

The Indian skate park bringing children together

Level 3 • Advanced

1 Warmer

Take a few seconds to picture a skateboarder. Then compare your thoughts with other students.

- What do they look like?
- How old are they?
- What are they wearing?
- Where are they?
- What sounds can you hear?

2 Key words

Match the key words with the definitions. Then find them in the article to read them in context.

is flanked by	slap	enrolled	file	tangible	eased off
hierarchy	scholarship	scoot	trudge	significant	caste

1. put something down quickly and noisily _____
2. has at its sides _____
3. move around very quickly _____
4. walk somewhere in a line _____
5. on an official list of pupils or students _____
6. an amount of money that an organization gives to someone so that they can study at a particular school or university _____
7. of great importance and with a special meaning _____
8. a system for organizing people according to their status in a society _____
9. stopped doing something that was annoying to you _____
10. important and noticeable _____
11. one of the traditional social classes that people are born into in Hindu society _____
12. walk somewhere with slow heavy steps _____

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'No school, no skating': the Indian skate park bringing children together

Bringing skateboards to children in Madhya Pradesh gives them enthusiasm to go to school and gives girls a confidence in themselves

Jamie Fullerton

13 March, 2020

- 1 The children skid into the dusty courtyard at breakfast time, grabbing skateboards from a stack near a tethered brown cow.
- 2 Boards jammed under arms, they sprint barefoot past a large well pump, the main water supply for many families here. They slap their wheels onto the still-clean concrete of Janwaar Castle – India's newest skateboard park.
- 3 Opened in January, 2020, to replace a skateboard park built a few hundred metres away in 2015, the large structure is flanked by grain crops that lie on the edge of Janwaar, a village of roughly 150 households in rural Madhya Pradesh, one of India's poorest states.
- 4 Soon, about 50 children are skating on the concrete. Toddlers scoot on boards, lying on their stomachs, while older children egg each other on to perform elaborate tricks.
- 5 However, when a bell rings from the schoolhouse next to the park, boards are dropped and the children file inside, illustrating the real purpose of the park.
- 6 Ulrike Reinhard, the founder of Janwaar Castle and Rural Changemakers, the German NGO (non-governmental organization) that funds it, set two rules for the young skaters: "No school, no skating" and "Girls first". The result has been increased school attendance and a chance to challenge prejudices.
- 7 School attendance in rural areas like Madhya Pradesh is often low. India's 2018 annual status of education report found that 57.1% of enrolled primary schoolchildren aged six to ten were in school during inspections in the state. For children aged 11 to 12, the figure was 53.4%.
- 8 Many parents in the village, where family earnings can dip below 2,500 rupees (£27) a month, received little or no education themselves so don't put pressure on their children to attend school.
- 9 Arun Kumar, 18, says that by the time his mother was 11, she was a married housewife. When he should have been in school, he says: "I just played and ran around the village."
- 10 Asha Gond, 20, a director of Barefoot Skateboarders, an offshoot of Rural Changemakers that runs Janwaar Castle, says: "Before the skateboard park, kids just weren't going to school." About 80 children are now enrolled in the village's primary school; since the park was opened, average pupil attendance rose from about 25 to 50.
- 11 As well as overseeing the park, Gond runs supplementary lessons for the children, outside the schoolhouse, using rocks as counting aids.
- 12 She regularly travels to New Delhi for training on a scholarship from an NGO and hopes to teach full-time in the village soon. There are still complaints about current teaching standards, which is why there is a need for her extra classes.
- 13 Popular, brilliant at skating and with an ability to handle children with quiet authority, Gond has become a role model for the Janwaar children. In a male-dominated community, that is significant.
- 14 Along with the "girls first" rule, Gond's role as a director helped reorder gender hierarchy among the children. Reinhard says that, without the rule, boys would have dominated the park. Instead, when a girl asks for a skateboard, it is shared without protest. The result is visible: often there are as many girls skating as boys.
- 15 Gond says that, without discovering her skating talent, she would probably have become a housewife in an arranged marriage. When she first started skating in 2016, pressure to marry dovetailed with village gossip.
- 16 "Village people were saying things to my parents," Gond says. "Like: 'I'm skateboarding with boys; I'm talking to boys.' So my father said: 'Stop skateboarding.' I was thinking: 'Why can't I do what I want? Boys do anything they want.' Every day, I cried, but after crying, I would feel stronger and new thoughts would come."
- 17 When Gond started winning medals in skateboarding competitions, her parents eased off. Seeing tangible results from her obsession – she also skateboarded in a TV advert for tyres – they began to accept that she didn't want an arranged marriage.

