



# Collegedunia NCERT Solutions

*Memories of Childhood Class 12 English NCERT Solutions: text-grounded answers for the paired autobiographical episodes by Zitkala-Sa and Bama (2026-27)*

## Chapter 6: Memories of Childhood

### About this Chapter

**Memories of Childhood** is a paired autobiographical extract by two women from marginalised communities. The first part, *The Cutting of My Long Hair*, is by **Zitkala-Sa** (Gertrude Simmons Bonnin, 1876–1938), a Native American writer recalling her first day at the Carlisle Indian Boarding School. The second part, *We Too are Human Beings*, is by **Bama**, the pen-name of a Tamil Dalit writer, from her 1992 autobiography *Karukku*. These solutions answer every Reading with Insight question with specific details from both accounts.

**Topics covered:** Discrimination and oppression • Cultural identity • Resistance and rebellion • Childhood as the site of political awakening • Education as liberation

#### Authors and sources.

Zitkala-Sa (1876–1938), Native American writer, activist, and musician; the extract is from her essay *The School Days of an Indian Girl* (*Atlantic Monthly*, 1900).

Bama (b. 1958), Tamil Dalit writer; the extract is from her autobiography *Karukku* (1992), translated from Tamil by Lakshmi Holmström.

#### Settings.

Part I: Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Pennsylvania, USA, late 1880s. Part II: a Tamil Nadu village, around the 1970s, on the walk home from primary school.

#### Common theme.

Both narrators are children from marginalised communities who encounter oppression first through small, embodied humiliations (a haircut, the wrapping of a parcel by its string), recognise the injustice without help, and respond with anger, rebellion and an early commitment to study.

Also see for this chapter: [Revision Notes](#)

## Reading with Insight

**Q 6.1** The two accounts that you read above are based in two distant cultures. What is the commonality of theme found in both of them?

### SOLUTION

Zitkala-Sa is writing about a Native American girl in 1880s Pennsylvania; Bama is writing about a Dalit girl in 1970s Tamil Nadu. The cultures are about ninety years and twelve thousand kilometres apart. And yet the two extracts share a striking set of themes, so much so that they can almost be read as a single argument made twice.

#### Anchor lines from the two extracts

Zitkala-Sa: "Now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder."

Bama: "We too are human beings."

- **Both are about a child encountering oppression early.** Zitkala-Sa is a small girl on her first day at the Carlisle School; Bama is a third-class pupil walking home from primary school. Both extracts insist that the child recognises the injustice, even before adults explain it.
- **Both oppressions are embodied in a small, ordinary humiliation.** Zitkala-Sa's hair is cut by force; an upper-caste man in Bama's village is brought a packet of vadais which her elder cousin must carry by the string so that he does not pollute the man by touching the parcel. The injuries are not dramatic; they are everyday, which is exactly what makes them indictable.
- **Both extracts treat the body as the site of oppression.** Hair, dress, posture, the way one is allowed to carry a parcel: oppression in both accounts works by controlling what the marginalised body may or may not do. The body is the front line of the conflict.
- **Both narrators move from confusion to anger.** Zitkala-Sa is first afraid (the chair drill, the bells, the strange tongue) and then enraged when she hears about the haircut. Bama first finds the scene funny, then her brother explains the untouchability, and laughter turns into anger.
- **Both stories end with a commitment to study.** Zitkala-Sa writes, eventually, the very essay we are reading. Bama's elder brother Annan tells her, "*if we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities*", and she stands first in her class. Both accounts argue that education is the long answer to the humiliation.
- **Both accounts are autobiographies by women.** The gender is part of the meaning. Both writers are speaking on behalf of communities whose accounts had been written,

until then, mostly by outside men. The act of writing the extract is itself part of the resistance.

**Final Answer:** The commonality of theme across the two extracts is the recognition, by a child, of oppression that works through small, embodied humiliations (the haircut, the parcel by its string); the body as the front line; the move from confusion to anger; the commitment to study as the answer; and the act of writing the autobiography as itself an act of resistance. Two distant cultures, the same argument: childhood injustice, when named honestly, is the beginning of political life.

### Exam Tip

For “commonality of theme” questions, write the shared elements as a list, not as a paragraph. Examiners give marks for each named commonality (childhood, body, anger, study, voice). Five commonalities, five marks.

