



SHORT STORIES | RHYMES FOR FUTURE | CROSSWORD

gobar times

ISSUE NO: 226, July 1-15, 2020

A DOWN TO EARTH SUPPLEMENT FOR THE YOUNG AND CURIOUS

Green Literature Special

Let's see the world from
the eyes of our authors
and poets





GSP-GT Environment E-Summer Camp

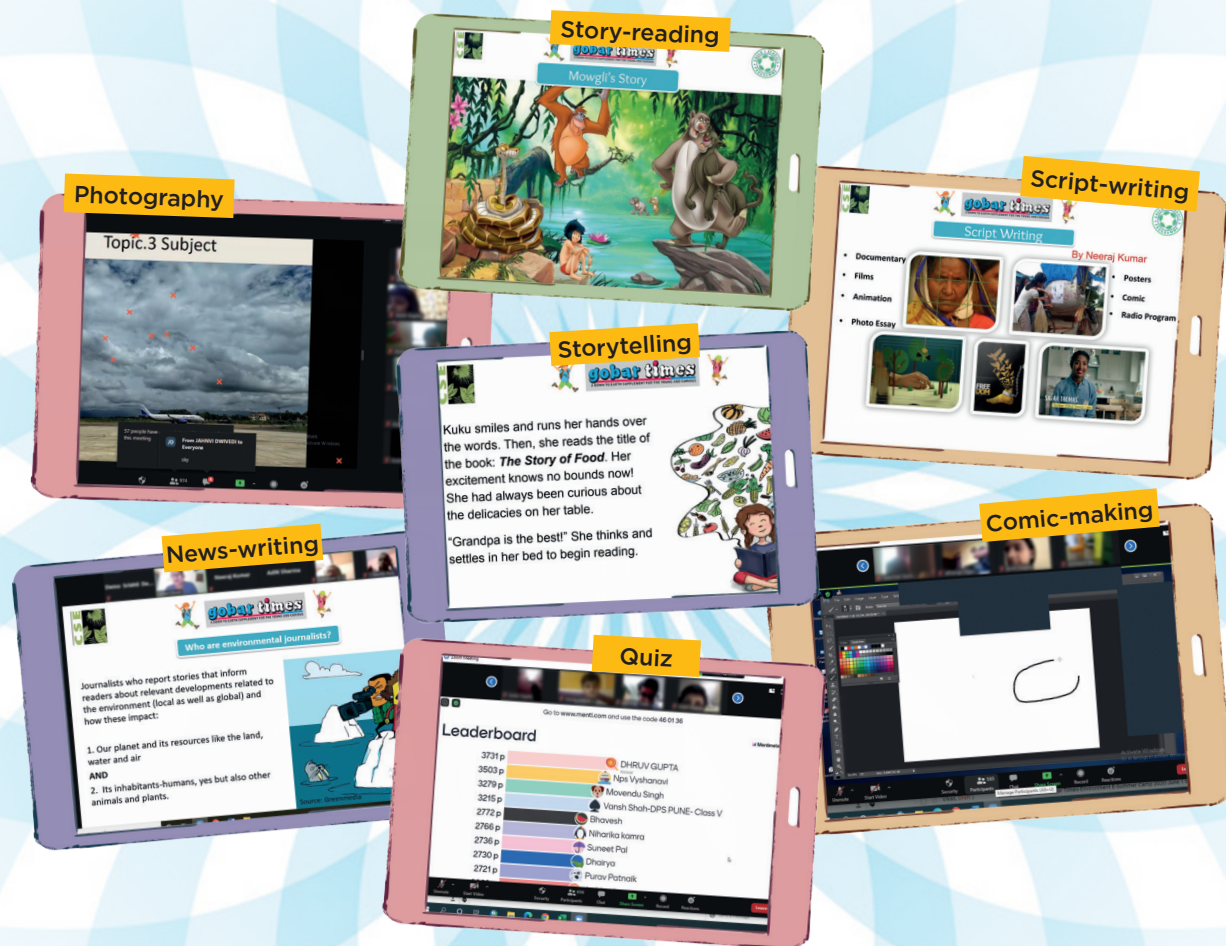
June 1-5, 2020

5 days

9 sessions

900+ participants

The five-day e-summer camp conducted by Green Schools Programme and *Gobar Times* saw students take part in the online sessions culminating on World Environment Day, observed on June 5 every year. Here's a quick glimpse of the events:



What's new?

GSP Audit @ Home: An online environment quiz for young environmentalists to assess their household practices and make them greener. Take the quiz today!

For more information, please visit www.greenschoolsprogramme.org

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Inbox

Green Strokes



Let's continue to be creative

After a long and unbearable summer, it's the month of monsoon. July usually marks the onset of monsoon in India and this year, it's also when schools will re-open after a break of nearly three months due to the COVID-19 lockdown.

The sky will be full of dark, dense clouds and our school bags will be full of new books and notebooks and their fresh-smelling pages. Haven't the rains always been inspiring? It inspires us to write, sing, dance, think and garden. And sometimes, it brings us out of our homes—after all, who can resist the temptation of enjoying the rain in open? It's all very “normal”, isn't it?

But things have changed in past few months due to the pandemic. Now, we're not supposed to go outside without a mask. Meeting friends is not allowed, let alone playing with them. This is our new normal, but don't you worry. New opportunities always open up. Yes, we may not be able to have face-to-face conversations with our friends, but thanks to online platforms, we can still be in touch with them. And we can also learn new skills through online classes and seminars. Remember the environment e-summer camp organised by *Gobar Times* and Green Schools Programme in June, 2020? We hope you enjoyed the sessions!

So, let's utilise this time by boosting our creativity. And what could be better than short stories, poems and crosswords when it comes to boosting our creativity? So here we go, presenting the “Green Literature Special” edition of *Gobar Times*!

However, just reading stories is not enough. So, pick up your pens, pencils and brushes and start writing stories or making comics and posters. And remember to share your work with us. *Gobar Times* is waiting for your contributions!



Dear GT,

I loved the June 2020 edition of *Gobar Times*. I found it very informative and enjoyed reading the complete edition. The coverstory where Mr Bat fights back against the allegation that bats are nothing but virus-spreading species was my favourite. I also came to know about the ecological importance of bats in our world. I thank the GT team for this sharing the story with us and hope that you keep up the good work.

**Pritha Ghosh, Siliguri,
West Bengal**

We are waiting for your letters, responses and stories. Send them to Sorit Gupto, Editor, *Gobar Times*, 41, Tughlakabad Institutional Area, New Delhi-110062.

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Freeze frame by Vikas Chaudhary



Plague of locusts: Locust are short-horned grasshoppers. Under favourable climatic conditions, some species are known to congregate, move together as bands and swarm over long distances. They can cross over countries and continents rapidly, eating everything green on their way!

