

Exploring the world!

A treasure-trove of Indian books for children

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Over the last few years, I have been involved with setting up and running self-initiated and self-directed learning spaces for children studying in classes 5 to 7. In these 'Resource Rooms', children work in self-chosen groups on topics of their choice selected from a library of learning resources and take their learning forward in line with their own unique interests and inquiries.

For instance, a group of children may choose to work on the topic of 'Butterflies'. The initial learning material would give them some information on the topic, and thereafter, as the children go about studying the material and examining their existing knowledge on butterflies, they would also evolve further inquiries about the same. Next, the children would plan and initiate a process of collaborative research, which would culminate with a body of knowledge and understanding on the topic of 'Butterflies', put together by the children themselves based on their own study and explorations. The teacher's role in this entire process would be that of a facilitator, guiding and helping the children along, as and when required. Such a learning experience builds in children, not just a sound understanding of the topic at hand, but also a deep engagement with the process of learning itself, which in turn strengthens their capacity to take charge of their own learning.

As I have continued working with the Resource Room methodology, I have realized the importance of encouraging and equipping the children to conduct their research work more and more independently. As a logical outcome of the same, I have also realized the importance of making a wide range of high-quality reference books available to the children. Since the children I work with come from under-resourced socio-economic communities, access to the Internet remains a challenge. Given their limited exposure to the World Wide Web, as also quite often, their developing literacy skills, the Internet doesn't always serve as the most appropriate tool for research. Besides, I do believe that there is something to be said for the joy and effectiveness

of holding a book in one's hand and reading and rereading its pages!

For a while now, therefore, I had been feeling the need to source good reference books for children in the age group of 9-14 on a variety of topics. I wanted to look for reference material which while being informative and rich in detail, was also presented in an engaging and enjoyable manner, material which was written and designed to facilitate both, engagement with and independence in learning. I was also interested in exploring Indian publications to be able to source material closer to our context. I spent part of my last summer vacation to this end and in this article I share the treasures that I found! I hope that both parents and educators will find these books interesting and useful.

In the following sections, I have highlighted a few books across the subject-areas of language, math, science, geography, history, civics, gender and the arts. (Find a complete list of the books on www.teacherplus.org.)



Language

- I am sure many of us have already benefited from the *Everyday English* book series by Jane Sahi. The three books are filled with delightful language activities, poems and stories on a variety of themes which are both appealing and relevant to children. The books are thus, most helpful in developing effective English language skills in children in an enjoyable and meaningful manner.
- *Picture Reading* by Madhuri Purandare is another big hit with the children. The beautiful and detailed illustrations, so close to the children's experiences, throw up numerous possibilities for language work. The book also comes with suggested language activity ideas, which serve as a wonderful starting point.
- *Batao Mai Kya Kar Raha Hun!* a picture reading book published originally by UNESCO and thereafter translated into Hindi by the National Book Trust (NBT) is unique as it provides glimpses of human life and geography across the various continents of the world.

Math

- *Mathematwist* by T V Padma, *Khel Khel Mein Ganit* by Aivar Yushiel and *Romping in Numberland* by P K Srinivasan provide an engaging and intriguing collection of math stories and puzzles on a variety of mathematical concepts. These books are sure to facilitate curiosity in children and adults alike, as also take their readers on an enjoyable ride through the world of numbers!

- *My First Book of Money* by Ravi Subramanian talks about everything a child may like to know about the world of money – bank accounts and bank statements, credit and debit cards, loans and EMIs, currency exchanges, digital money and much more. Written in a simple and engaging story format and accompanied by small activities at the end of each section, this little book packs in a lot of essential information.

Science

- Katie Bagli's six books under Shree Publications' *Nature's Delight* series are a complete treasure-trove for everything nature – trees, birds, mammals, insects and marine life.

Her wonderfully engaging stories and poems teach us so much, and in such a warm and delightful way. The 'Interesting Tidbits' at the end of each section add to the readers' understanding of the species at hand, making the entire reading experience that much more complete and meaningful.

- Katha publications' *Walk the Grasslands* and *Walk the Rainforest* written by biologists and conservation professionals tell us about the flora and fauna found in these habitats. Written in an engaging story format, these books are wonderfully informative and accompanied by captivating illustrations.
- *Healthy Happy Me* and the *Get Well Soon* series, brought out by Teri, cover a range of topics to do with health and nutrition. Packed with useful information, the books are written in a fun and lively manner.
- Ruskin Bond's *Growing up with Trees* and *The World of Trees*, written with characteristic warmth and ease, makes one fall in love with trees. The engaging narratives tell us about the lives of trees and the bird and animal life which abound on them and also the various myths and fables associated with various trees, sprouting within the reader a deep yearning to renew the close bonds that we shared with trees, not so long ago.