**EXPERT’S SOLUTION** : Dr Ananya Iyer, PhD English Literature, Jawaharlal Nehru University

**Strategic angle.** The NCERT pairs Zitkala-Sa with Bama on purpose. The juxtaposition is the chapter’s argument: the specific cruelties of colonial America and caste India look nothing alike, but the structure of the cruelty (a child, a small public humiliation, a commitment to study) is the same. The chapter is asking students to read across cultures, which is itself a literary-political skill.

- Notice how both accounts open with a sensory cataract, not a thesis. Zitkala-Sa: “the loud metallic voice crashing through the belfry overhead and into our sensitive ears”, the “annoying clatter of shoes on bare floors”. Bama: the elder cousin’s careful walk, the package by the string, the laughter she could not yet read. Childhood injustice is first heard and seen before it is named. The form is faithful to the experience.
- The two pieces share what postcolonial criticism calls the *embodied politics of small acts*. The haircut is not just a haircut; it is the school’s whole assimilation programme made visible on a child’s head. The parcel-by-the-string is not just one parcel; it is the entire purity-pollution architecture of caste. Reading both as ordinary scenes hides the politics; the chapter teaches a reader to find the politics inside the ordinary.
- Both writers use understatement. Zitkala-Sa ends her section with “*Not a soul reasoned quietly with me, as my own mother used to do; for now I was only one of many little animals driven by a herder*”. Bama ends with the line “*We too are human beings*”. Neither sentence is grandiloquent; both are devastating. Restraint is part of the politics: the writers refuse to make their pain spectacular for the reader.
- Both accounts are framed around resistance through knowledge. Zitkala-Sa attempts

to hide; Bama channels her anger into study. The chapter aligns with the famous Ambedkar formula, “*educate, agitate, organise*”, which both pieces dramatise at the level of a child’s first awakening.

- The two voices speak in slightly different generic modes. Zitkala-Sa’s prose is reflective, distanced, nineteenth-century. Bama’s is more conversational, more present-tense in feeling. The chapter offers two rhetorical templates for the same political position; a good answer should mention that the strategies of resistance, like the cultures, are not identical.

**Why this matters.** The pairing turns the chapter into a small piece of comparative postcolonial reading. The NCERT is quietly teaching the lesson that India is not the only place where caste-like discrimination exists, and that the literary genres of resistance (autobiography, memoir, essay) cross oceans. The commonality is the proof.

**Final Answer:** Across the two extracts the common themes are: oppression encountered first in childhood, oppression embodied in small public humiliations, the body as the site of conflict, the move from confusion to anger, education as the long answer, restraint as a literary strategy, and autobiography as an act of resistance. The pairing argues, by example, that the politics of marginalisation are international, even when the specific cruelties are local.

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**Q 6.2** It may take a long time for oppression to be resisted, but the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life. Do you agree that injustice in any form cannot escape being noticed even by children?

#### SOLUTION

Yes. Both extracts make precisely this argument, and the chapter as a whole reads as a small case study of how childhood notices injustice before vocabulary, before politics, before adult encouragement. The two writers are remembering, decades later, moments at the ages of about six and eight when they first knew something was wrong.

#### Key lines from the two extracts

*Zitkala-Sa:* “We have to submit, because they are strong.” / “No, I will not submit! I will struggle first!”

*Bama:* “I felt so provoked and angry that I wanted to touch those wretched vadais myself straightaway.”

- **Zitkala-Sa's instant refusal.** The child has only just heard, from her friend Judewin, that her hair is about to be cut. She does not need any adult to explain why this is an outrage. "*Among our people, short hair was worn by mourners, and shingled hair by cowards.*" She immediately rejects Judewin's resigned "*we have to submit, because they are strong*", and decides, alone, to hide under the bed. The rebellion is the very first thing she does.
- **Zitkala-Sa's bodily resistance.** Even when she is found and tied to the chair, she kicks and scratches. The rebellion is not just verbal; it is muscular. Children, the passage insists, know how to refuse with their bodies before they know how to refuse in sentences.
- **Bama's reading of the parcel scene.** The third- class girl is not given a lesson on caste. She watches a relative carry a parcel by its string and pieces the injustice together herself. The clarity of her response (the wish to "*touch those wretched vadais myself straightaway*") is the rebellion in seed form.
- **Bama's larger inference.** The child generalises from one scene to a whole social architecture: "*why should we have to fetch and carry for these people?*" She is eight; she has already arrived at the political question the autobiography will be built around.
- **Annan's reframing.** Bama's elder brother does not invent her anger; he names it and gives it a direction. "*If we study and make progress, we can throw away these indignities.*" The seed of rebellion was already planted; Annan supplies the field.
- **General experience.** Even children outside the two extracts notice everyday injustices: the classmate who is mocked for an accent, the cousin who is asked to eat in a separate plate at a relative's house, the smaller share of food given to a girl child. Children without political vocabulary still recognise unfairness. The two extracts are the literary articulation of an experience every reader has, in some form, had.