This space is for young and budding wildlife photographers who wish share their work with us!

Send your best clicks to sorit@cseindia.org

Digits speak

The 2019-20 annual report of the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change shared some interesting facts about animal diversity in India. Here's a quick look at the numbers:

Over 1 lakh

species of animals have been documented in India so far

6,500+

species have been identified by the Zoological Survey of India (ZSI)

5,000+

new species have been described by ZSI since 1916



Source: Annual Report 2019-20, Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change

Konkan's family of dragonflies gets a new member

A new species of dragonfly has been identified in the lowland region of Konkan in Maharashtra. *Bradinopyga konkanensis*, christened "Konkan Rockdweller", is an endemic species discovered by Shantanu Joshi and Dattaprasad Sawant. "This is the only species of dragonfly or damselfly known to be endemic to the lowland coastal region of Konkan. This species prefers to perch on rocks and even concrete walls, which prompted us to give it the name Konkan Rockdweller," said Joshi, who is the curator of odonates at Research Collections of National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bengaluru. In 2017, Sawant, who is a dragonfly enthusiast and photographer, first spotted the new dragonfly species. Dragonflies and damselflies of Odonata order are ecologically important for freshwater habitats.



What a bug!

Locusts have found an ally in climate change and will only be stronger

Rajat Ghai

Hello, my name is Mr Locust. Actually, the full name is Mr Desert Locust. But we will stick to "Locust" for now. I am a small insect. But don't underestimate me because of my size. I have been around since the first human set foot on this Earth and have played a significant role in human culture and civilization. How? Let me explain.

For starters, I am, in fact, a grasshopper. All locusts are grasshoppers. They belong to the *Acrididae* family of the *Orthoptera* order. Now, friends I don't really understand taxonomy or the process of classifying different species of plants and animals. I fail to understand why we use such bombastic Greek words that are difficult to pronounce! The method, however, was discovered by the Swedish scientist Carl Linnaeus who, I guess, wanted to divide everything in Nature into categories.

Anyway, let's come back to us, locusts. Now as individual solitary insects, we are very unremarkable. The best use that humans can make of us is eating our flesh. We are *kosher* according to Jewish and Islamic dietary laws. Well, some of us, that is.

But everything changes when we become "gregarious", a phase when locusts are colorful, move faster, and are attracted to other locusts. However, special conditions are required for this to happen.

A long period of drought, followed by heavy rains resulting in thick vegetation, triggers a chemical reaction in our primitive brains. The rush of the *serotonin* chemical causes us to band together and we form "swarms". A typical swarm can consist of up to 10-15 crore locusts per square kilometre.

It is in this condition that our destructive potential is revealed. We fly with the aid

of wind, changing our course according to the wind direction. And we feast on vegetation that comes in our way. Each of us eats vegetation equal to our body weight. And those humans on the ground are left wondering where their next meal will come from.

The best known of our race is the desert locust. I am one of them. My tribe is found in North Africa, West Asia and the Indian subcontinent. When times are good, we fly over the Red Sea from Africa into the Arabian Peninsula and from there into



Iran and South Asia. We owe the latest episode of our global tour from Africa to South Asia to one simple fact: We got the best conditions to thrive in so many years! Countries receiving excessive rain created the perfect condition for us to multiply.

From the tale of Moses in the Bible to references in the Greek and Hindu epics to plagues in the 20th century, we have been there and will be there. You have to learn to deal with us. We ain't going anywhere. And now that we've found an ally in climate change, we will only be stronger. So, beware humans!

Green literature special

When Ajji ate ice cream

Shantanu can't spend his birthday as he wished due to lockdown. But the day turns out to be unexpectedly special as friends and family come together

Karnika Bahuguna



The author is a development communications consultant and trainer.

Shantanu was sad. He was turning 11 years old in four days, but he could not celebrate his birthday because of the lockdown. It was the 41st day of lockdown to avoid the spread of the coronavirus. He knew because he had been counting the days since he last went to the park to play with his friends—Vaachi, Dodo and Anu.

Ajji, Shantanu's grandmother, sensed his sadness. Although Ajji wasn't her real name, it was what Shantanu had always called his grandmother.

"What's the matter, Shantu? Why are you sad?" asked Ajji. "My name is Shantanu, Ajji. Shantu sounds silly," he said firmly.

Ajji giggled like a child. "Okay, Shantanu. Now, tell me why are you sad?" she asked.

"Every year, mummy and papa take me and my friends to Pizzanos for my birthday. Because of the lockdown, we can't go to eat pizza this year," Shantanu said with tears welling up in his eyes.

Ajji let out a hearty laugh. "Hahaha. It's not an issue, Shantu. We will celebrate your birthday at home. Me, your papa, mummy and little sister Srishti will be there. We will have lots of fun," said Ajji, gleefully.

"You just don't get it, Ajji. I want to go out and eat my favourite food on my birthday. I want to be with my friends. How can we celebrate my birthday at home?" said Shantanu irritably.

"We will make it special for you, Shantu *beta* (son). I will make your favourite food on your birthday," she said.

"But it's not the same, Ajji. I like pizza, cold drink and ice cream. You don't know how to

make it. It's not the birthday I want," he said. Ajji just smiled.

Four days later

It's Shantanu's birthday today! Mummy woke him up for his online classes and kissed his forehead. He got ready for his classes quickly.

His classmates and teachers wished him a happy birthday. Now, it was time for lunch. Ajji was eagerly waiting for him but Shantanu was not excited.

"Who wants to stay cooped up in the house, not have a birthday party and eat boring *ghar ka khana* (home-cooked meal)?" he thought.

"Come Shantu *beta*, we are waiting for you," Ajji called out to him from the dining room.

Shantanu dragged his feet, his shoulders were drooping and his head hung low. He was so sad that he didn't even look up to notice that everyone in his family had dressed up for his birthday. As soon as he entered, everyone started singing "Happy Birthday".

But there were more than four voices echoing in the room. Mummy, Papa, Ajji and Srishti were joined by uncles, aunts and cousins. They were on a video call. All his cousins were clapping joyously while sharing birthday wishes for him; and his friends Vaachi, Anu and Dodo were also there.

Shantanu was no longer sad. He had not thought that meeting his friends and extended family, even virtually, would make him feel so happy.

His mother had baked a cake for him. He cut

the cake and wished for everything to go back to normal so that he could play with his friends in the park again.

"Now let's have lunch, Shantu. I am hungry," Srishti said pulling his hand. He knew that he won't get his favourite food. Naturally, he was neither hungry nor excited.

But then he saw Ajji standing in front of him with a pizza. He was surprised and said, "This does not look like Pizzanos."

"Because it's from Ajjinos," said Ajji, laughing.

"This is homemade. Ajji made it especially for you," his father said.

