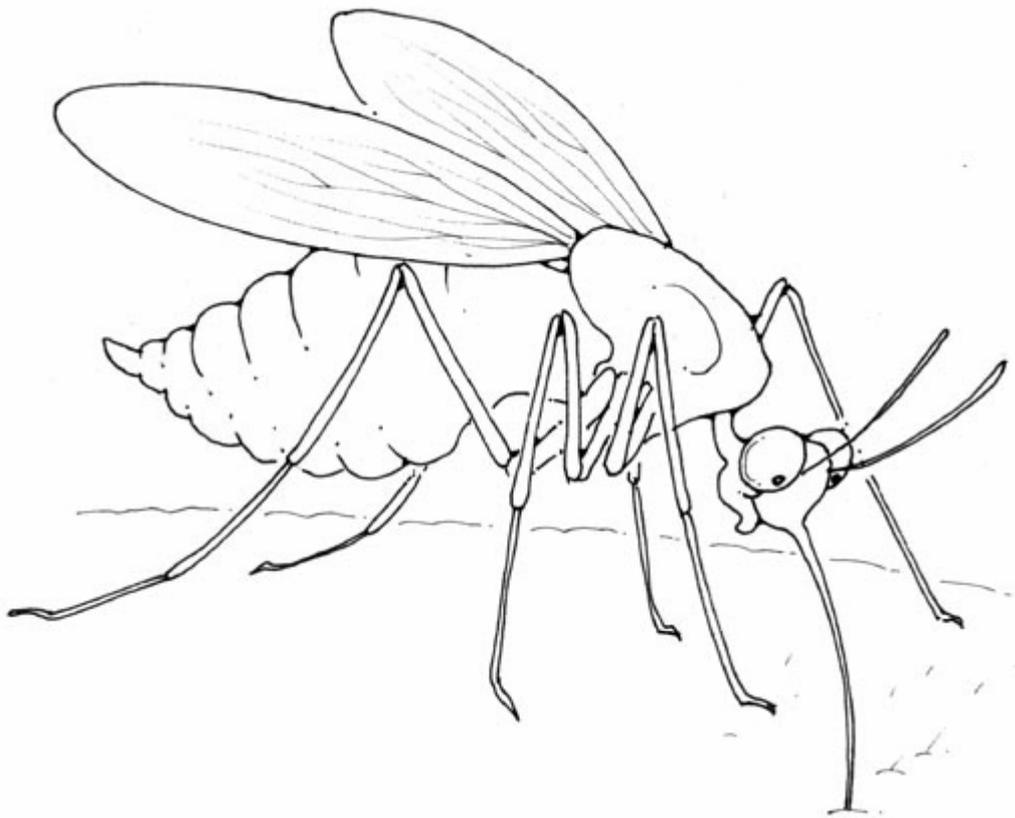


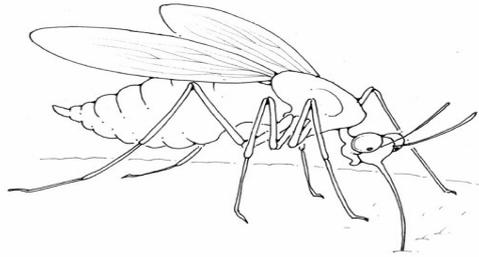
# SOONAM IS HUNGRY



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### Soonam's Story

**I**t was a hot and humid night; there was great excitement in the dirty pond near the school. Mama anopheles (a female mosquito) was very happy and she was zooming around singing zzz...zzzz. She had reason to be happy: two little baby girls had grown out of the eggs she had laid.

Mama anopheles had two sons also but, unfortunately, no daughters. She needed a daughter to carry out their family ritual of carrying germs called plasmodium and biting people to inject the germ into their bodies. She loved to see people shiver and get fever after twelve days of being bitten. People called the disease malaria. All female mosquitoes considered it their duty to bite people and make them sick. Today her wish had come true. She named her two daughters Soonam and Poonam.

As the girls grew stronger, mama anopheles taught them to fly and to bite people who lived in the houses near the pond. Her favourite

daughter was Soonam, as she was just like her mama, and also loved to bite young juicy children when they were fast asleep.

### **Karima's Story**

Karima was eight years old. She lived in a house near the dirty pool with her mother, father, grandmother and two younger sisters. Karima's mother worked all day and kept the house clean and tidy. She took care of her children and protected them against mosquito bites by putting mosquito nets around their beds at night. In the summers, they all slept in the inner compound of the house at night, as it was very hot inside the rooms.

Three years ago their grandfather had died because of high fever and shivering. He would not go to see a doctor. He believed in treating minor problems like fever and stomach aches himself. But this time it got very serious, and when he finally agreed to go to see a doctor it was too late: the doctor diagnosed his illness as malaria. The doctor advised Karima's mother to take precautions against mosquito bites as mosquitoes cause malaria. Her mother always made sure to kill any mosquitoes in the house and their whole family used mosquito nets.

### **Soonam on the prowl**

Soonam and her sister used to visit Karima's house every night. However, to their disappointment, they always saw the three girls sleeping calmly in their nets.

Nevertheless, Soonam knew she would find a way to bite the sisters. She kept spying on the three sisters especially Karima as her arms looked the healthiest. Karima's mother was very smart;

she made sure that there were no holes in the net and it was properly tucked under the mattress.