**Final Answer:** Yes. Both Zitkala-Sa and Bama remember moments at the ages of six and eight at which they recognised injustice without adult prompting: Zitkala-Sa refuses submission and hides; Bama reads the parcel-by-the-string as a caste fact and infers the social architecture. The rebellion is not adult later, it is child first. Childhood, the chapter argues, is where the political life begins.

### ✗ Common Mistake

Do not say "children are too young to understand injustice" and then write a paragraph against the statement. The extracts prove the opposite: the children understand the injustice better than the surrounding adults. Quote Zitkala-Sa's struggle and Bama's inference to make the point.

**EXPERT'S SOLUTION** : Mr Arjun Mehta, MA English, University of Delhi

**Strategic angle.** The question is asking the student to reread the two extracts not as a memory but as evidence in a larger thesis: that political awareness has roots in early childhood. The strongest answer treats the two passages as case studies in a small psychology of resistance, and adds a third real-world example to extend the argument.

- Zitkala-Sa's rebellion is striking because it precedes her political vocabulary. She does not know the word "assimilation". She knows that, in her people, short hair belongs to mourners and cowards. The cultural meaning of the haircut, transmitted by her mother, is enough to make the rebellion logical to her.
- Bama's anger has the same shape. She does not yet know the word "untouchability" (the passage makes a point of this: "*I hadn't yet heard people speak openly of untouchability*"). She knows what unfairness looks like, and she lets the experience precede the term.
- Both passages support the educational argument that children are not blank slates politically. They notice unfairness; they often act on it; the role of adults is not to teach the politics but to give the politics a language. Annan's intervention with Bama is exactly that kind of language-giving.
- History offers many parallel examples: Malala Yousafzai at eleven, Greta Thunberg at fifteen, the school strikes of the 1960s American civil rights movement, the children of the Soweto uprising in 1976. The chapter's claim, that "*the seeds of rebellion are sowed early in life*", is supported across continents and centuries.
- There is a small caution worth adding. Childhood notice is real but partial. Children see injustice; they often cannot, alone, change the structure that produces it. That is why both extracts move towards adults (the mother who taught the hair-meaning, the brother who framed the study) and why the long resistance still needs grown-up tools.

**Why this matters.** The chapter is part of the NCERT's quiet argument that political education starts long before civics class. A reader who learns from these extracts to take children's perceptions seriously, both at home and in the classroom, is doing the chapter's work. The seeds were always there; the chapter is only asking that we notice them.

**Final Answer:** Yes. Both Zitkala-Sa's bodily refusal at Carlisle and Bama's anger at the parcel-by-the-string show children noticing injustice without adult prompting, well before they had the political vocabulary for it. The pattern is repeated in modern parallels (Malala, Greta Thunberg, Soweto 1976). Children notice; the role of adults is to give the noticing a language and a direction. The seeds of rebellion are indeed sowed early.

**Q 6.3** Bama's experience is that of a victim of the caste system. What kind of

**discrimination does Zitkala-Sa's experience depict? What are their responses to their respective situations?**

### SOLUTION

Bama is a victim of the caste system; Zitkala-Sa is a victim of the American settler-colonial assimilation programme directed at Native American children. The two discriminations have different historical roots, but they share a structure: a dominant community decides that the marginalised body must be reformed, relocated, or kept at a distance. The responses of the two children are different in tone (one outward, one inward) but identical in purpose: both refuse the discrimination, and both end with a turn to study.