Shantanu took a bite. It was very different but tasty. And to his surprise, it was indeed better than the pizza he used to eat at Pizzanos.

"Ajji, this is so good. It looks like pizza but tastes so different. What is this?" he asked.

Ajji just smiled.

"Now, have some cold drink."

Just like the pizza, the drink was delicious but not like the fizzy cola. It was, in fact, way better.

And then came dessert—mango ice cream! Shantanu was surprised to see Ajji eating ice cream because the doctor had advised her not to.

"Ajji, why are you eating ice cream?" said Shantanu.

"Shantu beta, this is homemade ice cream made with fresh mango pulp and milk. There's no refined sugar. It's healthy for everyone, especially for Ajji," replied Shantanu's mother.

"Does that mean the ice cream we eat is unhealthy?" asked Shantanu.

"Well, eating too much refined sugar is bad for everyone. It leads to obesity, diabetes and heart diseases; and it ruins your teeth," she said.

Shantanu was not happy with this information. After all, he loved his chocolates and ice cream.

"Should we not eat good things?" he asked confused.

"The good things

are homemade and contain natural ingredients. Like the pizza, cold drink and ice cream you had today," replied Ajji.

"The pizza base was *thalipeeth*, which is made of millets and multigrain; and it is good for the bones. Then, I used tomato *chutney* and fresh *paneer* as toppings to make it healthier," Ajji added.

"That's why it tastes different than Pizzanos," said Shantanu.

"Yes. And the delicious, tangy *aam panna* we drank was made with fresh raw mangoes and jaggery. It is refreshing in summer and nutritious as well," Ajji explained.

"This is too much information for a child. Grown-ups understand all this. Let's not bore Shantanu on his birthday now," his father intervened.

"But I am a grown-up, *papa*. I am 11 years old and I understood everything," Shantanu replied.

"What did you understand?" Ajji asked.

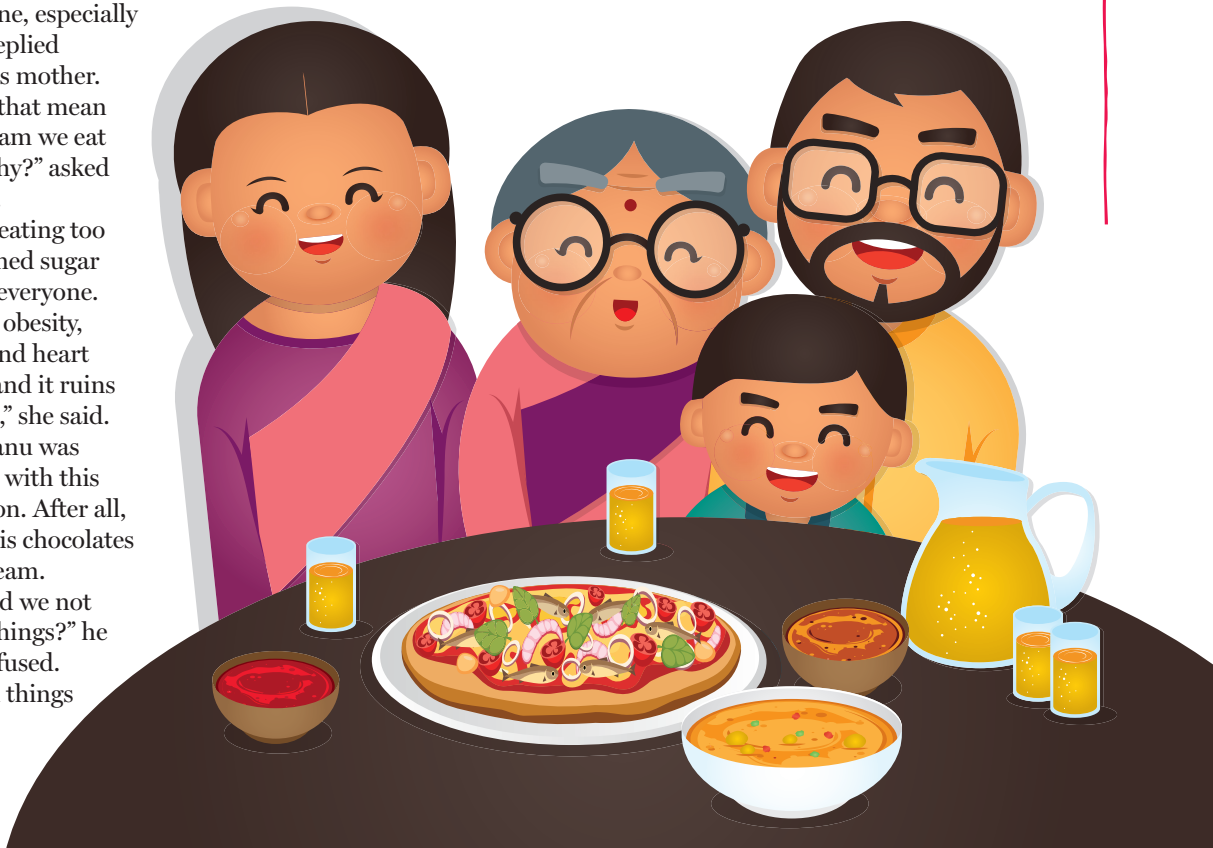
"That birthdays with family are the best," he said.

"What else?" Papa asked.

"Homemade food is better than Pizzanos."

"Anything else?" Mummy asked.

"Oh! Yes. I learnt that Ajji loves eating ice cream," Shantanu said as he giggled.





Inside out: Let's audit our homes!

While we are stuck indoors, let's utilise the time to better manage the resources within the house

Tushita Rawat

Anvi was sitting in front of the television, casually flipping through the channels until she decided to watch some news. It has been over two months now since her school closed due to COVID-19. Watching news is now one of the few ways she stays connected with the world. And today it had something bizarre to offer—animals on roads! The news anchor told how Nature has reclaimed its space, owing to minimal human activities. Lions, civets, and deers have been venturing out in the open. Rivers have been flowing exuberantly. Clean air and blue skies have been making days brighter! And one thing that has remained constant throughout is humans have been inside their homes.

"Looks like humans can just be equally injurious to health," Anvi chuckled.

She wondered how much the world has changed in just months. What has happened is undoubtedly sad. The pandemic has made people home-bound. However, some of its consequences have turned out to be positive.

She recalled one of the online school classes where her teacher discussed its environmental effects. Anvi really looks forward to her online classes. Besides getting to know all the interesting things, she gets her daily dose of humour there too. In that class, one of her

classmates had come wearing a long, red cape! He looked determined to change something about the world, just not sure what!

Anyway, the teacher continued and told that within the first 10 days of the lockdown in March, energy consumption in India plummeted by 26 per cent! This was because all industrial activities had been stopped and it was indeed a silver lining in an otherwise grim situation.

