

Explanations for the picture story board

* to be photocopied, cut out, and pasted to the back of the picture boards.

1. My name is Meena. I am a 13 year old girl, and I work in an oil palm plantation in Peninsular Malaysia. My day starts when the morning sun starts shining, and I start the fire in the hearth. I put water in the pot to cook rice, prepare breakfast, and then the whole family eats breakfast together.

2. After breakfast, I take my little brothers and sisters to the crèche, and then go to the pick-up spot. Many other workers like us are also gathered there. The manager tells us what work we must do today. Then we go to the plantation with the other families assigned to the same area.

3. When we arrive at the area assigned to us by the manager, my father lifts up a long pole with a sickle attached to it, and cuts down one of the bunches of fruit on the oil palm tree. Each bunch weighs about 20 kilograms, and lands on the ground with a loud "thud," scattering fruit all over the place. One of my jobs is to gather the scattered fruits into plastic bags.

4. My brother also helps me do this. We are told to collect all the fruits that have been scattered. There are many oil palm leaves lying around. Sometimes we cut ourselves on their sharp needles.

5. As our family was eating lunch together, my mother started to say something. "Today is the anniversary of when Jamila passed away. Two years ago, she fell sick and died while spraying the chemicals and pesticides to get rid of the weeds and the pests on the oil palm. Poor Jamila!" I remembered about Jamila, and felt very sad.

6. After lunch, we go back to work. "It's heavy, so be careful!" mother said. Mother and I together lifted the heavy fruit bunch, and hauled it over to the wheelbarrow.

7. Once several bunches are in the wheelbarrow, we push the wheelbarrow to the road. The fruit bunches and the fruits gathered in plastic bags will be loaded into a truck later on. Today our family was only able to collect 84 fruit bunches, which is less than usual. Today is pay day but I am a child so I do not get any pay.

8. The truck comes in the evening to pick all of us up. I immediately go to the crèche to pick up my brothers and sisters. We hurry back home on foot.

9. I start preparing supper while looking after my little brother.

10. After supper, I go to get water for the next day, and scrub the pots and pans. I prepare the fire for the next morning, and at last my work for the day is over. Though I work all week long, there is no day off. The only holidays are at the time of festivals.

11. Lying in bed, I started to think. My dear grandmother spent her whole life working in the rubber plantation. That was before oil palm was planted. My mother started working on the oil palm plantation when she was very young, and gave birth to me when she was fifteen. My mother is still young, but her fingernails are deformed and her skin gets rashes from the pesticides. I suppose I will also spend my whole life here, without ever seeing the outside world. And my children too...





















