



GUIDE FOR TEACHERS AND FAMILIES

BABAYAN *and the* MAGIC STAR
Kiku Adatto and Michael Sandel

Guide for Teachers and Families: Babayan and the Magic Star

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FOUNDERS OF THE BABAYAN STORY PROJECT

Every Child is a Philosopher!

Babayan and the Magic Star, a children's book with an accompanying *Guide for Teachers and Families*, is the basis of the **Babayan Story Project**, an **international** initiative by Kiku Adatto and Michael Sandel. The project offers teachers and families a resource to use storytelling to ignite children's artistic and moral imaginations. The book and *Guide* have been published in multiple languages and are available in Spanish from **Nagrela Editores**.

Babayan and the Magic Star is a short chapter book for readers 6 to 9 years old and a read-aloud book for younger children. Its themes of transformation, self-discovery, and the power of friendship will appeal to readers of all ages.

Adopting the Socratic model of Michael Sandel's course "**Justice**," the *Guide for Teachers and Families* pioneers ways for children to engage in ethical reasoning and civic dialogue. We believe every child is a philosopher, capable of asking profound questions and offering deep reflections. In facing real-world problems, children can use the story of Babayan as a springboard to discuss the power to change and meet life's challenges.

The *Guide* provides questions, projects, and activities to connect oral storytelling, writing, reading, and art.

We invite you to visit our bilingual English and Spanish **website** for further resources.

We encourage teachers, leaders of educational nonprofits, and families to adapt the Guide as you see fit for your projects, programs, and curriculum.

KIKU ADATTO is an award-winning teacher at Harvard University and a noted author, scholar, and commentator on art, popular culture, and civic life. *Babayan and the Magic Star* grew out of the bedtime stories she told her two sons when they were young. She is married to Harvard political philosopher Michael Sandel.

MICHAEL SANDEL is an internationally acclaimed scholar and teacher whose books *Justice* and *What Money Can't Buy* have been translated into more than thirty languages. His course "**Justice**," is the first Harvard course to be made freely available online and on television and has been viewed by tens of millions of people.

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MISSION AND OVERVIEW: THE BABAYAN STORY PROJECT



Babayan and the Magic Star and the *Guide for Teachers and Families* are the basis of the Babayan Story Project, an international initiative by Kiku Adatto and Michael Sandel, which encourages children to use storytelling to discover and transform the world. The project has five goals:

- Connect oral storytelling, writing, and reading
- Strengthen the bonds between home and school
- Ignite children’s artistic and moral imaginations
- Engage children in ethical reasoning and civic discourse
- Share art, ideas, and projects locally and globally

The Oral Storytelling Tradition

We hope to revive the oral storytelling tradition by encouraging children to retell, interpret, and continue the story of Babayan in their own voices, adapt it to their local cultures and traditions, “publish” their own illustrated books, and create individual and collective art projects.

We like to think of the story of Babayan as a seed we are throwing into the wind. We do not know where the seed will land or how it will grow. That is in the hands of our readers.

Strengthening the Bonds Between Home and School

We can widen the community of storytellers by encouraging children to become “story seekers.” The Babayan Story Project invites children to tell the story of Babayan at home, to encourage their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends to tell them stories with similar themes, and to “publish” a second illustrated book based on these stories. As story seekers, children build bridges between home and school. They learn the art of translation. They become weavers of the richly embroidered cloth of memory.

Through oral storytelling, the boundaries between literacy and illiteracy begin to dissolve. For those who cannot read or write, books can be barriers, but everyone has stories to tell. Each voice is distinctive; we all speak from our own experiences. At the same time, we form a community of storytellers.

Igniting Children’s Artistic and Moral Imaginations

Storytelling is a way to ignite children’s artistic and moral imaginations by inviting them to discuss characters and situations in a make-believe world. Once their imaginations are awakened, children can “return to” or “journey back” to the actual world they inhabit and discuss the ethical dilemmas and problems they face in their everyday lives—problems such as bullying, anger, exclusion, and violence.

