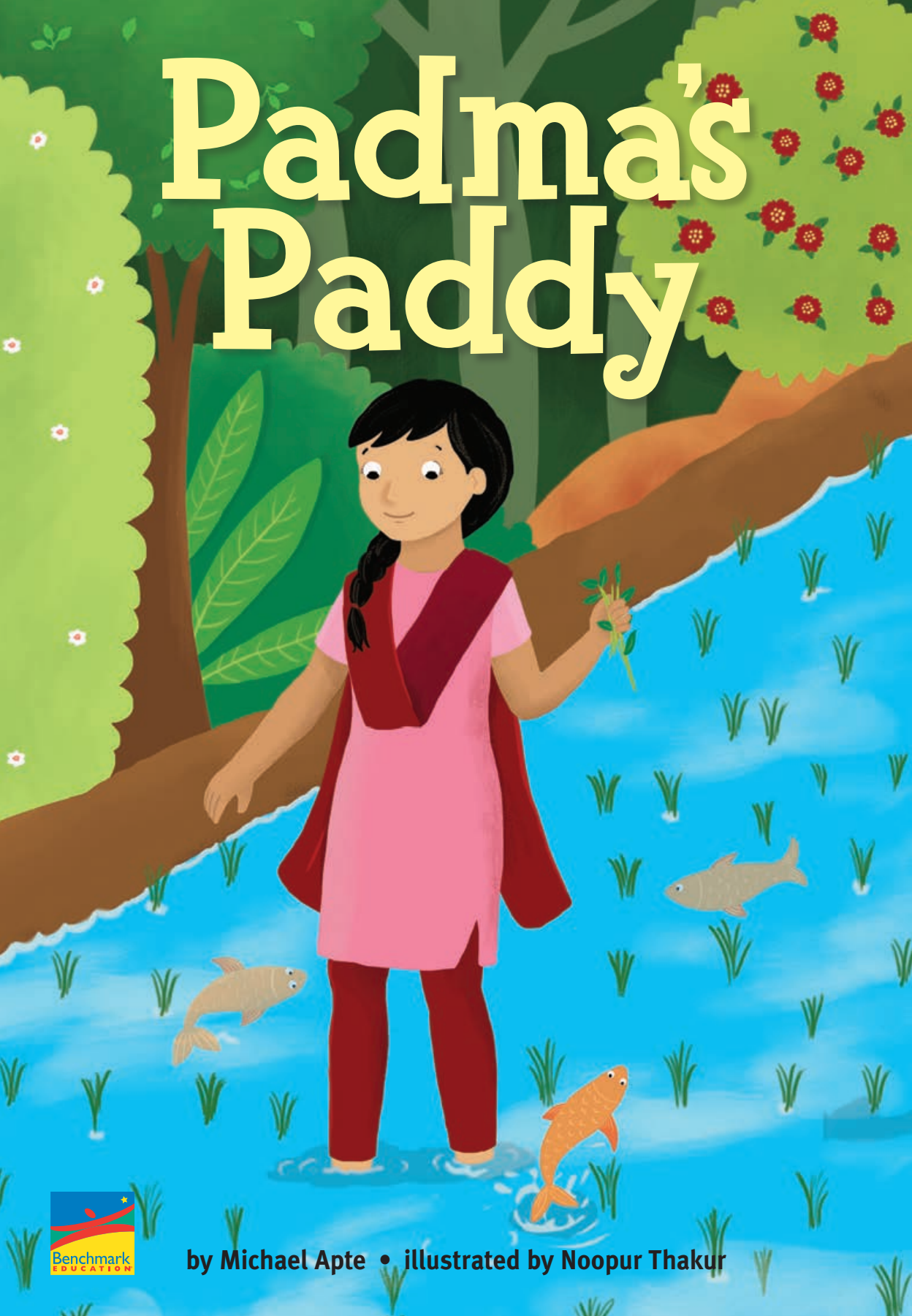
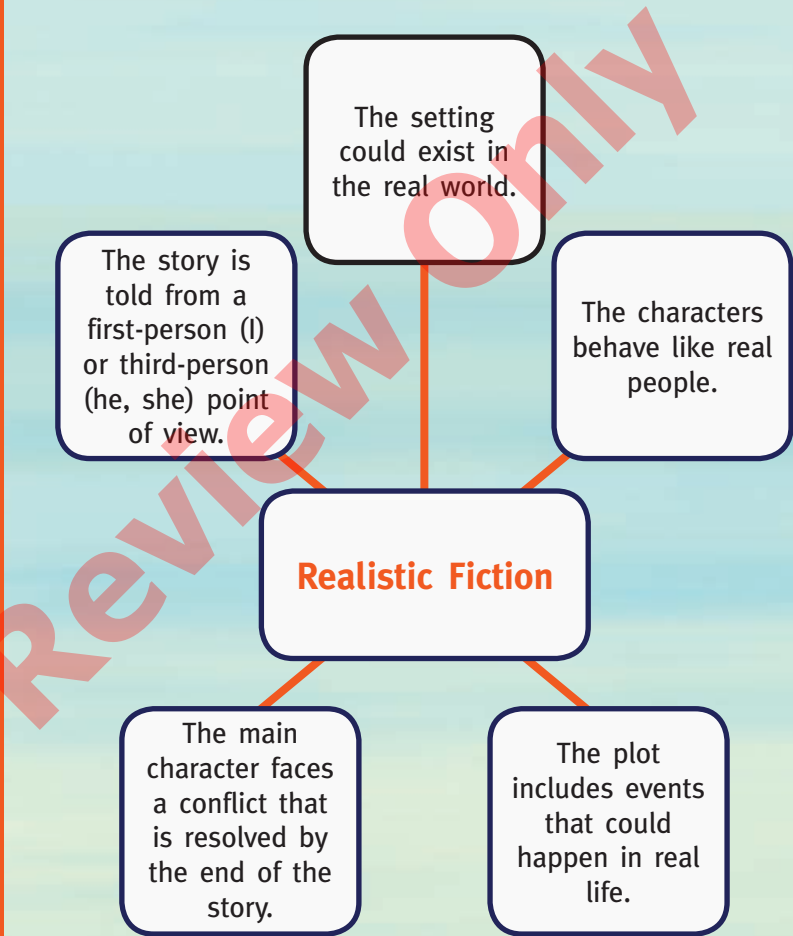