Geography

- The *Read and Colour River Stories* by Tulika are truly a rare treat! A 4-book series, these books trace the journey of some of the most important rivers of our country. Along the way, the readers are presented with mesmerizing details about the geography of the land that the river traverses, the nature and personalities of the rivers themselves, the lives of the people living along the river banks, and so on. The illustrations accompanying the text further spark one's imagination and the opportunity to colour-in the beautiful line drawings enable the readers to add to an already enchanting journey!
- *The Natural Wonders of India* published by Teri, talks about 10 of India's most spectacular natural wonders in a beautiful story format. The way in which the illustrations have been juxtaposed with actual photographs, the little activities at the back as also the glossary at the end, add to the appeal and usefulness of this book.
- The NBT series *The Story of our Rivers* covers many of India's important rivers and gives rich details about the geographical characteristics



of the rivers, as also the key cities, temples, sanctuaries and irrigation projects found along these rivers.

- *Playing Together*, also available in Hindi, is another fun publication by NBT. Each of its chapters provides us with some information about India, its trees, birds, animals, states, languages and so on, and each chapter is followed by a crossword puzzle to be solved based on the information provided.
- A Scholastic publication, *Amazing India – a State by State Guide* is a delightful book which takes one through all the states and union territories of India, providing details about its history, geography, culture and more. Presented in a lively and attractive manner, the information in this book is both rich and engaging.

History

- The *Smart Green Civilizations* series by Teri is a most unique find! Covering seven ancient civilizations of the world, these beautifully illustrated books not only take us through the life and times of the people of these civilizations, but also educate us on the various environment-friendly practices that were followed by them.
- The *Read and Colour Freedom Stories*, a 4-book series published by Tulika, tells us about some of the freedom fighters of our country as also the key events which led to our eventual freedom from the British rule. The engaging narratives accompanied by the beautiful line drawings, both fire one's imagination and also invite us to add our own colour to the stories.
- Subhadra Sen Gupta's *Let's Go Time Travelling* and *A Children's History of India* are of course other familiar and truly delightful books which make history both relatable and fun for children.
- The recently released 'UNESCO World Heritage Sites of India Series' published by Mapin Publishing, appears to be a most delightful addition. Written in a story-format and filled with intriguing facts and information, these books are sure to ignite a sense of wonder and amazement in children's hearts as they read about our national treasures.

Civics, gender and the arts

- *We the Children of India* by Leila Seth. In this very important book, Leila Seth takes the readers through the words of the Preamble of our Constitution, explaining the meaning and purpose behind the same. The beautiful illustrations add to

the appeal of the book, making it a most treasured possession.

- *The Gender Series* by Katha, draws our attention to the many disparities faced by the girl child in our society, such as the lack of an equal access to education and equal opportunities for making one's choices and pursuing one's dreams. Written in an easy and playful manner, the books however, challenge prevalent societal prejudices very effectively and compel us to ask the right questions and seek the right answers.
- *Learning Through Art* by Jane Sahi and Roshan Sahi, a book which many of us may already be familiar with, teaches us to look at art as a means for facilitating learning and not as a separate subject or activity. Filled with varied and detailed activities apt for facilitating lessons on language, math and environmental studies, this book is truly one of a kind.
- The *Looking at Art* series published by Tulika introduces children to the world of art, including the earliest form of art – cave paintings and to the lives of some of India's most celebrated artists in a most fun-filled and enchanting manner. These books featuring contemporary, traditional and folk artists are truly remarkable.
- NBT's *Together in Dramaland*, also available in Hindi, is a unique collection of children's plays from countries in the Asian and Pacific region.

To say that it is completely overwhelming to be in the company of such a rich, diverse and delightful collection of books is to put it very, very mildly. In the weeks and months to come, therefore, I hope to make my way through these wondrous lands of adventure and discovery, inspired and accompanied by the curiosity and perseverance of the children that I work with!

There is of course, much that can be added to this collection. And to that effect, dear reader, I request your kind help. Please do share with me your valuable finds and help me make this collection that much more complete! Thanking you in advance, and wishing you a most marvelous journey through the land of books!

Note: This is an edited article. Read the complete article on www.teacherplus.org.

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