Oral storytelling provides an alternative to the didactic approach to moral education. Stories carry children to another place—an imaginary world where it may be easier to discuss difficult issues. In facing real-world problems, children can use the story of Babayan as a springboard to discuss the power to change and to rise above adversity.

Ethical Reasoning and Civic Discourse

Adapting the Socratic model of Harvard University political philosopher Michael Sandel’s course “Justice,” the project will pioneer ways to use storytelling to give children the opportunity to engage in ethical reasoning and civic dialogue. Through storytelling, children can learn to discuss the big questions they face as emerging citizens and participants in public life: justice, the common good, and what it means to be a citizen.

Students are encouraged to write and illustrate a third book in which they become “reporters” who document real-life issues facing their communities and share these books at home and at school.

Sharing Art, Ideas, and Projects Locally and Globally

An integral part of the Babayan Story Project is to provide opportunities for students, teachers, and families to share their ideas, art, and storytelling locally and globally—in schools, children’s forums, exhibits, and through social media. We encourage secondary school students and upper-grade students to become partners with younger students on the Babayan Story Project. As mentors, the older students can help bring out the voices of younger students. At the same time, upper-grade students will have the opportunity to re-engage in the imaginative world of storytelling.

STORY SYNOPSIS: *BABAYAN AND THE MAGIC STAR*



“Many fierce monsters have roamed the hills and valleys of the far north, but none as fierce as Babayan.”

So begins the adventure of Babayan, the wild beast with a mighty roar who terrifies everyone. But what happens when he is magically lifted from the world he knows and finds himself dangling from a star? Will he be able to return to earth and start a new life? Is it possible for him to change?

Alone in the night sky, Babayan meets the Queen of the Stars, who gives him a second chance in life and sends him to the enchanted kingdom of Shayma Bayma, where animals live together in harmony. There, in the tropical island kingdom, Babayan encounters many fantastic creatures—some friends, some foes. Yet the mysterious call of the Wild Islands still stirs his inner beast, until he journeys across the Great Sea to face his past...

Babayan lives in an imaginary world, but his story is deeply human. The themes of transformation, self-discovery, and the power of friendship and community will appeal to readers of all ages. How can we overcome selfishness, anger, and fear? How can we explore the world with new eyes? How can we find our true path?

BEFORE BEGINNING THE STORY



Before reading *Babayan and the Magic Star* or telling the story, begin with a question. This immediately engages students as agents in the storytelling process and models the Socratic dialogue that connects storytelling to moral reasoning. By beginning with a question, you give students the opportunity to speak first. They are drawn into the circle of storytelling right from the start. Below is an example of a question aimed to spark children’s imaginations.

The Monster Question:

Imagine a monster: What would the monster look like? And act like?

The “monster question” is good for a few reasons. It taps into children’s fears and fascinations, yet it is a simple and fun question to answer. All children have ideas about what a monster looks like, and they are eager to offer a variety of vivid descriptions. Talking about monsters helps open up many avenues for later discussion. There are imaginary monsters in folklore and legends. And monsters have their real-life counterparts: bullies or cruel and violent people. There are also the “monsters” that we may feel are living inside us, parts of ourselves that are angry, aggressive, or selfish.

After the students contribute their ideas about imaginary monsters, you can draw upon their descriptions as a way to transition into reading the story: “We are going to read a story about a monster named Babayan who looks and acts like some of the monsters you have described. As we read the story, I want you to think about these questions: How and why did Babayan change? Did he change all by himself? Or did he need the help of others? Do you think even a monster should be given a second chance?”

“Some people think the author of the story is the ‘expert’ on its meaning, but actually *you* are.”

“A story comes to life when you think about what it means to you.”

CHAPTER GUIDE AND ACTIVITIES



Chapter 1: Babayan

- Why is everyone afraid of Babayan? Would you have been afraid of Babayan?
- What do you think Babayan looks like?
- Why do you think he acts the way he does?
- Do you think anyone will miss Babayan now that he has disappeared?