With many such thoughts running through her mind, Anvi decided that this was enough television for today. She now went for a walk... inside the house, of course. As she crossed her parents' room, she heard them discussing what looked like an electricity bill.

"That is quite a hefty amount, isn't it?" said her father.

"Hmm... probably the biggest till now. I will pay it tomorrow morning. Wonder if we are really using just as much electricity as we need," said Anvi's mother.

And then, both her parents looked at the television. It was still on with just an empty couch staring at the screen.

Anvi was embarrassed. She quickly switched off the television. She realised that she had been so busy assessing the situation outside that she ignored what was happening in her house. Now

practices in her house as well? She scanned her entire house to find the potential pockets of change. So what can Anvi Do?

Finally, Anvi had a real mission for herself—auditing her home!

GSP @ home

Here's a shout-out to all the young environmentalists! Let us extend environmental education to our homes now. And what better way to do it with our families than a fun online survey on green practices at home! ♻️

ON THE WALL

RHYMES FOR FUTURE

Life is poetic in its own way. It provokes as well as inspires. Naturally, poetry about life is bound to have the same quality. So, sit back and let the rhymes do their work!

School life!

My mother, so excited, woke me with a jerk
I was scared and cried,
So she pampered me with a chocolate Perk!
First, we'll tell you about classes nursery to three;
We were flying like birds, free!
Nursery to three was fun time,
It was like enjoying a sweet soda lime!
No exams, only study, sit, eat and play,
At the end of the day, ma'am gave me clay.
On Fridays, yummy pasta and bread rolls, fried!
Till class three, our flight was a joy ride.

Assignments, CDLO in class five and four,
These new words knocked at our door.
When a teacher was absent, we got to do
our favourite dance
When the substitute teacher came
"Ma'am HPE! Ma'am HPE!" we would protest,
And she would humbly put down a request.
Exams, seminars, oh no! Another class test.
Please give these little souls time to rest.
The experience of *khoj* can't be expressed,
The joy of star-gazing, delicious food, games
and cozy beds!
My younger brother will still be enjoying in the
"Jimmy Jolly Park"

The joy of sharing

While sharing our food, laughter and happiness
With the downtrodden and the helpless,
We share our honest smile and caring attitude
Towards those who fight for
Their share of joy and hope;
And for living a better life.

We may not give them any kingdom,
Yet we can share with them
Our sincere thoughts and ideas,
To make them regain their self-esteem
And their right to live a beautiful life.



Whereas I'll be in school, while it's still dark.
I didn't miss school, even if the weather was chilling
Each day of junior wing was surely thrilling.
From the junior wing, it's very difficult to part
We thank you all, from the bottom of heart
Teachers stood beside us when parents were far
We thank them all for making us shining stars.

A question, I want to ask one and all
What if, like a book
Instead of a senior wing,
We have junior wing, part 2?

*Divleen Kaur, Delhi Public School (DPS)
Ludhiana, Punjab*

We, human beings, can indeed share
Our simplicity and transform this society
Into a better place and live a purposeful life.
Sharing is caring;
And it pays in the long run!

*Jayanta Topadar, Sikshak Karyakarta, Vivekananda
Kendra Vidyalaya, Dhemaji, Assam*

How often do you smile?

I met a lady on the street, facing the summer morning's heat.
I asked her a question—
"What is your most used expression?"
"I weep when I see the creeps," she replied.



I asked her back, "Miss Fragile, how often do you smile?"

While walking on the road, I found a man wearing a coat.

I asked him the same question—

"What is your most used expression?"

"Sadness has taken a toll on me,

I have never screamed Yippee," he said.

I asked the man stuck under sadness' pile,

"How often do you smile?"

I went back home, all alone.

I took a seat and began to tweet—

To people of different rank and file

Whom I asked, "How often do you smile?"

I say, "Forget all stress and other life's mess,
Sit for a while, show your teeth and smile."

*Niyonika Maharishi, Vardhman International School,
Jaipur, Rajasthan*

Poetry in environment

The sun is shining,
The sky is blue,
The birds are flying
And the breeze is so cool.

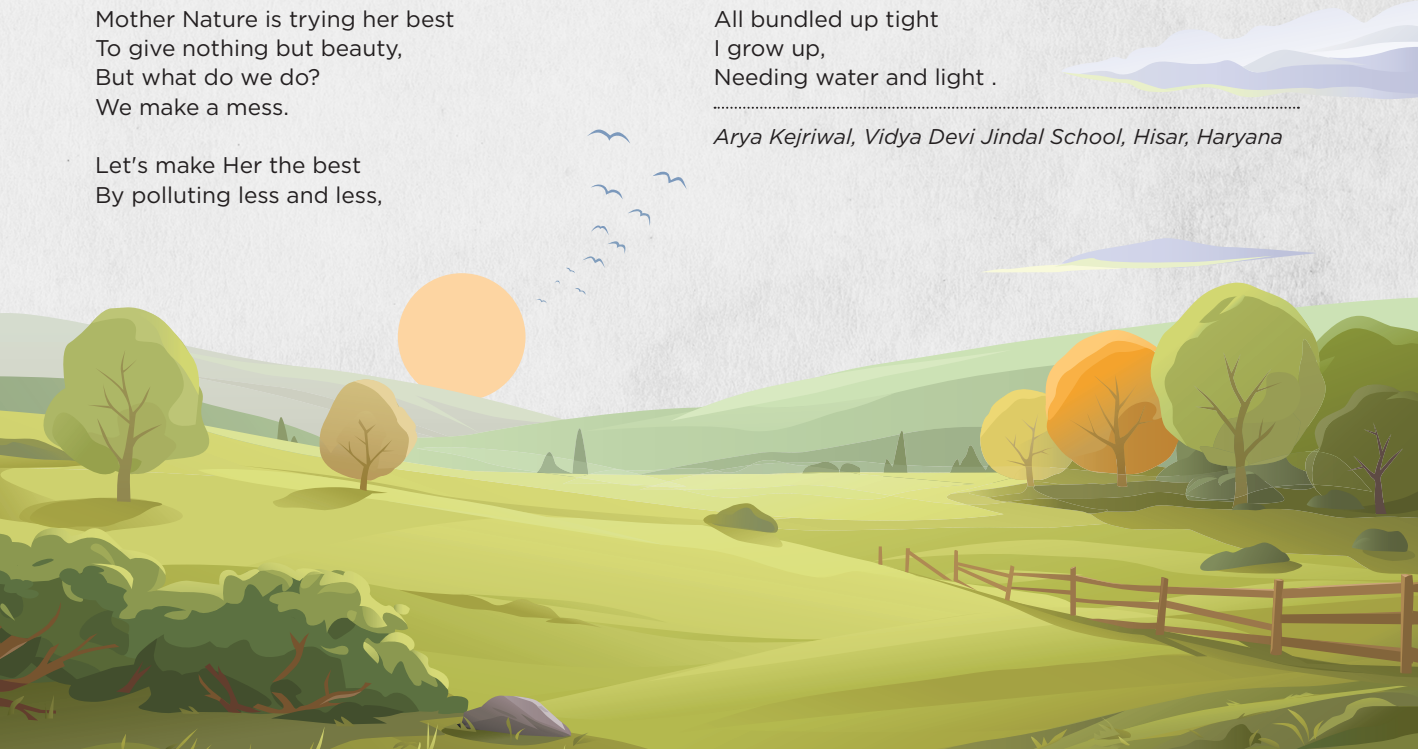
Mother Nature is trying her best
To give nothing but beauty,
But what do we do?
We make a mess.

