilizers). Now they are treated with great respect.

NM: What about your own family? Do they support your education?

Shabnam: My parents work on the farm all day and there are six children in my family—three boys and three girls, so there is a lot of housework to keep me busy in addition to my studies. I have to clean the house, cook, look after my siblings and help my mother feed the buffaloes in the field.

My mother has supported my education the most. Neighbors have told her that letting me go to a co-educational school and interact with boys is against the conventions of Islam, but she always supports me.

During my 10th grade final exams, my father was completely opposed to letting me travel the 20km (12.4 mi) to the exam center. He said I needed to finish my household responsibilities first, and my brothers refused to help out on the farm if he continued to allow me to study. It was very difficult to negotiate with them and explain how life-changing these exams could be for me. The results would determine my admission into engineering college, and I had imagined a new future for myself—one where I would earn money, have a job and be able to take care of myself. It has taken many years to convince my father, but slowly he has started to come around.

NM: Now that you are in the engineering college, what is a typical day like for you? Has anything changed?

Shabnam: The biggest change is that I live alone in a one-bedroom apartment. I wake up, cook food for the day and wash my clothes. Then I study for an hour and leave for my engineering classes, which are about an hour's walk from home.

Classes end at 3:30 p.m., and I usually stop by the market on my way home to buy vegetables. Then I finish household chores and try to study before work. I don't get a chance to see my parents very often because the village is far away.

NM: You are so independent. Are you scared of anything in the future?

Shabnam: There is no fear. A lot of girls didn't get an education before, but now things are changing, and girls have an opportunity to prove themselves. I do think sometimes about what would happen if I were not able to study.

You know, my family sacrifices a lot to pay the rent for my apartment. I just pray



that I am able to finish my education. I have this daydream of being in an office, sitting in front of a computer!

NM: So what exactly would you say education means to you?

Shabnam: Education is the tool through which I can become independent in my life—both financially and emotionally. Through education, I can judge right from wrong. It helps me solve problems, express my opinions and stand up to my brothers and father. I can tell them, "look at what I am capable of achieving!"

NM: What are your plans after graduation? More school? Work? Marriage?

Shabnam: I will get my bachelor's degree in technology and become an engineer. After school, I will pursue a government job so that I can help build facilities and infrastructure in my village.

I know a lot of girls look up to me for inspiration now, so I feel I have a responsibility

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to succeed in life and help them. When I am an engineer, people in the community will be convinced that girls can study and have a right to build a future for themselves.

About the interviewer:

Noor Mohammed, founder of AMIED

My parents were farmers here in Alwar. As a child, I managed to complete my education at the local village school despite many hurdles and went on to achieve both a bachelor's and a master's degree. Girls were not allowed to go to school, and in my heart I knew I had to change people's mindsets and attitudes about that for the betterment of us all.

In 2004, I resigned from government work

I know a lot of girls look up to me for inspiration now, so I feel I have a responsibility to succeed in life and help them. When I am an engineer, people in the community will be convinced that girls can study and have a right to build a future for themselves.

to start AMIED. My objective was to improve education in the Mewat area, which lies between Delhi and Rajasthan. Room to Read and the Girls' Education program have helped me do this.

Change is slow, but it is definitely starting to take place. The community is beginning to understand that upholding gender

biases and not educating girls will not take them very far. I'm proud of Shabnam and the other girls we have worked with. I remember when her college fees had to be paid. There was such strong opposition from her neighbors and even her own brothers. She was the only girl who would stand up for herself and say, "I want to be an engineer." ●

A Young Girl's Passion for Culinary Arts

Hatton, Sri Lanka is a rural region best known for its Ceylon tea plantations. While the region makes millions for tea estate owners and international tea companies, many of Hatton's residents live far below the poverty line, working as day laborers for less than 2 dollars each day. Raveena belongs to one of these families, with her father working at a local tea plantation and her mother cleaning homes in the area. Since birth, Raveena was taught that her future was already mapped out and that she too would marry young and join her mother as a housemaid. With her family of four surviving on less than \$800 each year, Raveena was often reminded that she was a financial strain and that she needed to find a husband to relieve the stress she was placing on her parents.