Chapter Activity: Ask your students or children to list all of Babayan's physical traits as he appears in the first chapter. Then, ask them to discuss what they think Babayan is like based on the illustration. Have the students save the list to discuss and compare after they have finished reading the story. This and all the subsequent activities can be easily adapted by families for projects at home.

Chapter 2: The Magic Star

- What do you think Babayan is thinking as he is dangling from a star?
- What would you be thinking if this happened to you?
- Why do you think Babayan is afraid of his own voice? Have you ever felt as lonely as Babayan feels when he is dangling from a star?
- When do you like to be alone and when do you not like to be alone? What is the difference between being alone and being lonely?
- Why do you think the Queen of the Stars rescues Babayan?
- What does the Queen of the Stars mean when she tells Babayan he won't be the same?
- What is going to happen to Babayan once he returns to earth? Where do you think Babayan will land?

Chapter Activity: The Queen of the Stars tells Babayan, “I will help you return to earth, but you will not be the same.” Have the students predict how Babayan will change. Engage them in a conversation about changes they have experienced in their own lives.

Chapter 3: Shayma Bayma Island

- How have Babayan’s face and body changed?
- Use your five senses to describe what Babayan experiences on Shayma Bayma Island. Would you like to explore this new kingdom?
- What is different about how Babayan uses his strength?
- Why do you think Babayan’s roar is more powerful than ever?
- How does Babayan feel after chasing the sea dragons away?
- Have you ever surprised yourself with your own strength?

Chapter Activity: Ask your students to write a descriptive paragraph or a short story about a new place they visited for the first time or moved to with their family. For younger children, have them draw pictures and tell about the experience.

Chapter 4: The Great Debate

- The animals of Shayma Bayma have several theories about who Babayan may be. Do you think any of their ideas is correct?
- What does the illustration tell us about how the animals are feeling? Why might they be worried?
- Without her parents’ permission, Kookatu flies out of the cave to have a closer look at Babayan. Why did Kookatu’s parents refuse to let her join them? Do you think Kookatu will get in trouble?
- What would you have done in Kookatu’s situation?

Chapter Activity: This chapter presents a good opportunity to engage students in a discussion on physical appearance. Is a person’s appearance important? Why or why not? When you look at someone, can you tell what she or he is like inside? What does their physical appearance reveal? Have you ever been surprised when you expected someone to be one way based on his or her appearance, and actually he or she was quite different?

Chapter 5: The Book of Names

- When Kookatu’s mother first looks at Babayan, what about his appearance makes her think he might be a friendly beast? What about Babayan makes her think he might be a fierce beast?
- Babayan tells Kookatu he will not eat her or any of the animals. Why do the animals trust Babayan? Would you trust him right away, or would you be more cautious?
- What will the relationship between Babayan and the animals of Shayma Bayma be like?

Chapter Activity: Divide students into two groups and read the following quote: “The animals made a circle around Babayan. The elders of the island came forward. ‘We are among the lost islands of the earth,’ said Grandfather Monkey. ‘A great and ancient magic protects us. We are invisible to people.’”

One group will play the animals and the other group, the people. How would animals act if they were invisible to people? How would people act if they were invisible to animals?

Chapter 6: First Night

- What is different about Babayan’s first night sleeping on Shayma Bayma Island?
- Why do you think Babayan only remembers dangling from a star and not his life in the north?

Chapter Activity: Before Babayan falls asleep, he thanks the Queen of the Stars for sending him to Shayma Bayma Island: “Thank you for sending me to Shayma Bayma,” he said quietly.” Kookatu also gives thanks to the Queen of the Stars: “I asked you to send me a friend. Thank you for sending me such a big one.” Ask the students to come up with a list of people in their lives for whom they are grateful. Why are they grateful to have them in their lives? How do they express their gratitude?