Let's make Her the best
By polluting less and less,

And preserve her green dress
For our kids and the rest.

And let's listen what a plant says
Inside the seed—
All bundled up tight
I grow up,
Needing water and light .

Arya Kejriwal, Vidya Devi Jindal School, Hisar, Haryana



Chaos and peace

When Life, a spirit, goes missing, Gem launches a mission to find the spiritual creature

Ayanna Zaheer



The author is a 12-year-old student of Oxford Presentation School who loves writing short stories, painting and rapping.

Gem was a special animal—human. Her day would start with brushing her hair while thinking of what to have for breakfast. She had two antlers—Peace and Chaos. She was the reason life was balanced. She was often asked by people, "Why don't you break Chaos?" Her eternal answer would be, "Chaos must learn to live with Gem. Chaos must learn to live with the world."

Gem's very existence was because of Chaos. If Peace and Chaos had not met, she would not have been created. She was often ignored by other kids, due to their fear of Chaos. Her best friend was Hope, a spirit. Hope would always be by her side, and that was the way of life.

Speaking of Life, he was another spirit. He was the reason creatures were born. Unfortunately Life lived far away, guarding a prison, where Death lived. Whoever Death touched, or aspired to kill, would die.

As for angels, they lived in the sky. They did not need to eat or drink, let alone sleep.

However, Hope could die if people stopped hoping. Every time someone stops hoping, a red line would appear over him, indicating that "Death was near".

Life in crisis

Gem was running up to meet the eldest resident of the village. She wanted to inform him about something serious. She had just heard some weird voices, like someone was mourning.

Death had escaped! And that meant something had happened to Life. She ran fast. All creatures were crying because they thought they were going to be wiped out. When she reached the eldest resident's house, she found nothing but a note, saying: "I am off to the East Ravine." Now, the East Ravine was a place filled with treasure...and danger. Gem lost hope, even when Hope was right beside her, assuring her that everything would be okay. They decided to go to the prison to search for Life. They had a portal that could teleport them to the prison. They pressed a button and *voila!* They were at their destination.

The prison was in ruins. Life was not there. "Had Life been defeated by Death?" thought Gem, shuddering at the possibility. Then it hit her: Life cannot die. Life couldn't die! How could she forget that? She remembered about the village elder. "The village elder went to the East Ravine, Death escaped and Life had gone missing,"

she kept repeating in her mind. What made the village elder go to the East Ravine? Why didn't he send one of his helps instead? She wondered and wondered and wondered.

At last, she had drawn an outline of the possibilities. The moment Death escaped, she surmised, the elder must've left for the Ravine and Life followed. Life must have tried to enter the portal and land in the dimension of giants and angels. She decided to follow each and every step of Life, and left for the East Ravine. She proceeded towards the portal and found that it was sealed. Upon inspecting it closely, she saw that the portal was not sealed completely. It was like someone wanted to seal the portal but failed to do so.

But who sealed the portal? It could not have been Death. She would know if it was him. "Then, who could it be?" she thought.

Could it be the elder? He had abandoned the village, after all. But how could he? She was so worked up that she forgot where she was. She broke the portal's seal and returned home only to see the Red Mist all over the place. The evil creature that lurked in the East Ravine had followed her to the village. "What have I done?" she said aloud.

The creatures that had been gambolling about just last night were looking helplessly at the mist, wondering where the elder was. She realised that people were ignoring her, as if she was invisible. Even Hope couldn't be bothered to see her. Gem decided find out why everyone was ignoring her. She bent over a puddle of water and gazed at her reflection. What she saw broke her heart. She had lost the antler of peace. There was a sign of dark magic on her neck. It meant that she, Gem, was the reason why the Red Mist was in the village and the thoughts she had at the East Ravine were actually prompted by this evil creature!

All of a sudden, she could communicate with Evil itself, and the village was down in flames. She had to leave before things got worse. But then, she saw Life. She had not met him before, but could tell it was Life because of the light leading up to her. She spoke to him and told everything. She shared how she thought that the village elder and Life had ran away. Then she asked where Life had been all this time?

Life shared that he was at the ravine and was silently watching everything. Life wanted the Red Mist to leave the ravine so that he could find the village elder who was trapped in the East Ravine. Gem was relieved to know that she was helping Life and not the red mist! But the red mist was still there in her village. What could be done to end this havoc? She hoped that it was all a dream.

Speaking of hope, Life helped the spirit calm down and cast a spell to ensure Hope stopped ageing, that is, for a while. Next, Life made creatures, twice as big as their predecessors and stronger. They captured all the red mist and Life set off to find the trapped elder. While they were travelling, Gem asked Life to give her the peace antler and make Peace stronger than Chaos. Life gave back peace antler but refused to make Peace stronger, saying that a balance needs to be maintained between Peace and Chaos. "Why?" Gem asked. Life replied by saying that the red mist was actually a creature

from a parallel universe, just like Gem. And like her, the Red Mist was given the responsibility to maintain peace and order in its realm. But, unlike Gem, it envied Chaos and asked Life of that universe to make Chaos, friend of Red Mist, stronger. Life refused and was sent prison. After several years of imprisonment, Life agreed to make Chaos stronger. The newfound power allowed the creature to shapeshift and become the powerful Red Mist. It conquered that universe, but was hungry for more power. And so it decided to conquer our universe as well. Life then asked Gem if she knew why Life never showed its face and lived far away. "I don't know," said Gem. Life replied, "I am Life from the other world. I have been hiding and thinking of ways to capture the Red Mist. One day, I met the village elder who said Gem was the balancer of this world. I was surprised but decided instantly that I will meet you. Hence, I came to your village." Now, a new question was bugging Gem. Where was this world's Life? ♣



A friendly visitor

While Reema is on the terrace of her house, a colourful creature pays her a visit and fills her day with joy

Shrutikantha Kandali



The author is a story-teller who has previously worked with *Gobar Times*.

