

Novel Sing to the Dawn

Synopsis

The story is about a village girl's dream to further her studies in the city. Dawan's life is not easy as she faces many challenges. Dawan's wildest dream comes true when she is placed first in the scholarship winners' list. But ironically she has to compete against her own brother who is equally interested in studying in the city. If she rejects the scholarship, her brother has a chance to go to the city. Dawan comes to know that her brother Kwai is placed second in the scholarship list. Kwai is resentful that his sister can go to the city while he may have to study in the village school. There is hostility and their normally-loving sibling relationship takes the brunt of it with the scholarship announcement.

Then there is her father who thinks that a girl does not need to study further. After all girls marry and bear children. Her place is in the kitchen finally. Of what good is an education? In addition, there are other people who warn her that there are many dangers and evils in the city. The city is no place for a girl.

Many obstacles torment Dawan who is torn with doubts. After much persuasion, Dawan's father agrees to let Dawan go to the city for her education. It is interesting to note that Dawan's grandmother is more forward-thinking and wishes Dawan to continue her studies in the city. Kwai comes around to the idea that his sister should accept the offer and continue her studies. He is also a little sad that he and Dawan will not get a chance to see the sunrise together as they usually do. Dawan considers everything and feels that she is capable of taking up the scholarship and the responsibility it entails. Perhaps she can prove something by taking the villagers out of the mental rut they are in. Girls too should further their education and improve their lot. She hopes that she will be the change that the family and her village need.

Themes

• Gender inequality

Girls are not given equal opportunity to study and further their ambitions. They must stay at home and raise their families. Tertiary education is wasted on them as they get married and look after their husbands and children finally. Noi stays at home to be with her family. To break that mindset is not easy as men like Dawan's father wish to maintain that status quo. Dawan thinks she will bring about that change but it will be a tough journey. Not to give women the right to education and to deprive them of the opportunity to advance and explore their abilities and their talents is a social injustice. It must be corrected everywhere.

• The importance of education

In this rural setting education cannot be taken for granted. Winning a scholarship is just about the only way to break the vicious cycle of poverty. Both siblings want that scholarship and it is very awkward that Dawan the girl gets the first place while her brother is placed second. Dawan has to convince just about everyone that she deserves to go to the city school. Her grandmother sees the importance of education and is willing to get help for her sake. Strangely it is Bao who is Dawan's strong supporting force because she makes Kwai think and act rationally. Education will bring change to Dawan and to the family and, through her, the village.

• The family unit is a stable force

- The children respect their elders and obey them generally. Dawan wants her father to give permission for her to accept the scholarship. She is hardly rebellious. She also wants her brother to be happy for her and that he is not hurt by her greatly.
- There is much gentleness in the relationship the siblings share. Dawan leaves the umbrella for him as she does not want him to get wet and sick. When they share the umbrella home, it is a special moment of reconciliation and renewal of their affection. They watch the sunrise together while Dawan sings to the dawn. It is very touching to know that Kwai feels that he will miss watching the sunrise with his sister.

- Her parents want the children to do well but the mother is afraid that Dawan will be disappointed if she can't go to the city.
 - The grandmother is still a force to be reckoned with as she takes the step to take Dawan to meet Noi. And in the end she is the one who convinces Dawan to accept the scholarship. When her father gives permission, it gives Dawan that thrust that she needs to go to the city. The family acts as a support for everyone in times of trouble. People survive their problems better when there is a strong family foundation behind them.
- **Victimization/Abuse of power**
- In the village, the poor people who work hard on their farms are victimized by the landowners who take the sacks of rice as their tax. There is very little chance of escape from this feudalistic system.
 - Even the army officer takes money from Ghan so that he will not have to be enlisted in the army.
 - It is the same in the city where the bosses take the hard-earned money of the workers.
 - The grip of the big, powerful man on the poor worker is harsh and vicious.
 - Vichai hits his sister when he finds that she has not taken money for freeing the birds. That is abuse at the family level. Victimization goes on at many different levels and only education or strong governmental action can break this evil cycle.