Chapter 7: Kookatu, Teema, and Paw

- Would you like to live in a place like Shayma Bayma?
- The animals of Shayma Bayma have a special rule that doesn’t allow animals to eat one another. Why do you think they have a “no eating rule”? Do you think this is a good thing?
- What do you think the animals of Shayma Bayma eat?
- Kookatu tells Babayan that they have a “no eating rule” because eating one another “created a lot of hard feelings.” What do you think creates “hard feelings” in your life at home or at school? What kind of rules would help people change their feelings toward one another?

- Describe Kookatu, Teema, and Paw. What kind of friends will they be to Babayan? What do they like about Babayan? Do you think they would have liked the “old” Babayan?
- What do you think Babayan is feeling inside when the winds of the Wild Islands begin to blow?

Chapter Activity: Describe and draw a map of the Shayma Bayma Islands. Shayma Bayma is the main island, but many of the inhabitants of the Shayma Bayma Island Kingdom have their own island—for example, Big Cat Island. Have the students create their own personal island with no limitations. What would the island look like? What would they name it? Who would live on the island? What rules would they make?

Chapter 8: The Talking Palms

- The Talking Palms have fun all day in their secret world. If you were a friend of the Palms, and you could dress up in any way you wanted each day, what would you wear? How would you want to look?
- Why do you think the Talking Palms don't like visitors to their island?
- On Palm Island, Babayan discovers the Star Stone. Why do you think the Star Stone is so special? What do you think are its powers?

Chapter Activity: Divide students into two groups. One group is the Talking Palms and the other group is made up of visitors to the island. Have them act out how they would react to each other. What would they say and do? This exercise provides students the opportunity to explore the themes of exclusion and inclusion in groups at school and in their neighborhoods. Ask the students to reflect on how newcomers to their block, neighborhood, and school are treated. What would they do to improve the way newcomers are treated?

Chapter 9: The Attack of the Kura Birds

- Why do you think the Kura Birds are not afraid of Babayan's mighty roar?
- Do you think Babayan would have won his fight with the Kura Birds without the Star Stone?
- When Babayan was a fierce beast, he was always the predator. What does he learn about the relationship between predator and prey after he is attacked by the Kura Birds?
- How are the creatures from the Wild Islands similar to Babayan when Babayan lived in the far north?
- Why do you think the Talking Palms share their secrets with Babayan? Will Babayan keep their secrets?

Chapter Activity: After the Kura Birds attack Babayan, he helps protect the Talking Palms and they befriend him. Ask students to write two paragraphs: one describing a time when someone has helped them, and another time when they have helped someone else. Have them share how they felt after each experience.

Chapter 10: The Migrating Swans

- How does Babayan make himself feel at home on Shayma Bayma?
- Even though Babayan's life is peaceful, sometimes he has bad dreams, and angry and violent feelings come back to haunt him. Why do you think this happens?
- What do you think Babayan will find on the Faraway Islands? Do you think he is ready to visit them?
- Why did Grandfather Monkey believe that Babayan was not ready to visit the Faraway Islands? Have you ever been in a situation where you have been told that you were not yet ready to do something? How did it make you feel?

Chapter Activity: In this chapter, Babayan learns of the Faraway Islands for the very first time. When Babayan asks Grandfather Monkey why he had not mentioned the Islands before, he replies that Babayan was not yet ready. Ask your students to share an experience similar to Babayan's.

Chapter 11: The Voyage

- The creatures of Shayma Bayma use materials from their islands, for example, wood and pitch from their natural surroundings. What kind of materials from your home and neighborhood would you use to build a boat?
- Kookatu, Teema, and Paw are chosen to be Babayan's crew. Who would you choose to be your crew if you took a voyage to a new place?
- During his journey to the Faraway Islands, Babayan realizes that he is not as strong as the storm or waves, and he reaches out for his special Star Stone. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed someone's help to face a new and difficult situation?
- What do you think the Faraway Islands will be like? Do you think Babayan and his friends will like it there?