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- 18 “Recently my grandfather came to my house and said: ‘What about your daughter? We can find a boy for her.’ My father said: ‘Let her be successful in her life, then we’ll see,’” says Gond.
- 19 The building of Janwaar Castle was not without controversy. According to Reinhard, its construction ruffled feathers among some members of the Yadav caste, a group traditionally considered to be of higher social status than the village’s other group, Adivasi. A row over land use led to the second park being built and the first largely abandoned.
- 20 Beyond gender and caste, the park’s existence arguably created a further divide: between skaters and non-skaters. As school ends and children get back on boards, a young girl walks by the park with a bundle of wood balanced on her head. Some parents insist their children dedicate time to housework, rather than school or skateboarding.
- 21 Despite this, the park appears to have been overwhelmingly positive for many children. And its impact has been noticed outside Madhya Pradesh. Reinhard says that other village communities, including some near Bangalore and in the eastern state Odisha, recently worked on their own skateboard parks after seeking advice from Janwaar.
- 22 The sun sets, the children reluctantly trudge home from Janwaar Castle and Gond’s mood becomes reflective. “Life is life – there is no meaning; you have to make your own purpose,” she says, kicking the end of her board so it leaps upwards. “Do what you want. Don’t listen to what people say about you.”

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3 Comprehension check

Answer the questions using the information from the article.

1. Where is the skate park?
2. What is it called?
3. What two things is it next to?
4. Who set it up?
5. Which organization runs it now?
6. Who was the skate park created for?
7. What two rules do the children have to follow, and what are the reasons for these rules?
8. What positive effects has the skate park already had?
9. What new problems have arisen from it?
10. What do you know about Asha Gond?

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4 Phrases

Find these two phrases in the article. Then choose the correct meaning for each phrase below.

egg someone on

ruffle someone's feathers

1. egg someone on
 - a. encourage someone to do something
 - b. throw eggs at someone to show your disapproval
 - c. give someone something if they do something illegal for you
2. ruffle someone's feathers
 - a. rub a child's head so that you make their hair untidy
 - b. make someone feel worried or annoyed
 - c. give someone money to make up for something bad you did

Use the phrases to complete these sentences. Change the form and add pronouns where necessary.

1. The boy was _____ by his father, who promised him a new bike if he succeeded.
2. The council's decision _____ a few _____ amongst shop owners in the town.
3. The board members aren't happy with him. His critical remarks really _____.
4. He'd never have stolen it if she hadn't _____.

5 Verbs of movement

a. Find these verbs in the article and decide what they mean.

1. skid _____
2. grab _____
3. jam _____
4. sprint _____
5. slap _____
6. scoot _____
7. file _____
8. trudge _____

b. Think of a more common verb which could replace each one of the verbs in part a. For example, *sprint* could be replaced by *run*.

c. Read each sentence from the article aloud, first with the verb from the original article, then with your verb from part b. How does changing the verb change the feel of the article when you read it.

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6 Discussion

- Talk about the positive and negative effects of this initiative on the village – both short-term and long-term effects.
 - In your opinion, does one outweigh the other?
- Do you think parents should let their children use the skate park? Give reasons for your answer.
 - What arguments would you give to convince parents to follow your advice?
- Do you think Ulrike Reinhard is just interfering?
- Talk about any other schemes you have heard about that:
 - aim to encourage children to attend school
 - aim to increase equality between girls and boys.
- Discuss these two quotes from paragraph 22. Who said them and why? Do you agree with the

Life is life –
there is no meaning;
you have to make
your own
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Do what you
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about you.

7 Webquest

Watch Ulrike Reinhard's TEDx talk, 'When a skateboard transforms a village'. Answer the questions.

www.youtube.com/watch?v=2b6D2HaeIX0

1. Why didn't the little boy dare to join in the skating?
2. Did Reinhard succeed in breaking down this barrier?
3. What convinced Asha's parents to let her go to England?
4. What gave Jivaj his love of learning?
5. Why is the 'girls first' rule so important in rural India?
6. What does the skateboarding model have the power to do?
7. What is 'reverse mentoring'?
8. What does Reinhard consider to be her 'job'?