

Grade level: 10©12

Famine curriculum

Lesson aim: Students will compare the characterization of Nathan in *Nectar in a Sieve* and Patrick Derrane in "Poor People."

New York State Standards: Language Arts. 2 Students will read independently and fluently across many genres of literature from many cultures and historical periods.

Historical background: Ruku and Nathan's courage is tested with the death © after suffering © of their youngest and most beloved child Kuti, a child his sister has turned to prostitution to get money to help save. Patrick and Bridgid Derrane lose their first™born son, a little boy, aged four, who dies from illness, from poverty.

Lesson:

1. Chapter 16 of *Nectar in a Sieve* opens with Nathan facing this season of reaping, threshing and winnowing the rice. Ruku watches him and observes how thin and weak he has become and wonders whether he is strong enough for the job. What does Nathan say about the future? What gives him hope?

2. At the beginning of Liam O'Flaherty's short story "Poor People," Patrick Derrane gets out of his sickbed on a cold, February morning to gather seaweed to fertilize his potato crop. Later he goes home to his cottage where food and fuel are gone and where his son lays dying. What gives him the courage to go on?

3. Read Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is a thing with feathers":

-j Hope is a thing with feathers-that perches in the soul ©

-j And sings the tune without the words ©

-j And never stops © at all. j»»7j

Complete the diagram below:

4. Use the information on the diagram to explain how the poem comments on the characters in *Nectar in a Sieve* and "Poor People."

5. The title of *Nectar in a Sieve* comes from a line in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "Work with Hope" (1825):

jj Work without hope draws nectar in a sieve,

jj And hope without an object cannot live.

Why do you think Kamala Markandaya chose these lines for the title?