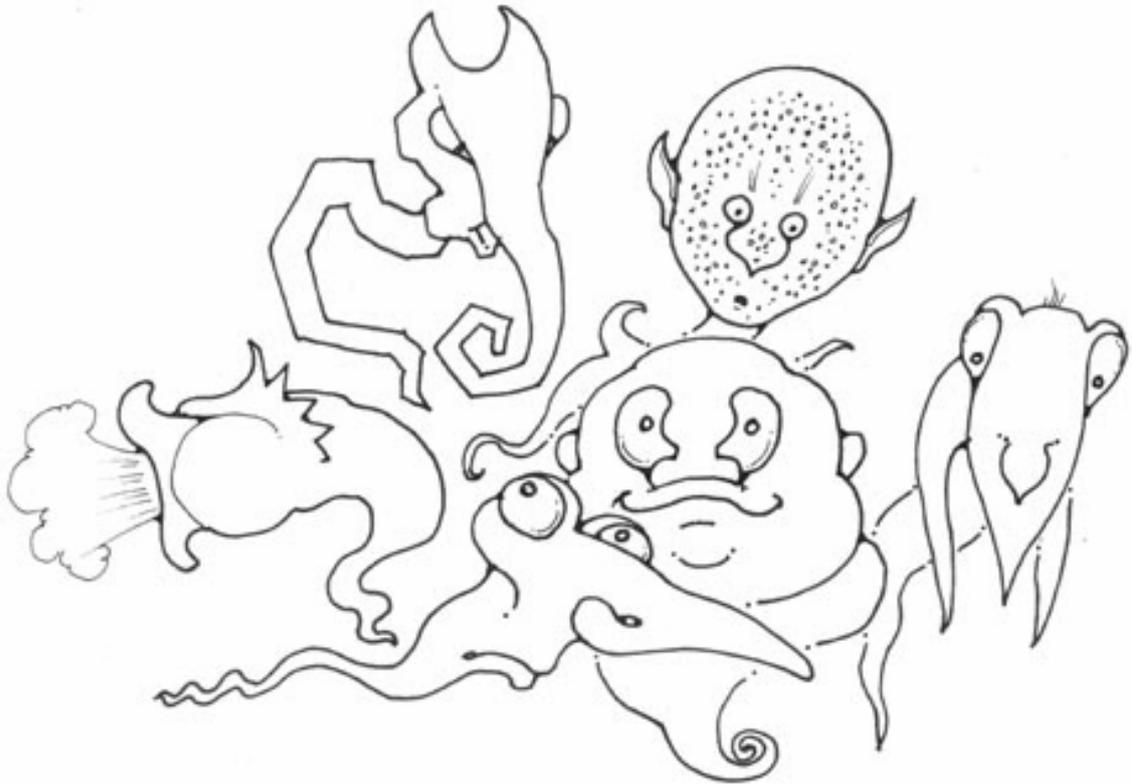


THE KILLERS' COMMITTEE



*And why Mr. Polio and his
friends fear the older children
who tell everyone about
immunisation*

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When the health visitor came to our house she told my father: "It is time for you to take your little son to the clinic to be immunised. The clinic is next Thursday".

My father said: "Perhaps I will not have time to take him as I have a committee meeting".

"That is interesting," said the health worker. "They say that the diseases have committee meetings too. Listen, I will tell you a story of one of these that some one told me."

It was a hot day in the middle of the afternoon in the land where the disease spirits live. The room was dirty with cobwebs and dust. There were six empty chairs. Mr. Polio walked in. He was thin and he limped. One of his arms was

stiff. He looked around the empty room angrily. "Where are the other members?" he shouted. "We must meet at 4 p.m. and it is now 4:15. In fifteen minutes, I can kill two children and make another three lame".

"I'm right behind you," said Mr TB who followed him in. They greeted each other.

Polio asked "How are you?" TB began to explain that he had good news and bad news, but just then Ms. Diphtheria walked in. Her neck was big, her eyes red and she could not speak well.

Mrs. Pertussis (whooping cough) came in behind her coughing in loud whoops. "I see you are still coughing" said Diphtheria. Mrs Pertussis replied: "Yes, I can go on coughing for six weeks and can make the children so weak that they can even die. I am a little late because I have just spent an hour giving whooping cough to the children in one village where they were not properly immunised."

Mr. TB looked around. "We are waiting for our chairperson Mr. Tetanus and our Secretary Mr. Measles to arrive and then we can start our meeting."