Characters

<p>Dawan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enthusiastic and vibrant, she is full of teenage energy in wanting to grasp at life. - She shares a special relationship with her brother and both are keen to further their studies. But as a girl, she knows that her opportunities are less and accepts that too. - Sees social injustice and is angry that the landlord gets to collect the rice as a tax when the poor villagers had worked hard to cultivate it. She wishes to correct the system. - Wins the scholarship but is in a fix as her brother is keen to study too. - Very proactive and persistent, she seeks support from many people to convince her father to let her go. - She is very brave, stands up for Bao when Vicha hits her. - Courageous enough to speak up to her own brother to make him realise about her dreams and win his support. - She is happy when her father allows her to go and her brother says he won't stand in her way – and is happy to see her brother waving to her when she leaves. - Caring and knows that she will miss her family and the village when she leaves. - Loves her family and wants their support and cooperation.
<p>Kwai</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Kwai is the younger brother of Dawan and he wins the second place in the scholarship list. - He has a good relationship with his sister and enjoys watching the sunrise with her. - Dawan was given a chance to study because he spoke to his father into letting her go to school. He is farsighted. - He has some ideas about what he will do to improve life in the village. - He is tough and can be aggressive. He is very disappointed that he didn't get the scholarship and is unable to be happy for his sister at first. - He acts selfishly and turns away from her. - He goes to defend Bao when Vichai hits her. - He is brave but he gets an earful from Bao for being selfish and not letting

	<p>Dawan accept the scholarship.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – He pushes Dawan in the scuffle with Bao and she hurts her ankle and bleeds. He tries to help her too when he sees her in pain. He cares for his sister and his family. – He is willing to change as he allows his sister to pursue her studies. Sits on the same old bridge and watches her leave.
The Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – He is a good teacher who stimulates his class with discussions of relevant topics. He provokes thought and encourages students to give their opinions. He wants them to help the community and gets their views on what is harmful and how changes will help. – He pretends to teach from the book when the headmaster comes by but what he discussed with the students earlier is also important and he shouldn't worry that it is not from his text. – He cares about his students.
Grandmother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – She is very supportive of Dawan and is the only person to express her pride in what her grandchild has achieved. – She strongly believes in what she does and decides to take Dawan to meet Noi, the cousin. The three kilometer walk is no problem for her. – But she is happy when her daughter decides to take Dawan and she can stay back to look after the grandson at home. After all that is the role of the mother.
Father	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – He is fixed in his views – follows the old mindset in thinking that girls need not be educated. – He is very angry and disappointed that Kwai did not win the scholarship and scolds Dawan for taking his chance away. – Unwilling to discuss issues, expects children to obey without questions. – Changes at the end and permits Dawan to pursue her studies – a big change in him.
Mother	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – She takes a lesser role as she is more subservient to her husband. – She does not want her daughter to be disappointed so she does not encourage her. – But she takes her to meet Noi and her husband with the hope that they will help Dawan by talking to her father. – She walks three kilometers to go to Noi's house. She too wants the best for her children.
Noi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A few years older than Dawan, married to Ghan and has a baby. – Burdened with financial problems, she is stressed out with work, – She talks negatively of the city and says that it is ugly and cruel. Businessmen profit from the labour of the workers and life is very tough. She says rural life is more healthy and peaceful. – Her husband supports her views too. – She helps Dawan when she gets hurt in the encounter with Bao. She is kind-hearted but has become hardened by her own problems.
Bao	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – A girl selling flowers in the market, she is friendly and very generous. – Willing to give her flowers to Dawan free. She has never been to school and is awed by the fact that Dawan is smart and has done well. – She is very supportive and encourages Dawan to take up the challenge and go for her studies. – She lets a bird free to tell Dawan that she too should set herself free like the sparrow. – Her brother hits her for it and she scolds him and lets all the other birds free too. – She is heartbroken when one sparrow dies in the scuffle between her and her brother.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Very courageous; she scolds Kwai for being mean and unfair to Dawan. – It is because of her that Dawan speaks up for herself to Kwai. – Bao made Kwai think and he thus gives in. Only then does Dawan accept the scholarship.
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Setting

• Physical setting

- It is set in a village in Thailand. There is a river flowing through the village and it has a rickety old bridge. That is the favourite haunt of both Dawan and Kwai who sit there and watch the sunrise. Dawan comes from a poor family. The family has few luxuries.