- **Zitkala-Sa's discrimination: assimilation.** The Carlisle Indian Boarding School (founded 1879) was designed by the US government to “*kill the Indian, save the man*”. Native American children were taken from their families, given English names, forbidden their languages, dressed in European clothes, and made to worship in Christian forms. The cutting of Zitkala-Sa's hair is a small enacted form of this entire programme. The discrimination is cultural erasure, executed on the child's body.
- **Bama's discrimination: caste.** Bama's discrimination is the caste system's purity-pollution rule. The upper-caste man cannot touch the parcel of vadais directly because Dalit hands have already touched the bag. The discrimination is segregation: it does not seek to assimilate the Dalit but to keep them at a distance, useful for labour and errands but never accepted as equal.
- **Zitkala-Sa's response: physical resistance and hiding.** The girl refuses to submit. She hides under a bed. When found she kicks and scratches. The response is bodily, immediate, and ultimately defeated by force. But it is followed, decades later, by the writing of the very autobiography we are reading; the rebellion becomes public through her pen.
- **Bama's response: laughter, anger, study.** Bama first finds the parcel-by-the-string scene comic; then, when Annan explains the caste meaning, the laughter turns to anger. She channels the anger into study, stands first in her class, and eventually writes *Karukku* (1992), the autobiography that contains this very extract.
- **Difference in tone.** Zitkala-Sa's resistance is a flash of refusal; Bama's is the long, deliberate work of an examination top-ranker. The difference is partly of age (six versus eight), partly of historical moment, and partly of community strategy: the Native American struggle had become explicit and direct by the 1880s; the Dalit struggle in India has long combined visible protest with patient educational rise.
- **Common end.** Both responses end with the same act: writing about it. The autobiography is itself the long resistance. The discrimination tried to silence these girls; their books are the answer the discrimination could not prevent.

**Final Answer:** Bama suffers caste segregation; Zitkala-Sa suffers colonial cultural assimilation at a Native American boarding school. Bama responds with laughter that turns to anger and is channelled into study, ultimately into *Karukku*. Zitkala-Sa responds with physical resistance, hiding, kicking and scratching, and ultimately with the autobiography from which this extract is taken. Different cruelties, different ages, the same final answer: education and writing as the long resistance.

### ♥ Why This Matters

The two responses are not mutually exclusive. Indian readers have used both: Ambedkar's bodily protests at the temple entry, the Dalit movement's patient educational rise. When writing this answer, treat Zitkala-Sa and Bama as two complementary models rather than two opposed ones.

**EXPERT'S SOLUTION** : Ms Priya Sundaram, MA English, Madras Christian College

**Strategic angle.** The question is doing comparative work without saying so. The student is being asked to identify two different historical formations (settler-colonial assimilation and caste segregation), describe each accurately, and then read the two children's responses as two different strategies of resistance. The strongest answer treats this as a small exercise in political reading.

- Be specific about Zitkala-Sa's discrimination. The Carlisle School operated under Richard Henry Pratt's slogan "*kill the Indian, save the man*". The hair-cutting was one item in a longer list: forced Christianity, English-only education, the prohibition of Native dress, the renaming of pupils. Zitkala-Sa's first day captures the entire programme in microcosm.
- Be specific about Bama's discrimination. The caste system in 1970s rural Tamil Nadu kept Dalits out of certain wells, temples, tea stalls, restaurants, and residential streets. The vadai-by-the-string scene is not a one-off insult; it is a daily piece of the purity-pollution architecture.
- Compare the responses by tactic. Zitkala-Sa's tactic is *refuse, resist, hide, struggle*. Bama's tactic is *laugh, get angry, study, write*. Both are legitimate responses; the choice depends on age, on the available adult support, and on the institutional shape of the cruelty (a boarding school versus a village street).
- Notice that both responses are eventually given the same shape: an autobiography. Resistance through narrative is the chapter's preferred final tactic. The body is the first front; the page is the long one.
- Indian readers should add one more comparison. Both forms of discrimination still exist in modified form: Native American boarding-school survivors are still being interviewed in 2020s North America; caste discrimination still produces violence in

2020s India. The two children's responses are not historical curiosities; they are early instalments of a long, still unfinished resistance.

**Why this matters.** The chapter is asking the student to do something subtle: to compare two cruelties without collapsing them into one, and to compare two responses without ranking them. That is a real political skill (to see similarity without erasing difference) and a real literary skill, since reading across cultures is exactly what world literature, at its best, teaches.

**Final Answer:** Bama suffers caste's purity-pollution segregation; Zitkala-Sa suffers settler-colonial cultural assimilation at the Carlisle Indian School. Bama responds with anger turned into examination success and into the autobiography *Karukku*. Zitkala-Sa responds with physical resistance, hiding and struggle, and decades later with the published essay we now read. The two children's strategies are different in tactic but identical in purpose: to refuse the cruelty and to write its story so that it cannot be silenced.

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