One summer night it was very hot and humid. The air was still and not a leaf was moving. The moon was shining brightly. Everybody had gone to sleep except Karima, who kept tossing in her bed. She felt thirsty and got out of bed to get some water. As she came out of the net, she felt cooler. Soonam was hiding in a shawl on a chair near the bed. As she quickly flew out and sat on Karima's hair, she could not help squealing in excitement! But Karima ran a hand through her hair, and Soonam flew back and hid in the shawl. Karima looked around but couldn't see any mosquitoes around. She said to herself: "I will sleep without the nets just for one night. It will do no harm ...just one night". She saw her family sleeping. Karima quietly took away the net from around

her bed. Soonam, who was watching Karima from her hiding place, could not believe what she saw. Her prey was lying without her guard, the net, over her! Soonam waited patiently for Karima to go to sleep. She was not taking any chances. She thought about her mother, how proud she would be of Soonam, when she would hear about her achievement. She flew out of her hiding place and sat on Karima's arms. She dug her stings into Karima's soft skin..."Here mother, this one is for you," she shouted and injected the germ into Karima's body with all her strength. Karima winced in her sleep and scratched her skin. Later other mosquitoes including Soonam's brothers also joined in biting Karima. When poor Karima got up she was itching all over, and there were little red boils all over her bare arms. She brought the net back and put it around her bed. Little did she know that the damage was already done.

### **Karima pays a price:**

After about twelve days when she was having her mid-term exams, Karima felt sick in school with nausea and a stomach ache. She came home early. She also had diarrhoea and a very bad headache. Mother was very worried. By evening Karima was shivering and sweating. Grandmother told Karima to wrap herself in the blanket so that she could stop shivering.

Karima's father reminded grandmother that when grandpa was ill the doctor had advised him not to wrap himself in a blanket when he had fever. Grandmother was very angry, and shouted, "This child will die of cold...it was the horrible medicine that killed grandpa too!" Father tried to explain that it was because he did not

go to the doctor in time that grandpa died. He took Karima to the doctor's clinic. Mother accompanied him.

Karima had developed high fever by now. Doctor suspected that she had malaria, Karima knew that she got it from Soonam's bite.

Mother was surprised and said, "It is impossible! I protect them from mosquito bites. There must be some other reason." The doctor ran a blood test and confirmed that it was the malarial parasite plasmodium in Karima's blood that has caused the disease.

Karima then told her mother that, just for one night, she had removed the net for a few hours because she was sure that the mosquitoes would not harm her.

She was given medicine to help her get better. The medicine did not taste very nice, but the doctor told her that she **MUST** take it all at the right times even when the fever is gone. Slowly, Karima began to feel better but she had had to pay a heavy price for not listening to her mother.

The doctor said that children like Karima should not be covered with blankets but should be kept cool and given plenty of drinks. "Let her eat as much as she can. It will keep her strength up. When she is getting better she will need more food than usual to help her regain her strength."

"What are some ways to prevent the spread of malaria?" asked Karima.

The doctor gave the following advice:

- Use bed nets. Bed nets that have been treated with insecticides are the best and these will continue to give protection even if there are some holes in them.
- Fill up puddles of standing water around the house with earth and stones, especially after it rains, to prevent mosquitoes like Soonam from breeding. Water pots and containers should be covered to protect them from Soonam and her mosquito friends.
- If there is a pond around the house, put oil on the surface.
- Doors and windows and other openings in the house should be covered by nets (if possible). Mosquitoes can also be driven away using mosquito coils.
- Clothing that covers arms and legs should be worn at night when the Anopheles mosquito is most active.

Karima soon got better and made sure that her and her family members took action to prevent the spread of malaria by killing mosquitoes, sleeping with mosquito nets and wearing clothes that covered their arms and legs at night. In the end, Soonam never visited Karima's house again. However, every night she continued to look for other people to bite. As time went by Karima her sisters and all their friends had spread the word to all the homes around. So, Soonam and her friends found fewer and fewer people to bite easily and fewer and fewer places to lay their eggs.

**What do you think happened to them in the end?**

## A NOTE TO TEACHERS

### About the Story

This story is suitable for children of any age from eight upwards in any country where there is a danger of malaria. Its writer who is both a medical doctor and a health educator gives very detailed and specific information about malaria and like "Uncle George" it needs to be carefully studied. It may well be worthwhile introducing it after an initial lesson on malaria. If it is to be read by the children perhaps give questions before reading for children to find answers to.

**Every child** in a malarial country needs to know the answers to these questions.

The story places great importance on the use of bednets. In many areas people are too poor to use these therefore other suggestions made must be emphasised. Yet it remains a fact that research in many countries proves that ***the use of treated bednets[even ones with holes] remains by far the most effective way of preventing malaria.***

### Activities

All recommended activities are suitable with this story, which is particularly suitable for planning and teaching using the six step approach recommended by Child-to-Child.

E.g. Identify the problem [Local Hospital and Health Workers]

Find out More [Surveys: Where do mosquitoes breed. How is malaria treated]

Plan Action [Discussions and plans for school and home]

Take Action [ Telling; e.g. Plays and Doing e.g. Stopping Soonam breeding]

Discuss Action Taken [What did we do; How well did it work]

Doing it Better {Revisit topic at the end of the term: What now?}

*Source: Written specially for this website by Dr. Shabnam Ahmed Health Action Schools Programme I.E.D. Aga Khan University Institute, Karachi Pakistan*