Padma's Paddy



Realistic Fiction

Look for the genre features noted below as you read this book. Use the features to help you understand the text.



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Exciting News

I couldn't believe it. It was the most exciting day ever, ever, ever! Ms. Chakravarty called me to the front of the classroom. Then, she made the announcement.

"Class, I want to share incredible news. Padma's story has won a prize in an international story competition. She's been invited to Washington, D.C., for the Young Writers' World's Fair next October." *That's just over a year from now*, I thought.

"It is quite an honor, Padma," she said, turning and looking at me. "You're one of just eighty kids from all over the world who were chosen. We always knew you were a wonderful writer. The fair is paying for your expenses, hotel, and food. A plane ticket is all you need to pay for."

I almost fell over when I heard what she had to say. All of the other students stared at me with their mouths wide open. Flying to Washington, D.C.! That must be a million miles away.

I never thought I had a chance of winning a prize when Ms. Chakravarty told me she was entering my mystery story into a competition.

I didn't think anyone from my village had ever been to the United States. Most of us had never even been to Kolkata, or any of the other big cities in **West Bengal**. I knew I hadn't...



I couldn't concentrate the rest of the day. I was dreaming about my first plane ride. I was dreaming about visiting the White House. I was dreaming about reading my story aloud while kids from other countries listened.

When school ended, I picked up my little brother, Aneek, at the main school gate and made him run home with me. His little legs almost flew off the ground as I pulled him along by the hand. I couldn't wait to tell my parents the news.

I didn't go into the house. At this hour, no one would be there. My mother and father would both be working in the fields. I ran across the mounds of earth that separated the **rice paddies**. Then I saw my parents.



They were standing in a rice paddy, pulling out the weeds that sprang up between the rice plants. They were ankle-deep in water. Rice fields are flooded after the rice is planted. That's how rice grows. After the rice grows, it is harvested.

I ran up shouting, "Ma, Baba, I'm going to Washington, D.C.!" The words came flying out of my mouth as I explained everything about the contest and the invitation. "Isn't it incredible?"

They seemed proud, but they also looked worried. My father looked at my mother and then back at me before he spoke. Then he tore all my happiness away.



“Padma, Padma,” he said. “We can’t possibly afford a plane ticket to the United States. That would take all the **profit** from this crop of rice. We need the money to live on. And we’ll need money to buy supplies for the next crop. We depend on the rice to keep us alive. I don’t see any way you can go.” He looked at me with sad eyes, “We’re so proud of you, but we’re sorry.”

How quickly happiness can turn to sadness. I could barely speak. I sputtered and choked, trying to hold on to the dreams I’d had all afternoon.

“But, but, it’s not until October, Baba. Why don’t we grow double the rice and make double the money. I’ll work extra hard, I promise. I will help you every single day after school!”

“I wish we could. But to grow double the rice, I’d need double the land. We don’t have it. We use every inch we have already.”

Just like that my dream died. Later, as we gathered to eat, my mother tried to comfort me.

“I know you’re upset, Padma. But I made your favorite, *maacher jhol*. We don’t get to eat fish curry so often. The fish is expensive now. The fish sellers must be making a fortune.”

“Now, if I were a fisherman,” said my father, “then I could afford to send you to the United States! Sadly, I’m a rice farmer like my baba and his baba before him.”

I couldn’t even look at him. I was so disappointed.

“Why do we have to farm rice?” I yelled. “Why can’t we do something to make us rich? I hate rice! And I hate farming!”



Tears streamed from my eyes as I ran out of the house into the fields. I went as far as I could. Finally, I stopped, gasping for breath.

I sat down and looked across the shining rice paddies, where I had spent so many hours.

Beneath the setting sun, I could see many birds. Egrets and cranes stretched their long legs in the lush paddies. They were looking for food in the shallow water, worms and snails. Dragonflies bounced around the surface of the water.

It was quiet and it was beautiful. *So many creatures rely on our rice paddies*, I thought. *We aren't the only ones.* Suddenly, I didn't hate rice. I didn't hate farming. I was just sad.

I walked slowly back to the house and found my mother and father. They were sitting on mats on the floor. I walked over and hugged my father. "I'm so sorry, Baba. I didn't mean what I said."

He hugged me back and looked me in the eye.

"I know you didn't, Padma. And I know you're sad and disappointed. But when you grow up, you won't be a rice farmer like me. Then you can travel to many places."

