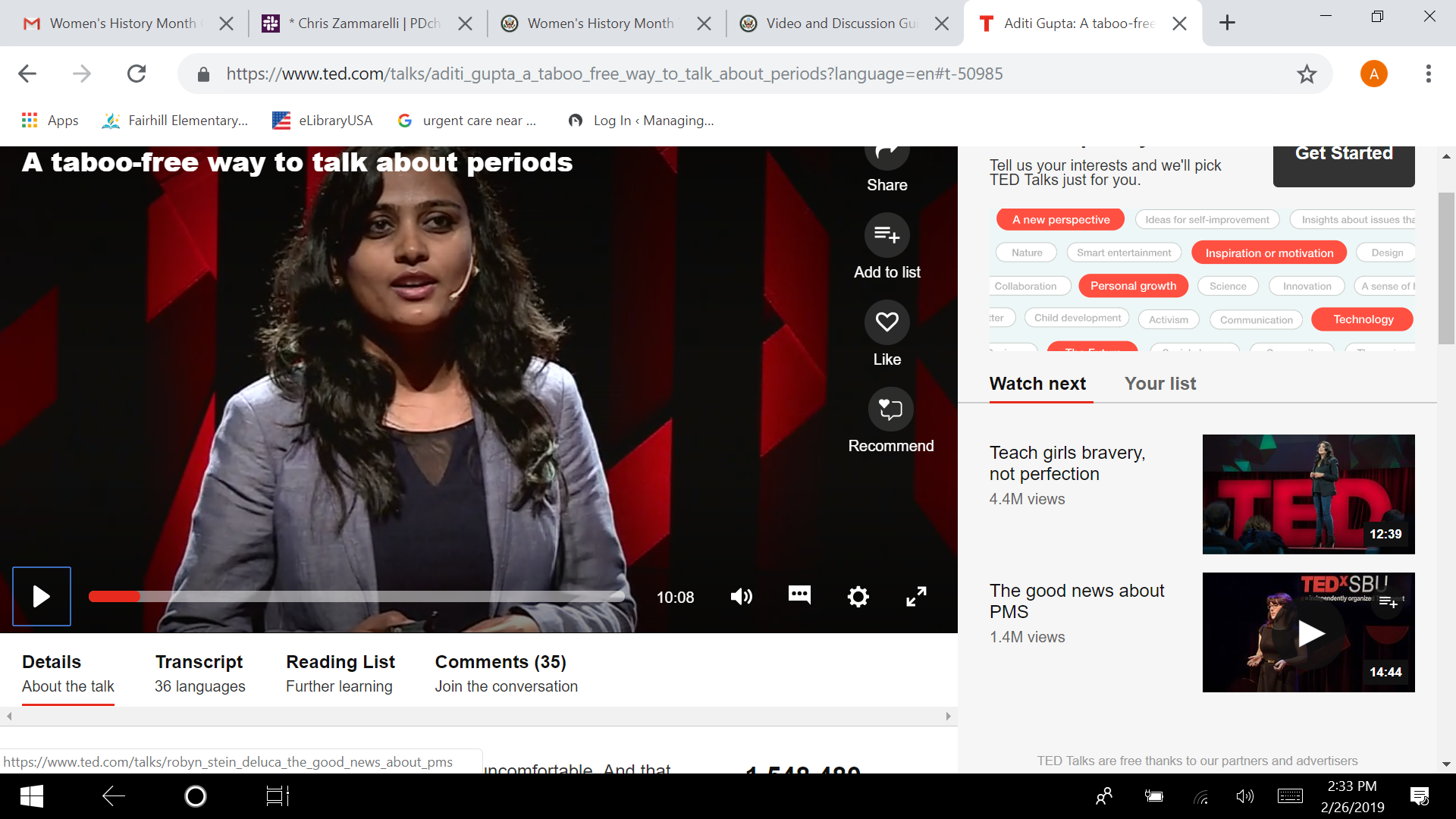


Video and Discussion Guide

***TED Talk:***

***A Taboo-Free Way to Talk About Periods***



**Speaker:** Aditi Gupta

**Year of talk:** 2015

**Length**: 11:11 min

**English** **level**: Medium

**Themes:** Girls’ and Women’s Education and Empowerment; Menstrual Education

**https://www.ted.com/talks/aditi\_gupta\_a\_taboo\_free\_way\_to\_talk\_about\_periods?language=en**

**Link:**

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* **American Spaces Coordinators should work together with their Public Affairs Sections** in planning programs for the American Space, and to determine appropriate programming themes and content.
* **Ted Talk videos are available for download.** This is recommended for American Spaces with low or unstable bandwidth.

**Context (from Ted Talk summary)**

It's true: talking about menstruation makes many people uncomfortable. And that taboo has consequences: in India, three out of every 10 girls don't even know what menstruation is at the time of their first period, and restrictive customs related to periods inflict psychological damage on young girls. Growing up with this taboo herself, Aditi Gupta knew she wanted to help girls, parents and teachers talk about periods comfortably and without shame. She shares how she did it.

**About the Speaker (from** https://www.ted.com/speakers/aditi\_gupta?language=en)

Aditi Gupta is a social entrepreneur and co-founder of **Menstrupedia**, working towards spreading awareness about menstruation. While studying at the National Institute of Design as a Ford Foundation research scholar, she has conducted extensive research in understanding the scenario of menstrual unawareness in India and its impact on a girl's life. She has designed effective educational tools for girls and schools using storytelling and sequential art for educating young girls about periods in a society where the subject is a major taboo.

**Menstrupedia Comic** is a complete guide on periods designed by Menstrupedia team being used by more than 30 schools across India. The books are being distributed in other parts of the world like Nepal, South America and Nigeria.

Gupta is a World Economic Forum Global Shaper and made it to the achiever's list of *Forbes* India 30 under 30 in 2014 for her work towards breaking the taboo around menstruation. She is an International Visitor Leadership Program (IVLP) alumni. Her work has been featured in *The Wall Street Journal*, Reuters, CNBC and BBC. She aspires to create a future where menstruation is not a taboo but a welcoming change in a girl's life.