At the break of dawn, Reema woke up to screams that were loud enough to wake her up from her deep sleep. It had been two weeks since the lockdown had been announced and Reema had slept for a few hours only, courtesy latest resolution to read a new novel every day, and at one go for several hours.

The screams grew louder, almost sounding like a mix of a crow's caw and a cat's meow.

It was precisely a loud noise that sounded like... Kreow Kreow Kreow.

Reema groggily woke up from her bed and walked out to her balcony. She thought to herself, "I really have not seen a sunrise in years!"

But maybe it was not her day to see a sunrise yet! The sky was

grey, and it was grumbling like it would come pouring down any minute. A cool breeze went over her face and all that change in her surrounding made Reema change her mood too. Suddenly being groggy from her half-asleep state, she felt fresh and was in an upbeat mood. Reema made herself a cup of tea and walked towards her terrace to enjoy it.

One her way out, she dragged out her yoga mat,



kept below the cupboard, and decided to do some stretching as well. Up on the terrace, as she closed her eyes and took a deep breath, suddenly she heard the noise again. Kreowwwwww.

Reema opened her eyes and saw somebody staring back at her with equal curiosity.

From where Reema was standing, she saw two big eyes, one beak, and the blue neck of the most beautiful bird she had seen in a while. It was peeking at her from the terrace's wall boundary. It had started drizzling and the peacock hopped along the wall, almost presenting a show for Reema, with the drumbeats of thunder and the tip-tap of raindrops as background music.

But from where the peacock was looking, it was even stranger. From the past few weeks, the peacock had seen no humans. They were not on the streets and there was no honking on the roads. Nobody was even taking walks in the park! And this was a big change! This particular bright blue-green peacock lived in the big park behind the buildings where very few people went. It was safe for them there, but they had to hide when humans came out to walk because if they spotted the peacocks, they would start chasing them. The peacocks could always see humans with their sharp eyes but the humans rarely saw them as they camouflaged themselves in the green trees. But now, since the roads were empty and there was

not a single human in sight, the peacock and his family had begun looking around for food, hopping and flying a short distance everyday.

One day he would peep from a window and see a family of four sitting around the room together and laughing and talking with each other. Another day he saw a father gardening with his daughter. And one day he saw two siblings cooking something in the kitchen while their parents stood behind proudly. Now all of this was new and strange to the peacock because from what it remembered, humans would only look at their phones and talk on the phone during their long walks. Many would also be on video calls but not when they were sitting face-to-face.

There had been many days when the peacocks would cross paths with the humans, but they would be so busy running against a clock that they would never take notice of the peacocks.

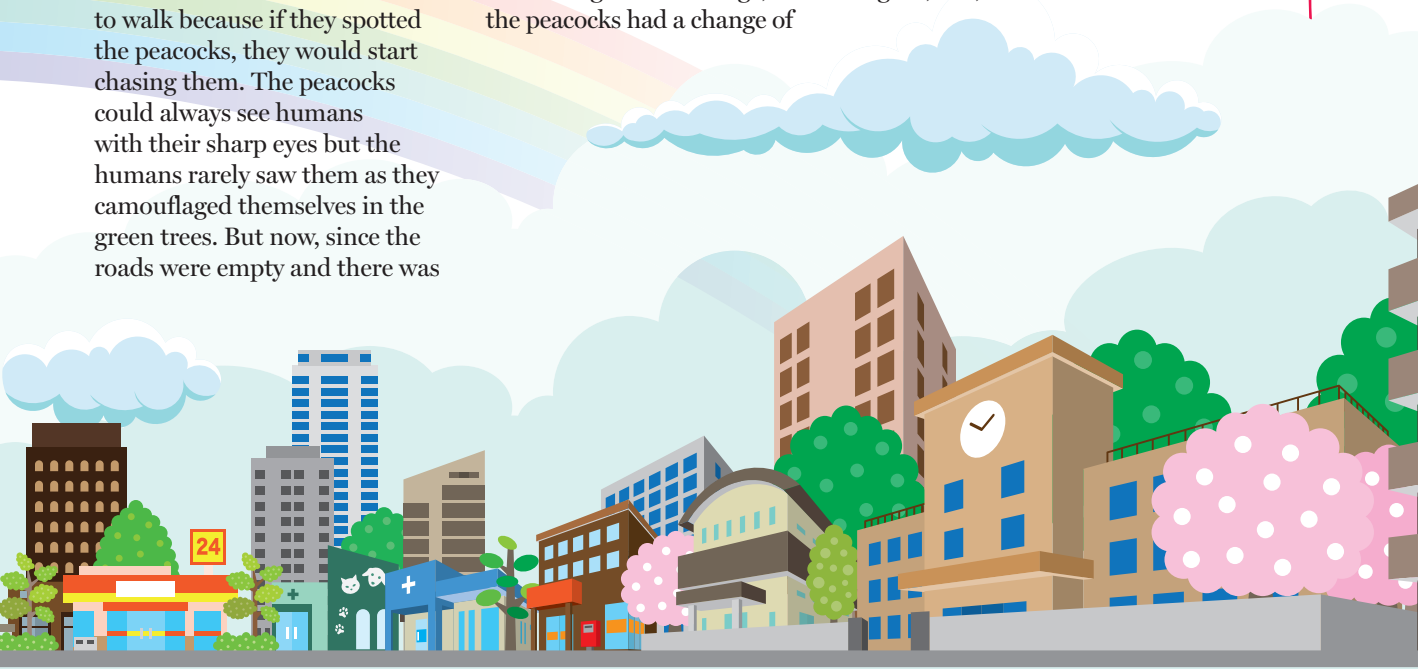
But something had definitely changed. The skies were clearer, there was less air and noise pollution and families were spending time with one another. And now when the peacocks sensed it would rain, it actually did. Seeing all this change, even the peacocks had a change of

heart. They changed their views about humans, who seemed a bit more trustworthy now, and visited them.

Looking at the peacock, Reema took a big breath. She had not seen something this majestic and beautiful since she was 2 years old, that too in the zoo. She took a step and stopped midway, "Where is my phone?" she thought.

And just then, as Nature has its way of making everything right, the grumbling stopped and so did the rain. Parting from the middle of the clouds, came out the brightest orange sun and just as Reema looked the other way, she saw the most perfect rainbow forming. It was a start to a beautiful day and Reema couldn't wait to witness what the next morning had in store for her.

She wanted to click a photo and post it on the social media so that everyone could see it and believe her. But even before she could get her phone, the peacock took a flight across the balcony and disappeared into the trees. "Kreoww," it said and off it went towards the rainbow-filled sky showing off its beautiful, long tail with colourful eye markings of blue, gold, red, and other hues. ✦



Little Attu's aquarium

Attu loves colourful fish. When rains leave the town waterlogged, they bring him good news

Pranav Pradhi



The author is a freelance journalist with nearly 9 years of work experience.