• Social setting

- The family is a strong unit and there is love and a show of kindness among the members. The children respect the father and generally obey his wishes. It is essentially a male-dominated society as it is the right of boys to get an education. Girls appear to be thought of as inferior and not as equals to men.
- The people are trapped in a society where the landowners take all the earnings of the workers and leave them poor and miserable.

• Time setting

- It is set in modern times but speaks of a village where the mindset goes back several decades. Women are not considered equal to men.

Moral Values

Compassion and kindness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It is compassion that makes Dawan feel uncomfortable about accepting the scholarship as her brother is very keen to study too. If she were totally selfish, she would just accept it and go off. But she can't. This is a brother she cares about. It is compassion that makes Dawan leave her umbrella for her brother when it rains. She worries for his wellbeing. – Kwai too feels torn about blocking Dawan's chance to improve herself. When Bao tells him off for being selfish, he realises his mistake and rectifies it. His better self takes over and he wants her to grab this chance she has. – Bao is full of compassion and kindness. She tries to cheer Dawan by giving her the lotus bud and allowing her to free the bird. She takes a beating from Vichai for it. She also tells off Kwai so that he will allow Dawan to accept the scholarship. She has a natural sense of justice and fairness.
Responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – With power and position comes responsibility. Dawan knows that she has to do a lot more for her family and society once she has finished her studies. Kwai too says he will improve the plight of the villagers when he can. They both see that there is much that needs to be done for their society and are willing to bring changes for the people. There is clarity of vision between them and that is commendable. – The grandmother is a very responsible woman. She is quick to act and is willing to go the extra mile for her granddaughter. When she decides to take Dawan to meet Noi, the cousin, her daughter has no choice but to follow and take Dawan instead. – The parents are responsible people, wanting the children to be educated. But according to the mindset of the people, the father thinks only males should be educated. But he too relents when he lets his daughter go off to the big city on her scholarship. It is the act of a responsible father.
Courage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – It takes courage to break out of an age-old custom and start anew. Dawan wants a chance to study in the city but the general custom is for girls to get married and stay at home, minding the children. She faces many obstacles and it is most frustrating for her when her father and brother stand in her way. She is brave and determined as she does her best to get support from

	<p>others to make her way in the world. She is not afraid of Vichai and stands up for Bao in the marketplace. She also tells off her brother even though she is very close to him. Because of her persistence and strength she is able to get the chance to study in the city.</p> <p>– Kwai is also courageous in his way. He is willing to fight Vichai when he hits Bao. He is also willing to accept the fact that he should not stand in Dawan’s way. That takes courage too – to accept the fact that he is wrong and should change his mind about her future.</p>
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MORAL LESSONS

1. Everyone deserves an equal right to education
2. We should work hard to improve the quality of our family life
3. Appreciate and take care of nature
4. We should have a positive attitude
5. Be open-minded and approachable
6. We have to listen to others and be more tolerant
7. Have confidence in life
8. Determination is the key to success
9. We should respect our elders
10. Focus on the family

Sample Question and Answer

Question 1

Using the detail from the novel you have studied, describe how **one of the characters shows sense of integrity and character.**

The story, Sing to the Dawn tells of a young Thai girl called Dawan who lives in the village with her family. A typical Thai village girl, she has her early schooling in the village school in spite of gender discrimination practised by the villagers. She wins a scholarship which will help her pursue her studies in a City school, Dawan has hopes of using her education to improve the situation in the village. Her brother, Kwai who has the same dreams as Dawan, comes in second and while he has the support of their father, Dawan does not.