Raveena says, "When you grow up with voices telling you to get married so that you won't be a financial burden anymore, you eventually learn to believe it. Though I had big dreams when I was a kid, I had to drop out of school, help my family at home and look after my sister. My destiny, I felt, was to do household chores and get married."

Raveena re-enrolled in school in 2008, the same year that Room to Read implemented its Girls' Education Program at her school. Raveena immediately began attending life skills workshops where she started to learn about the options that she had for her future and the ways in which she could control her fate. Raveena says, "Room to Read's life skills sessions not only helped me gain confidence, but they also made me realize I have control of my life. From learning about communication to understanding the idea of decision making, life skills sessions opened up a whole new world for me. During one of our life skills trainings, we had to travel to Colombo to participate in a Job Shadowing Program. I was immediately drawn into the hospitality industry and I realized that even if I cannot afford to go to university, there is another opportunity waiting for me as long as I capitalize on it."

Returning to school determined and inspired, Raveena graduated from St. Gabriel's Secondary School in 2015 and made the decision to enroll in a cooking course in Nuwara Eliya. After six months at the school, Raveena was accepted into the Tea Castle Hotel School where she is learning about cooking and kitchen management. One of Raveena's social mobilizers says, "Raveena truly has developed the right set of skills to succeed in life and is a great role model for her sister and the girls in her community. She is a completely different person today, a person with great confidence, knowledge and willpower to go after a better life; and that is all that we could hope for through our life skills training."

In six short years, Raveena went from being a 14-year-old drop out to the first person in her family to graduate secondary school and pursue a career outside of tea farming. Today, Raveena is creating a better life for her family by using the skills she has gained over the years and is a role model for many young girls in her estate.

Sary's Determination to Stay in School

Sary Raun is the only girl from her village to continue secondary school. Determined to pursue her goal of graduating secondary school, 16-year-old Sary has been renting a room near Samrong High School in Siem Reap since she was in Grade 10. She has three younger siblings, and both of her parents are farmers who make a living growing rice and potatoes.



Before Sary began renting a room, the commute to school was not only far but also dangerous. From Grade 7 to Grade 9, Sary had to ride her bicycle 16 kilometers each way to secondary school. "On the way back from school, I sometimes had to stop at random houses and make an excuse asking for a drink of water, because there were strangers riding slowly behind me," said Sary. Instead of staying in school, many teenagers from her village have quit school and migrated to Thailand to work as laborers. Some work as waitresses at a restaurant in the nearby village.

Sary herself was pressured to drop out of school in Grade 9, when her parents asked her to begin working in a garment factory instead. Sary had other plans though. "I told my parents that I really didn't want to drop out. I didn't want to work at the factory. I wasn't sure if I was strong enough to work for hours at the factory, and I didn't think it would earn much either," Sary recalled.

It was around this time in her life that Sary was selected to join Room to Read's Girls' Education Program. As part of the program, Sary attended life skills classes, and was connected to local female mentors who supported her education. Through these experiences, Sary could clearly see what her future could be like as a capable woman with a good income and job. Now, Sary says, "I want to continue learning and become a teacher in physics or chemistry."

After attending parent workshops and several meetings with Sary's female mentor, Sary's parents have also been convinced of the benefits of keeping Sary in school. They are now very supportive, even providing financial support for Sary to rent a room near her school. Now, Sary comes home once a week on the weekend to help her parents with their farming. "My mother now encourages me to become a teacher at the secondary school that was just opened in our village after I graduate. There aren't enough teachers there since none of the children from our village have finished high school, except me," Sary said proudly.



Education is a human right, yet millions of girls globally are not in school.

Room to Read's Girls' Education Program helps girls in historically low-income communities cultivate the skills they need to navigate economic and social barriers that block their path to a fulfilling life.

Join us in supporting a new generation of educated young women to become leaders in their families, communities and the world.

It costs US \$1 a day to keep a girl in school. If you enjoyed this download, please consider donating what you can at roomtoread.org today.

Visit roomtoread.org to learn more.

