

How One Man Is Trying to Teach A Whole Country With An App

This lesson can be presented over 1-2 sessions. Instructors should feel free to use whichever discussion questions and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before the discussion questions.

Lesson Goals

Help students...

- understand the struggle of individuals who don't have access to quality education and cannot read.
- appreciate their own educational opportunities and the role of education in empowering us to strive towards our goals, and to provide for ourselves and our families.
- explore how just one person's creativity and wisdom can help address widespread problems and create positive change in a community.
- be inspired to be generous with our talents, time and resources for the betterment of other people.
- view technology as an opportunity to learn and improve ourselves if used correctly and safely.
- see the role of citizenship, both our rights and duties, within our local community, our own country and globally.

Highlighted Virtues and Character Traits

Caring: to help others; a caring person lives with empathy in trying to understand another person's situation, compassion in desiring to help others, and then with generosity in acting to help

Citizenship: the duties, rights, and privileges relating to a person being citizen of a local community, nation and our world; the desire to make our community a better place

Creativity: the ability to think of new ideas; to come up with new approaches for accomplishing a goal or solving a problem

Generosity: giving freely of our own possessions, time and/or talent.

Wisdom: ability to apply knowledge, experience, understanding in ways that are effective and good. The ability to discern or judge what is true, right, or lasting

Leader Introduction:

Hodan Artan is a 23 year old single mother working as a cleaner in Hargeisa, Somaliland. She and her baby live in a mud hut with a cloth roof that she repairs with string. Her roof flaps in the wind and leaks when it rains. She never learned to read or write, and neither did her parents before her. Money is very tight for Artan and most citizens in Somaliland, so most cannot afford school.

Somaliland is a small, unofficial country in the North East area of Africa and the people have suffered from many years of war and the lack of opportunities to attend school and to work. Somaliland has one of the highest illiteracy rates, or portion of people who cannot read, in the world. Imagine, three out of every four adults cannot read or write, and one out of every four children does not go to school. The government is trying to make sure children here at least finish elementary school (that's only up to sixth grade!), but challenges remain. Many people live far from cities and towns where schools might be, and many people don't have established homes but live on the go. One man named Ismail Ahmed and his organization, The Sahamiye Foundation is providing a solution through the wise use of technology.

Ahmed has built an app named Daariz, (pronounced "Dah-riz") that has changed the lives of over 410,000 people in the region, including Hodan Artan, by teaching them how to read and write. The app's website says that it is always free and always fun, and can even be used without the internet. Daariz teaches many things, including basics like the alphabet and letter sounds, numbers, simple words, and progresses to writing, sight reading, and comprehension. All of the app's learning features are set up like games, and users get personalized feedback and guidance on what they should work on next. While progressing from level to level, they can also compete with friends to gain fun awards and badges to raise virtual farm animals to see who can grow the biggest herd. After only two months of use, Artan, the single mom in a mud shack, is able to read short stories in her native language. This will give her many more opportunities for work and set her and her daughter up for a better future.

The story of how the Daariz app came into being is also fascinating. Ismail Ahmed, the creator, left Somaliland as a refugee in his early 20's, and arrived in the United Kingdom as a poor refugee. There, he was given the opportunity to attend school and eventually studied business in London. After his schooling, Ahmed had a job at the United Nations, and after leaving the UN went on to launch his first app, a financing app, called "World Remit." World Remit allows users to send money in their local currency to people across the globe, who will receive the money in their own local form of currency. For example, an American could send \$100 United States dollars to another person in the Philippines, who would receive the equivalent of around 7,000 Philippine pesos, either virtually through the app, for cash pickup at a bank, or deposited into their bank account. Normally transferring money to other currencies has a surprisingly large fee, but this app cut that cost by about half! Ahmed achieved a lot of success from World Remit, but ultimately decided to step down from his leadership role in hopes to be able to use his time and money to give back to his home community. He had the idea to use a mobile app to tackle the learning crisis in Somaliland, and "Daariz," was born.

Today we are going to listen to a portion of a podcast from BBC News where other users of the Daariz app share their experiences and what the app means to them. Since there's no video with today's lesson, please be sure to listen carefully!

Lesson Podcast, Start at 18:33, end at 20:20:
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0hqhng>

Leader Summary:

Thanks to Ismail Ahmed's app, Daariz, people like Hodan Artan and hundreds of thousands of others now see a brighter future for themselves and their children. Their stories highlight that learning is always important—no matter how old we are—and that education is a powerful tool to help us overcome tough situations and to improve our lives.

Ahmed's work also shows us the value of generosity, creativity and wisdom in working to make a difference in the lives of others. Let's discuss more about Daariz and what we can learn from both the users and creator of the app.

Discussion Question Options: *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses)*

Before beginning our discussion, let's read over the virtues and their definitions, found in the online lesson as a separate document.