The character who I feel shows a strong sense of character is Kwai. This is clearly portrayed in his interaction with the other characters. Dawan, although a year older than Kwai, is not allowed to attend school due to gender discrimination. Kwai speaks up for her and persuades their parents until they relent and allow Dawan to attend school. Unfortunately, this jeopardises Kwai’s chance of getting further education in the City later on. Both are in a silent competition for the scholarship and both have plans on how to use their further education to improve life for the villagers. When Dawan wins the scholarship, Kwai, as expected, is disappointed but he does not tell Dawan off for taking away his opportunity. He feels she has won it fair and square even when their father shows anger and disappointment. This is a good example of his sporting spirit and strength of character.

Coming in second for the scholarship and with his father’s support, it would have been easy for Kwai to disappoint Dawan. But, he not only does not inform their father, he convinces him to allow Dawan to go to the City school. This integrity of character helps convince their father that the children are serious with regards their situation – Dawan is keen on the scholarship and would do well while Kwai is willing to let go of his opportunity because of sibling love.

At the marketplace, Bao tells Kwai off about being a hypocrite – bullying Dawan because of the scholarship. This gets Kwai into reflecting on himself. He regrets his rashness in hurting Dawan. When Dawan gives him the umbrella and walks home on a hurt ankle in the rain, he realises he is right in not taking away the scholarship from Dawan. Understanding that their relationship will change in the future, he waves farewell to Dawan from the old bridge. With his

arms in a gesture of embrace, he sings her song. He shows strength of character from the beginning to the end.

Question 2

Using the details from the novel you have studied, **write about a theme in the story**. Use textual evidence from the text to support your answers.

The story, *Sing to the Dawn* tells of a young Thai girl called Dawan who lives in the village with her family. A typical Thai village girl, she has her early schooling in the village school in spite of gender discrimination practised by the villagers. She wins a scholarship which will help her pursue her studies in a City school but she has to overcome the obstacles of getting her father's permission who is traditional in his thinking. He favours further education for boys rather than girls. One of the themes portrayed in the story is ideals versus reality. The rural community faces problems of economic poverty, exploitation by the landowners and gender inequality. Getting an education to further their studies in the City is one of the best ways to put into reality their ideals to improve the economic and social situation in the village.

Dawan understands the unfair exploitation of the villagers by the landlords especially when she sees the sacks of rice prepared by the farmers for the landlords. She queries the right of the landlords to the sacks of rice. She wants to know the reason the landlords own the land that has been worked by the villagers for generations. She feels the land should be owned by the farmers and not the landlords. As she says all that, now they know the bits and pieces of unfairness that they have experienced. It is hard to change things, even the smallest thing, without changing the overall pattern of things. She wants to study how the system works and then she will be able to help find a better one.

Kwai also has plans to improve life in the village. He hopes to study and return to teach Father to raise new crops and use better fertilizers. He even has plans to set up a hospital to provide better healthcare for the villagers. He will advise the villagers on how not to be cheated by the tax collectors. To protect the villagers against the tax collectors, he suggests a collective system whereby the farmers can put all their buffaloes and tools in the village centre, near the storage bins. That way, everybody could take turns to use all the farm equipment meaning that the animals and tools will be put to more use. He understands the responsibility that goes with the student who wins the scholarship. He should learn what is useful for the people and come back to help the village. Another ideal Dawan wants to turn to reality is gender discrimination. Her father, like most of the male villagers, feel that females have no right to education or to go out to the outside world. Dawan tells her father she wants to learn, see and do the many things offered by the wide world out there. Just as her father can share in his son's dreams, she wants him to share in hers too. She refuses to be caged in.. Thus Dawan and Kwai hope their ideals could be turned to reality if they could acquire further education in the city.

Question 3

Using the details from the novel you have studied, write about **social issue faced by the characters and discuss how the issue is solved**.