Chapter Activity: Teamwork is an important theme in this chapter; all the Shayma Bayma animals help build Babayan's boat. Discuss the importance of teamwork and come up with a list of activities that will require teamwork. A few ideas are planting a garden, painting a mural, or creating something out of recycled materials.

Chapter 12: The Faraway Islands

- Describe what the Fort of the Voyagers looks like. Who were the Voyagers? Why did they take a journey across the sea?
- Babayan is surprised when he discovers that his friends have followed him into the Fort of the Voyagers. How does having friends by his side make Babayan feel? How do your friends make you feel? Have your friends ever made you feel stronger?
- Babayan looks out and sees monsters all around him, and, for the first time, he remembers he was once a monster. How do you think Babayan feels about no longer being a monster?

Chapter Activity: Babayan finally arrives at the Faraway Islands. He sees monsters in the distance, but chooses not to eat or fight them. He has changed since the beginning of the story. Ask your students if it is possible to make a big change in real life. Have they made a big change in their lives? Were they able to do this alone, or did they need the help of others? Engage the students in a discussion about how friends, families, and mentors can give a person the courage to change.

Chapter 13: A Joyful Roar

- Babayan is on his way back to the Shayma Bayma Islands with Kookatu, Teema, and Paw. How would his journey have been different without them?
- How has Babayan changed from the beginning to the end of the story?
- What do you think Babayan's life will be like from now on?
- The Queen of the Stars tells Babayan, "Now the light of your star is inside you. Your eyes cannot see it, but it is a strong light, and it will guide you wherever you journey." What do you think she means?
- Is there someone in your life who has been like the Queen of the Stars and helped guide you? Can you imagine being like the Queen of the Stars for someone?

Chapter Activity: Babayan did not change all at once. What specific events or characters influenced Babayan's transformation? Have your students work together to create a timeline with significant milestones in Babayan's journey. Ask your students to name the creatures who helped Babayan and also what he learned from facing his fears and his foes. Engage students in a conversation about the potential to transform their own lives. Have the students create a timeline of significant milestones in their lives. Ask them to draw a picture of a joyful moment to share with others.

If you were chosen to draw the pictures for *Babayan and the Magic Star*, how would you draw the Queen of the Stars?"

If you could spend a day with any of the characters in the story, who would it be, and why?" Have students share their ideas in small groups and then with the class.

STUDENTS AS STORYTELLERS AND ARTISTS



Continuing the Story of Babayan

The next phase of the Babayan Story Project is for students to continue the story of Babayan in their own voices and create their own art. Pose the question: “What do you think happens to Babayan and his friends?” Have the students “publish” their own illustrated books and share them at school and at home. Encourage them to focus on the characters in the story that most engage them. They may even want to make themselves characters in the story.

Sharing their stories is a way of promoting appreciation of one another’s work, collaboration, and community building.

Additional collective projects engaging with the story of Babayan could include:

- Creating a class library of the children’s books continuing the story of Babayan
- Painting a mural or poster
- Writing and performing a play, musical, or dance
- Producing a puppet show
- Creating a “story walk” in which pages of the story are posted on a path through the school or in a public gathering place like a park or square
- Designing an exhibit of the students’ stories and art
- Making a Babayan quilt with each student contributing a square of his or her own design

THE STORY SEEKERS' INITIATIVE: BRINGING NEW STORIES FROM HOME



A central goal of the Babayan Story Project is for the students to become “story seekers.” To reinvigorate the oral storytelling tradition, have the students retell the story of Babayan in their local language at home, and ask their parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, friends, or neighbors to tell them stories from their oral storytelling tradition. If the school has the resources, the students can even record these oral tales.

Here are some prompts students can use to learn stories from their families, friends, and neighbors:

Tell me a story about...

- ...a great beast or monster.
- ...an animal or person who appears weak, but is actually strong and brave.
- ...a creature or person who appears ugly, but is actually beautiful inside.
- ...an animal or person who can change shape or size.
- ...an animal or person who is violent, but learns to be gentle and peaceful.
- ...a creature who appears fierce, but is actually kind.
- ...a person or creature who helps others overcome danger.
- ...a magical place, kingdom, forest, or island.