1. What challenges prevent Hodan Artan and other people in Somaliland from getting an education? *(Not having the money to attend school, being too far from a school, not having a home and living on the go)*

Thinking about Artan's life and trying to imagine what it would be like to live in our community without being able to read, what are some challenges that individuals face when they can't read and have little or no education?

(Doing basic activities like shopping, doctors visits and applying for any services would be very difficult. Attaining a good job to afford the basic necessities of life would be difficult.)

2. Think about what education looks like for you, and for our country as a whole. What educational advantages do we have in The United States compared to children living in Somaliland and other similar areas?

(We have schools widely available, laws that require children to go to schools, busses to take children to schools, libraries, support services for students that are struggling, internet access, after school programs and activities, and post-high school education with colleges, trade schools and certification opportunities in many fields)

How do you think the education you are getting at school will affect your future ability to strive for your goals and to provide for yourself and your family?

(If we do well with the educational opportunities that we have, we can continue on to college, trade school, or other certification opportunities to learn valuable skills that are needed and well paid.)

3. Does learning about the struggles individuals in Somaliland have to attain even a basic level of education change our perspective on education and help us to better appreciate the educational opportunities we have?

What specific actions can we take to show our gratitude for our opportunities to learn through school and other activities?

(paying more attention in our classes, placing more effort into our homework, taking advantage of extra opportunities to better learn each subject by asking questions in class and with teachers outside of class, taking advantage of any opportunities for tutoring, reading good books and articles on our own.)

4. One of the women in the podcast said that she enjoys reading stories, including one about a woman with long ears who eats other people. The lesson of that story is for children to listen to their parents. This may seem ridiculous and silly to us, but there are folk stories and tall tales in every country of the world. Can you remember any equally silly stories from school or at home? What were their lessons?

(If students have trouble thinking of some: Little Red Riding Hood's lesson is never to trust strangers, Goldilocks and The Three Bears' lesson is to respect others personal property, or Hansel and Gretel's lesson is that thinking ahead can help us avoid dangerous situations. There are many more!)

5. Ahmed knew for his app to help address the education crisis in Somaliland, it had to be both free of cost and work without internet access, since most of the people there are so poor. What virtues do these two strategies reflect and why?
(**wisdom** in creating an app that would be effective despite challenges of no or little Internet access, **creativity** in coming up with an entirely new solution, and **generosity** in providing it all for free)
6. What are some of the other ways Ahmed uses **creativity** to make the Daariz app effective and fun?
(Ahmed decided to use story-telling and competitive games to make learning how to read and write fun)
7. How do you use technology for learning or self improvement—either at school or at home?

Technology can be a great tool, but too much or bad technology can also hurt us. From comparing ourselves to others on social media, seeing negative content, or letting technology distract us from healthy things like school work and having fun outside, we have to be **wise** in our use of technology. Let's share some ideas on how we can make sure that we are using technology in positive ways that help us and stay away from the harmful effects?

(limit screen time and balance with other healthy activities, share what you see and do online with parents, don't talk to strangers online, if a social media app or other app makes you feel bad about yourself or what you see on it makes you uncomfortable—just delete it, don't cyber bully, and be confident enough to stand up for others or alert an adult if you see cyber-bullying, use privacy settings on social media and don't share personal information, use strong passwords that no one could guess, and never be afraid to ask for help.)

8. Let's look at the definition of **citizenship** again. How does Ahmed practice good **citizenship** for his home country?
(He wants to improve this country by addressing the learning crisis and helping others learn how to read and write.)

We should strive to be good **citizens** of our local community, state, country, and as a citizen of the world! What are some simple and **creative** ideas of ways that we can practice good **citizenship** and work to improve our communities?

Journal Writing Options:

1. Write about how you feel about education and its importance to your life. Do you enjoy school and place good effort into your school work? How can taking full advantage of your educational opportunities affect your personal growth and development now and in the future?
2. Write about how you spend most of your time on technology. Do you have a good balance of using technology for fun and for learning? Are there any rules that you have to or want to follow to make sure you are using technology in a healthy way? Are there ways you could use your time on technology in a more positive way?

Extended Activity:

Share examples as a class of educational apps and online resources that they find beneficial or use in their classrooms. How do those tools help them learn and grow? Arrange children into groups of 2-3 and share the activity: “Imagine you have the chance to create an app to teach anything you want—even math, science, art, or history. Your goal is to design an app that is fun, engaging, and easy to use, so that your target audience learns something new every time they use it.”

- After brainstorming ideas, students should get a sheet of paper to define their app’s educational purpose. Who is it designed for and how will it help users to learn?
- They should sketch a picture of what their app will look like, including details such as the home screen and any buttons users would need to navigate it.
- Students should describe the kind of content that the app offers, such as videos, quizzes, games, stories or lessons.
- Challenge students to come up with creative features that make their app unique and fun. Is there a leaderboard to track progress? A chat feature? Virtual rewards?

Students can present their app to the class and even vote on which group's app they would personally like to use most and why.

*Information in the Leader Introduction is sourced from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-66707508> and <https://daariz.org/>

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