Little Attu has always been fascinated with aquariums. He would sit for hours beside the big jar and keep looking at the colourful fish. He loved their bright and shiny colours sparkling in the blue water. There was a small bank near his home that had an aquarium full of bright fish. He visited the bank with his grandmother, a school teacher, every month to withdraw her salary. The young boy quietly sat beside the aquarium, lost in his imagination as his grandmother stood in the long queue, drenched in sweat, waiting for her turn. Attu would count the fish in the aquarium, and then compare their colours and sizes. Often, Attu would be so engulfed in this activity that he would fail to hear his grandmother's call to return home. He didn't want to leave the company of his aquatic friends, and even his grandmother's enticement to buy him sweet *jalebis* would fail to persuade him.

He did not particularly like visiting his relatives, except for this one house that belonged to Mr Mishra, Attu's uncle who had a large aquarium in the house. It was bigger than the one in the bank. At Mr Mishra's house, Attu would straight away go to the room where the aquarium was kept. He had always wanted to be a proud owner of an aquarium, even if it was a small one. But he kept this desire to himself because he knew that his parents won't be able to afford an aquarium and the fish.

One hot and humid afternoon, Attu went to the bank all alone and sat there for hours, just looking and admiring those beautiful fish. As a ritual, he started counting the fish, but today he counted

one less. Last time, there were 15 but today there were only 14! He felt a sudden sense of worry and rushed to seek help from the guard who usually kept sitting outside the bank like some old relic from the past. The boy muttered, "Uncle, there are only 14 fish in the aquarium. What happened to the turquoise-coloured fish? Where did it go?"

The guard, a little annoyed that his siesta was broken, yelled, "I don't know, I don't know."

Distraught, the boy pulled his *paan*-stained *khaki* shirt and asked the guard frantically if he knew the fate of the missing fish.

Irritated, the guard replied, "I told you, I don't know. I am here to check people not silly fish."

The kid was disappointed and a small tear ran down his cheeks. He went inside the bank to the counter next to the aquarium and repeated his question in front of middle-aged man who was sipping a cup of tea.

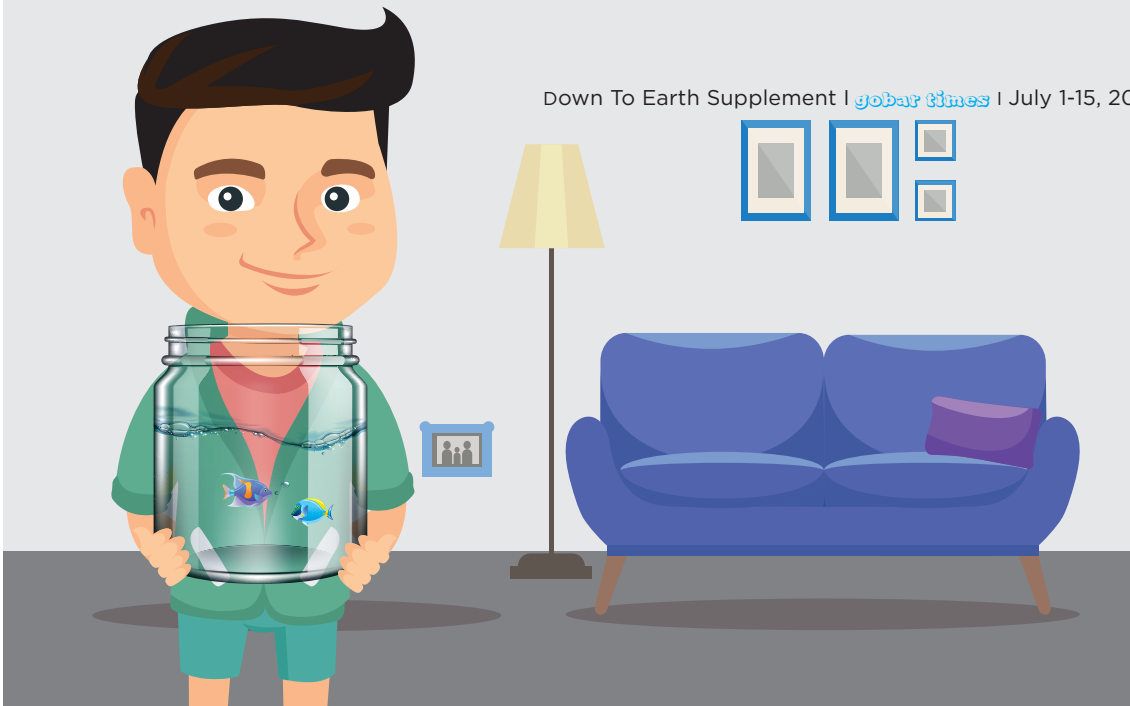
"One of them died. Fish die, they don't live for ever," replied the man behind the counter.

Attu was overwhelmed with grief. He felt as though he had lost someone familiar. He mumbled, "Fish die, they don't live for ever. Fish die, they don't live for ever."

He started thinking about Vinnie and Titee, a bright gold fish and a weird-shaped star fish in the aquarium who were also his favourite buddies. He turned towards them and said loudly, "Vinnie, Titee, will you die too? Please, don't die."

Attu left shortly after this. He kept muttering the same words, but no one heard or noticed him.

The hot and humid summer made sure he remained indoors for the rest of his vacation. His



school reopened and he could no longer visit the bank on his own. There was also no time to visit Mr Mishra's house either—his maths teacher had given them a lot of homework.

All this while, he constantly thought about Vinnie and Titee. He missed them and kept counting days. Each day became longer and longer; and then came the rains.

"It's always difficult to predict the rain god," he remembered his grandmother saying. It rained heavily for days and there was water everywhere. Rainwater had already clogged the lane and had it rained for another night, it would have entered his house. But the moment it stopped raining, few kids from the neighbourhood ran outside and started playing in the inundated lane. They looked like overjoyed puppies who had just learnt how to swim. "Fish! There is fish! Not one or two but many of them!" shouted one of them.

Attu was thinking about homework when he suddenly heard a voice saying "Fish!". He saw the boys having fun while trying to catch fish in the muddy water using strainers like the ones his mother used to clean the flour with. He liked their idea and asked his mother for a strainer. His mother gave him a spare one and Attu pranced towards the boys who were trying to catch fish in the lane.

At the end of it all, he caught 10 of these bright and colourful finned creatures. He kept them all in a large jar that once contained mango *achaar*; and carried this jar around the house, showing it to everyone proudly. "I got my fish, I got my aquarium! I got it! I got it!" he kept repeating gleefully. His face beamed with pride and content.