By gathering stories from home, students have the opportunity to act as translators, interpreters, and bridges between home and school. They bring their families into the circle of storytellers, helping break down the barrier between literacy and illiteracy.

Students can also become “scribes” by writing down the stories they have brought from their homes and neighborhoods. They can also “publish” these stories as a second illustrated book, which can become part of an “archive” or special library shelf in the classroom. The illustrated books can later be brought home and shared with family and friends. This is a beautiful way to honor the stories of their community.

STORYTELLING AND MORAL REASONING



Once students' imaginations are awakened through storytelling and story sharing, they can use storytelling as a springboard to discuss the ethical dilemmas they face in their everyday lives. Students are encouraged to write and illustrate a third book in which they become "reporters" who document real-life issues facing their communities.

At every stage of the project, but especially when confronting problems of daily life, partnerships between older and younger students are invaluable. College students, secondary school students, and upper-grade primary school students can serve as mentors, guides, and confidants to younger students. Working one-on-one with younger students, older students can draw out those who may be reticent to share their experiences in front of their teachers or in a large group.

The Chapter Guide and Activities section provide many opportunities for older and younger students to engage in ethical reasoning and civic dialogue.

Combating Bullying

If you are teaching a unit on the problem of bullying, you may want to incorporate the following questions to help focus your discussion:

- Do you think Babayan is a bully at the beginning of the story when he lives in his cold, dark cave in the north? Why or why not? Does Babayan remind you of anyone you know? In what ways?
- Have you ever witnessed bullying? How did it make you feel? What should someone do if he or she sees someone being bullied? How can the victim of bullying be protected? Where should victims of bullying go for help?
- Babayan changed from a selfish, angry beast to a peaceful beast who makes friends and

protects others. Do you think bullies in real life can change? Why or why not?

- Babayan did not change all at once. It took time for him to overcome his angry, violent feelings and confront his past. Ask your students to name the creatures who helped Babayan, for example, the Queen of the Stars, Grandfather Monkey, and his friends, Kookatu, Teema, and Paw.
- Do you think bullies in real life need time to change their behavior?
- Who do you think can help bullies change?
- How can students work together to stop bullying?
- You don't have to be a bully to feel angry inside, to feel like running and roaring like Babayan, or to grab something from someone the way Babayan grabbed the villagers' sheep and ate their haystacks. What do you do when you are angry?
- How do you feel inside when you are angry?
- What helps calm you down when you are angry?
- Why do bullies pick on people? How do you think bullies feel inside?
- Are bullies angry inside, and is that why they hurt others?
- Can you think of other reasons that bullies hurt people?

The following questions are good for a teacher, mentor, trusted friend, or family member to ask one-on-one with students or in a small group:

- Has anyone ever bullied you?
- How did it make you feel?
- What did you do?
- Based on your own experience, what do you think is the best way to stop bullying?

Older and younger students are ideal partners for a unit on bullying, and also excellent partners for the art and writing projects outlined in the Chapter Guide. After reading the story together and doing projects on *Babayan*, student partners can co-author a make-believe or a true-life story on a common theme or problem they have witnessed, such as exclusion or bullying. They can then share and discuss each other's stories. With the guidance of their teachers, student partners can gather in small groups, forums, or larger assemblies to share their stories, art, activities, and insights.

An excellent resource for high school and college students that models Socratic dialogue is Harvard University Professor Michael Sandel's free online "[Justice](#)" course.

SHARE YOUR PROJECTS

Join Team Babayan and share the work you have created. We welcome you to contribute new activities and ideas that build on the Babayan Story Project. Connect with the Babayan Story Project on our: **Website** (<https://www.babayanstoryproject.com/>) and **Facebook** (<https://www.facebook.com/Babayan/>)



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