**Key Vocabulary**

* **Menstruation** – the periodic discharge of blood and tissue from the uterus, occurring approximately monthly from puberty to menopause in nonpregnant women.
* **Misconception** – a wrong or inaccurate idea or conception.
* **Period –** a synonym for menstruation.
* **Taboo –** as an adjective, prohibited or restricted by social custom. As a noun, a prohibition or exclusion from use or practice.

**Suggested Discussion Questions**

1. What are your thoughts after watching this video? Were you surprised by any of the issues that Ms. Gupta raised? If yes, what were some of the things that surprised you the most?
2. Can you describe Ms. Gupta’s experiences when she first got her period?

*She was told to keep it a secret, even from her own father and brother. She would use rags, and due to repeated washing, the rags became coarse and she often got rashes and infections.*

1. What happened when the chapter on menstruation appeared in the school textbook?

*Her biology teacher skipped the chapter on the subject of menstruation.*

1. With menstruation treated as a taboo topic, what impact does this have on society? What are some of the psychological, social, and other effects on society?

*Girls feel ashamed to talk about this topic. Ms. Gupta also stated she was ashamed of her body and she learned to stay “unaware of her periods in order to stay decent.”*

*Based on the talk, the research in different parts of India also showed that:*

* *3 out of every 10 girls were not aware of menstruation at the time of their first periods.*
* *In some parts of Rajasthan, this number was as high as 9 out of 10 girls who were unaware of menstruation.*
* *Most girls Ms. Gupta spoke to thought they had “blood cancer” and that they would die soon.*

*Girls and women may also not be aware of or have access to hygienic ways of managing their periods, such as with sanitary napkins (according to the talk, only 12% of females had access to hygienic ways). This increases medical problems, such as rashes and infections.*

*While not addressed in this talk, in some communities, girls do not go to school when they are menstruating (or they may ultimately drop out of school altogether), and this has a long-lasting negative impact on society.*

1. What were some of the social restrictions that Ms. Gupta or other girls/women faced while menstruating? Are there any social restrictions in your communities?