He took good care of his friends. He fed them

food, sat beside them, and talked to them. "One day I will introduce you to Vinnie and Titee," he told his little friends. One morning, Attu did not feel like going to school. His mother asked him to freshen up and get ready, but he wanted to stay home and spend time with his new friends.

To his joy, his father said, "The lane is full of water and everything is closed. Even the school will remain closed today." Attu went straight to his new marine friends to break the good news. Later, his father informed that the school would remain closed for a few days since water had entered the campus. He couldn't be happier. He spent all his time at home talking and playing with the colourful fish.

Two days passed very quickly and on the third day, something unusual happened. None of the fish were moving. They were still and had settled at the bottom of the jar. He screamed loudly, "It's morning. Please, wake up!" But there was no movement. He ran to his mother and cried, "Mother, they aren't moving!" Attu's mother saw the jar, held his hands tightly and said, "They are sleeping. They will be sleeping like this for a long time. Attu, dear, they are gone."

"Where have they gone? They are here, in the jar. Why are you lying?" said Attu, baffled.

Now, his grandmother came and saw the jar. "They are gone. They are dead. Fish don't live forever," she whispered. Suddenly, Attu was transported back to the bank and he recalled the words of the middle-aged man, "Fish don't live long. They do not live forever."

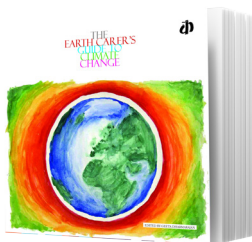
Attu fell silent and wept inconsolably. His mother and grandmother kept stroking his head to make him feel better. ♣

Let's re-stock our bookshelf

Can't decide which book to read next? An author shares her list of must-read books to help children out of their chicken-and-egg situation

Pallavi Ghosh

While deciding which book to read next, we may sometimes feel like we've landed in a chicken-and-egg situation where we are left clueless as to which book to pick from an ocean of suggestions. To make things easier for our young friends who are looking for a new book to read, *Gobar Times* asked children's book writer and educationist Geeta Dharmarajan to take a dive into her bookshelf and shares with us a list of must-read books.



1. *The earth carer's guide to climate change*

The Earth Carer's Guide to Climate Change is all about showing compassion and care towards our only home in the universe-Earth. It's about exploring the magnanimous beauty of world! The book is full of colourful illustrations, poems, folk songs and informative snippets about climate change, global warming and what we should do to check activities that harm the environment.

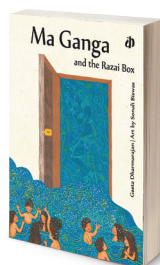
Price: ₹195



2. *Sera learns to fly*

Could we ever imagine a tiny little ant, daring to dream? Sera, the ant does! But, will she actually fly? *Sera Learns to Fly* is about dreaming the impossible and making it happen. It's about curiosity, creativity, and knowing that with a little bit of help, anything is possible!

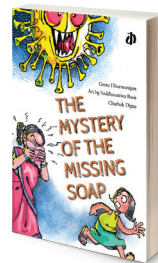
Price: ₹175



3. *Ma Ganga and the razai box*

Yasho of the Hill People complains about Ma Ganga flooding her village and Ma Ganga tells her that she will stop only when Shiva's matted hair is spread on her banks. Yasho and others realise they must plant trees on the barren hillsides to make Ma Ganga happy again.

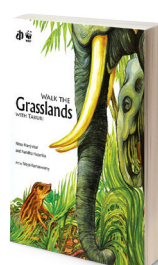
Price: ₹120



4. *The mystery of the missing soap*

The village of Dakshinpur is full of happy and loving faces. But what happens when soap mysteriously disappears from the village? The book tells us an exciting story while on sharing tips on how to stay safe during the coronavirus pandemic without feeling scared.

Price: Free e-book



5. *Walk the grasslands with Takuri*

Join the shy and super adorable Takuri on a tour of his undulating grasslands, where the wind plays Chinese whispers and the crumbling leaves tickle your feet. It takes you to the lush greens, pointing out the sights and sounds along the way and is sure to reveal some jaw-dropping and fun facts!

Price: ₹275

Little-known truths about writers

Anecdotes about famous novelists, poets and playwrights make us aware of the situation these writers faced while producing some their best work

GT Staff

It's said that truth is stranger than fiction. And when it comes to writers, this phrase must seem particularly apt since anecdotes about the real lives of novelists, poets and playwrights are as interesting as their work of art. So, let's get to know some little-known facts about writers, whose work must've brought them fame but little remains known about their actual lives.

- Vladimir Nabokov, a Russian-born novelist, was famous for his writing. However, this was not the only skill he possessed. Nabokov was also a lepidopterologist or someone who studies butterflies. He was a Comparative Zoology research fellow at Harvard, where much of his butterfly collection remains today.

- Lord Byron, the legendary poet from UK, always travelled with dozens of animals. Once, Byron completed a journey from his English estate to Venice along with ten horses, three monkeys, three peacocks, eight dogs, five cats, one crane, one falcon, one eagle, and one crow!

- The International Astronomical Union (IAU)

named asteroid 5696 after the Norwegian dramatist Henrik Ibsen. Astronomers at San Diego's Palomar Observatory discovered 5696 Ibsen in 1960.

- Chilean poet Pablo Neruda always wrote in green ink. For Neruda, green was the color of hope and abundance. It is also said that the colour was part of the poet's creative process



- John Steinbeck's dog ate his first manuscript of *Of Mice and Men*. Thankfully, Steinbeck was only halfway through the novella at the time his dog tore it to shreds. Steinbeck reportedly told a friend that this might've been a sign that his manuscript needed some serious revisions.

- Lewis Carroll, author of *Alice in Wonderland*, was terrible at finances. Ironically, he was a mathematics scholar at the Oxford University, UK.

- German poet Gottlob Wilhelm Burmann is better known today for his hatred towards the letter "R". Burmann hated the letter so much that he refused to use it in his poems and daily conversations!

- Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami was inspired to write fiction after attending a baseball game at Jingu Stadium. Murakami knew he could write a novel while watching Dave Hilton bat. He started writing *Hear the Wild Sing* that very night.

- Irish dramatist George Bernard Shaw invested a great deal of money and time into creating a new alphabet for the English language. His "Shavian alphabet" was intended to get rid of spelling issues in English.

- Ichiyō Higuchi, author of *Meiji Era*, wrote her greatest stories just before she died due to tuberculosis. She was living in a poor area of Tokyo at the time. Today, Japan honours Higuchi on the ¥5,000 note.



Online padhega India tabhi toh bachega India

Online classes were organised across the country to ensure children continue to learn during the COVID-19 lockdown, which forced schools to remain shut for nearly three months. India has 15 lakh schools, attended by nearly 2.5 crore students from varied socio-economic backgrounds.