Just then these two spirits walked in together. Mr Measles had fever and rashes all over his body. His eyes were red and watery, his nose runny. Mr. Tetanus was weird looking: his jaw was crooked and his neck bow shaped. He kept on jerking.

Now all the spirits were together and there was a lot of noise in the room; coughing, sneezing and groaning. There were bad-tempered arguments in loud voices about who had killed most children.

Mr. Tetanus banged on the table. “Before we start our meeting,” he said, solemnly, “we need to stand in silence in memory of our brother Mr. Smallpox killed by vaccination”.

The diseases were silent for a moment or so but then continued squabbling. Mr. Tetanus shouted at the top of his voice: “Order !”

He asked the diseases to report how many children they had killed. As they gave the numbers all the diseases reported that the numbers were lower as compared to last year. They spoke one after another all complaining in the same tone.

“It’s the BCG vaccine,” moaned TB. “When children receive it I can not affect them. Worst of all the idea is spreading through schools. These horrible older children learn about immunisation in their health classes and child-to-child clubs. And, would you believe it, they go and tell others what they have learnt.”

Ms Diphtheria and Mrs Pertussis were also unhappy. “Of course we can still try,” said Ms Diphtheria, “But that new DPT vaccine will destroy us. And those children in their health clubs! So cruel to us. Why I even hear that older children are offering to look after younger ones so that parents can take babies to the clinic.”

“Yes”, said Mr. Pertussis and Mr Measles together. “We can still hurt some children, but we are much weaker than we used to be. The more the children spread messages about immunisation, the weaker we become.”

The Chairperson, Mr. Tetanus, joined in. "There is more bad news for me. The mothers of the newborn babies are also being immunised so the babies cannot get tetanus."

Mr. Polio had a suggestion:

"Perhaps the parents will get tired and forgetful," he said.

"They have to take children for booster doses of these vaccines. Perhaps they won't bother and we will slip in later to affect the children."

"A few don't go back," said Mr. Measles. "Only a few do. The older children have been making birthday cards for the young babies to inform the mothers of the times for the boosters, and they even keep copies themselves so that they can remind them again if they forget."

| YOUR IMMUNISATION CARD | |
|---|---|
| <p>HAPPY BIRTHDAY (WRITE THE BABY'S NAME HERE)</p>  | <p>TICK OR COLOUR THE SPACE FOR EACH IMMUNIZATION GIVEN</p>  |
| WE HOPE YOU HAVE ALREADY HAD YOUR FIRST POLIO, & TB VACCINE | |
| AT SIX WEEKS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO | |
| AT 2½ MONTHS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO | |
| AT 3 - 4 MONTHS OLD YOU NEED DPT & POLIO | |
| BEFORE YOU ARE 1 YEAR OLD YOU NEED MEASLES | |

"So all the news is bad," said the chairperson mournfully. "Perhaps, we will all go the way of Mr. Smallpox."

“NO!” shouted Mr. TB, “we still have a chance.”

“There are many poor people these days, living close together and not eating well, so they become sick and weak. In some places, their numbers are growing. I can do everything to affect them and in some places I am doing very well, thank you. In some countries too, where we haven’t been able to reach for a long time, some mothers have stopped immunising their children and this allows us to come back.

“Then there are all these wars,” said Mrs Pertussis. “They make people weak and stop children going to school. Doctors and nurses have to stop immunising children to treat wounded people.”

“Hurrah for wars! Hurrah for poverty!” shouted all the diseases together.

And then there is a new member,” the chairperson reminded them. “He is called Mr. AIDS and he makes people’s bodies very weak so that we diseases can kill with much more ease”.

“Yes “, said Mr. Measles sadly, “But I hear the children are after him too!”

“Not the children again!” screamed the diseases.
“They will be the death of us!!!!”

My father laughed. “I see I will have to go a little late for my committee. We can’t let Mr. Tetanus and Company get their way.”

A NOTE TO TEACHERS

About this story

The original story was created by a teacher and her class in Kampala, Uganda, but has been adapted and updated by countries all round the world. This version originates in Gujarat State of India.

It is suitable for almost any age of primary school children and particularly effective as a role play.

One important outcome should be that **all** the children should know the immunisation schedule and the facilities available in their area.

Activities

A “Name the Disease Game” is suggested in the CHETNA (Centre for Health Education Training and Nutrition Awareness) publication with children describing or miming and others guessing symptoms, Birthday cards, as in the text, can be made.

This story/play gives a wonderful opportunity for children to spread messages to the community through drama, dance and posters.

Sources: Various, Including-Child Resource Centre CHETNA, Ahmedabad