* *Ms. Gupta was not allowed to sit on the sofa or on other family members’ beds.*
* *Since menstruating females are considered impure, they are forbidden from worshipping or touching any object of religious importance. In India, there are signs outside of temples that forbid menstruating girls and women from entering.*
* *Some girls have to eat and wash their dishes separately.*
* *Some are not allowed to bathe while menstruating.*
* *In some households, some are secluded from other family members.*

1. According to Ms. Gupta, who imposed these social restrictions? If there are social restrictions in your communities, who imposes them?

* *Most of the time, it was older women who imposed restrictions on the younger girls in the family, particularly since they grew up accepting these restrictions as norms. In the absence of any intervention, the myths and misconceptions propagate from generation to generation.*

1. Ms. Gupta talks about how she realized that she herself did not know much about menstruation. She undertook a year-long study to research the lack of awareness about menstruation and the root causes behind this phenomenon. What were some of her findings?

* *Menstrual unawareness and misconception are both a rural AND urban phenomenon.*
* *While many parents and teachers wanted to educate girls about periods, they lacked the proper means. In addition, since this is a taboo topic, people feel inhibition and shame talking about it.*
* *Girls generally get their periods in Classes/Grades 6 & 7, but the educational curriculum only starts teaching about periods in Classes 8 & 9. Again, given this is a taboo topic, teachers still skip the subject.*

1. What did Ms. Gupta and her partner Tuhin do to address the issues of menstrual unawareness and misconception in their communities?

*They created a comic book where the cartoon characters educate girls about menstruation in a fun and engaging way. They also made sure the book and illustrations were culturally sensitive.*

*The comic book helped to create an environment where menstruation stopped being taboo. They found that girls loved the book, and boys were also interested in reading it. The final version of the comic book is called “****[Menstrupedia Comic](https://www.menstrupedia.com/comic/english)****,” which launched in September 2014.*

1. Would you say that the comic book is making a difference?

*In the Ted Talk (2015), Ms. Gupta says that more than 4,000 girls have been educated by using the book in India. This book has also been translated into different languages and has been used in 10 different countries. There are 15 schools in different parts of India that have made this book part of their school curriculum.*

1. How is the subject of menstruation treated in your communities? Is it a taboo topic? When and where do students learn about menstruation?
2. Ms. Gupta came up with an innovative solution to the challenging issues of menstrual unawareness and misconceptions. Have you seen other innovative methods that communities around the world are developing in order to address challenges girls and women may face due to menstruation?

*Some external examples (not from the talk):*

* ***In India****, a man named Muruganantham created a* ***machine that makes affordable, biodegradable pads*** *from locally sourced materials:* [*https://www.thepadproject.org/*](https://www.thepadproject.org/)
* ***In Kenya****, Sharon, U.S. State Department Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) Network member, used YALI Network resources to create a* ***project to provide menstrual education and sanitary pads*** *for young girls in her community in Kisumu, Kenya. Here is a 2-minute video:* [*https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGkr9DFWtvA*](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JGkr9DFWtvA)
* ***In the United States,*** *as a high school student in 2014, Nadya Okamoto founded a* ***nonprofit organization to help deliver sanitary pads to homeless women*** *in the U.S. and to women and girls in need all over the world (*[*https://www.period.org/*](https://www.period.org/)*).*

1. What are the positive outcomes for our communities when we address many of the challenges we have discussed above?

**Subtitles for this TED Talk are available in 36 languages. A transcript of the talk is also available here (36 languages available):**

<https://www.ted.com/talks/aditi_gupta_a_taboo_free_way_to_talk_about_periods/transcript?language=en>