The story, *Sing to the Dawn* tells of a young Thai girl called Dawan who lives in the village with her family. A typical Thai village girl, she has her early schooling in the village school in spite of gender discrimination practised by the villagers. She wins a scholarship which will help her pursue her studies in a City school but she has to overcome the obstacles of getting her father's permission who is traditional in his thinking. He favours further education for boys rather than girls. The social issue portrayed in the story is that of gender inequality. Males and females do not have equal rights. Males are considered to be of a higher status than females, so they should be given priority socially and economically. This practice of gender inequality in the rural communities in Thailand is clearly seen in Dawan's village too. Girls should stay at home and do housework instead of going to school. Although Dawan is a year older than her brother, their parents consider it foolish and wasteful to send girls to school. She starts school only on the insistence of her

brother. Bao, the flower stall girl is a typical example of gender inequality as she is not sent to school at all.

Winning the scholarship is Dawan's chance to solve the social problem of gender inequality. But, as Dawan puts it, 'I'm a girl' and others saying 'You're a girl' means that girls have no chance or are not encouraged to be in the forefront. This brings out clearly the social issue of sexism. When Dawan wins the scholarship to study further in the City, Father is disappointed that Kwai is not the winner. He refuses to entertain the idea of Dawan studying in the city. Kwai, in spite of his broad ideas, is jealous of Dawan. Cousin Noi paints a bleak future for girls going to the city. The head monk, in spite of his sensitivity, tries to impress on Dawan albeit gently, the same impression. Eventually, Dawan overcomes Father's objection only because Kwai is adamant that he does not want to rob his sister of her chances and rights. Dawan herself has to stand up for her rights to solve her situation.

While Dawan's problem is solved through strong family ties, Bao, the flower stall girl is not so fortunate. She suffers mental and physical abuse, another aspect of gender inequality. She does not attend school as her parents only allow Vichai, her son, to attend school. Vichai has no hesitance about physically abusing Bao. He gives her stinging slaps in the open and nobody in the marketplace attempts to help. Kwai defends her but when Bao accuses him of bullying Dawan, he tries to attack her physically too. Bao can only retaliate physically by freeing the sparrows to settle her situation of gender inequality.

Gender inequality is a big social issue and the characters have to settle their own issues in their own way to show their rights and beliefs.

Question 4

We are the architect of our own lives

With close reference to the text, how far is this true of the novel you have studied ?

The story *Sing to the Dawn* tells of a young Thai girl called Dawan who lives in the village with her family. A typical Thai village girl, she has her early schooling in the village school in spite of gender discrimination practised by the villagers. She wins a scholarship which will help her pursue her studies in a City school but she has to overcome the obstacles of getting her father's permission who is traditional in his thinking. He favours further education for boys rather than girls. Based on the statement, it means that our life and future depend on our actions and decisions. They shape, mould and determine our future. As the architect of our future, we should fight for what we believe in and if certain positive situations arise, we should take steps to do the necessary. Take action to take the future one step forward.

Dawan knows that she needs to have the necessary education in order to realise her dream of improving the economic situation and eradicating the exploitation of the poor by the rich. So, when she wins the scholarship which is her stepping stone, she is determined not to lose the opportunity. She has to be sure that Kwai is comfortable with her going to the City school and that Father understands and supports her fully. She does not want anything or anyone to jeopardise her opportunity. So, she makes sure Kwai feels good and supports her going to the City school. She manages to convince Father to give his permission to allow her to further her studies. As the architect of her future, Dawan works towards her goal and succeeds.

Bao also shapes her own future and ends up as the flower stall girl. She is not educated and is unwilling to help in the house with the baby, the cooking and washing. So, she would sneak out and explore the marketplace. She does not like to do any housework. So, her parents want her to help outside the house and she ends up managing a flower stall for the family. Indirectly, Bao is the architect of her own future.

So, we are the architect of our future. How our future turns out is in our hands.