

Varsha Seshan's Creative Writing Programme

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Issue 1 | June 2022

by writers
aged 9-14



Poems

Stories

Speeches

Puzzles



Varsha Seshan's Online Creative Writing Programme - Special Event

What do editors do?
 How do they decide what to publish?
 Do publishers typically accept stories written by children?

All this and more at an interactive session with
Daphne Lee, consulting editor at Scholastic Asia

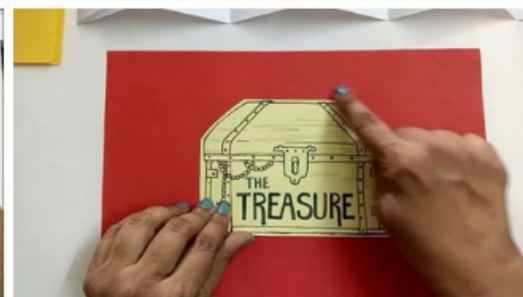
Fee: ₹400 per head
 Ages: 9-14
 Date: 14 June 2022
 Time: 5pm to 6pm IST

The Editor's Perspective

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Guest Sessions



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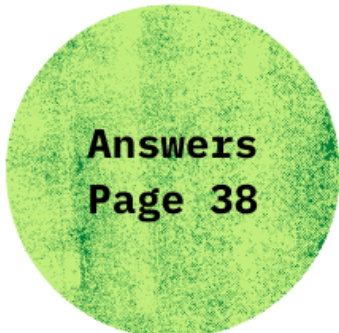
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Varsha Seshan
children's book writer
creative writing trainer

Meet the writers

Devangshi Duttagupta

Reading and writing are a huge part of me,
I'm a twelve-year-old, happy and free.

Himarsha Mulchandani

I have lived many lives, I would like to live more,
I'm a dreamer, a dancer and a reader to the core.

janvi barman

my friends and music are what keep me going
seeds of humour are the ones i like sowing

Samanvitha Prasad

I love reading books, they keep me on my hooks
I am 12 years old, and am good as gold

Hello!

This is the first time we're creating a zine at my online creative writing programme, and I've found it very rewarding. Over the course of 12 weeks, the young writers have written, edited and rewritten over a dozen pieces. Here is the result!

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

On many pages, you'll find a bubble like this telling you how the pieces on the page came about.

Shaza Farooqui

She's a bit too different to live on this earth,
She's been a crazy cat lady, a lover of everything since birth

M. Siddharth

I enjoy playing tennis, violin and cricket,
I'm Sid and I'm standing in deep mid-wicket.

Sunandini Sen

I'm Sunandini, I love to write and read,
Books and the piano are all I'll ever need!

Vivaan Chaudhry

Hi, I'm Vivaan, and I like to write books,
In many of them, there are evil crooks.

Playing with Poetry



Monkeying Around Vivaan Chaudhry

Playful is the childlike monkey
that lives deep in the heart.

Thrives on joy and amusement
its deadliest poison? Boredom.

The thrill of playing sports with friends,
is like swinging from tree to tree.

The somersaults, the adventure
the comradery of peers.

It's the joy of sport that fills my heart,
the feeling of fun, forever it should last.

The monkey dreams of adventures 24/7
wants a childhood overflowing with happiness.

Sadness Sunandini Sen

Sadness lives in the world around me,
Amongst everything and everyone.
It's like a snowy-white Polar Bear,
Looming over me, but with eyes that twinkle.

The bear nudges me with his nose
When I am deep in doubt.
He purrs, "Be yourself, always,"
Stroking my back with his paw.

When I cry, the bear sobs too,
His fur wet with my tears,
His paws pad softly beside me,
His eyes speak: 'I'm always with you.'

We frolic together in the snow,
Not heeding the icy cold,
For I'm warm with the Polar Bear,
Riding on his back through the wind.

I feed my friend with love and nostalgia,
And don't let Despair come near.
For sadness sticks with us through thick and thin,
It makes us who we are.



Courage

M. Siddharth

Braveness is the strongest of lions:
It lives deep in my heart
The majestic lion is the symbol of confidence
Only overconfidence can kill this beast.
When I feel scared, the lion roars fiercely
I feed it hope to keep it alive
It runs with me, determined to win
Braveness is a must for the king of the jungle
For without it, what would evilness be?
Without it, what would the world be?

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

In class, we read Emily Dickinson's poem, "Hope is the thing with feathers". And we thought, "What if we compare an emotion or a characteristic with an animal? And what if we write in free verse?"

The Lion Roars

Himarsha Mulchandani

Aslan, mighty and fair,
Standing strong like a mountain,
Burning bright like fire.
His roar – a thunderclap,
Inducing hope and determination.

Aslan, regal and fearsome,
Kind as a king,
Valiant as a warrior.
He's my strength, always there for me,
A fiery aura ignited when injustice is near.

Aslan, my mentor, my conscience,
Together we forge ahead,
Fighting obstacles, come what may.
His fire can't be extinguished, only dampened
By narrow-minded people,
And the broken world of today.



Thief!

Himarsha Mulchandani

The treasure site had been ransacked. RANSACKED. The barricade tape had been torn to shreds, the treasure had vanished - all except the skeleton of a woman, which lay in the middle of the site, untouched. There were two security guards on the site. The culprit's dog, apparently, had blocked the vision of the first one and licked his face till it was dripping wet; the second one had fainted as he was allergic to dog fur.

"Find that thief!" Aayush shouted. He shook my frame so hard that I wanted to punch him. I did. Playfully.

Aayush was a popular businessman, philanthropist and a billionaire. Just imagine an Indian Tony Stark come to life. He claimed that he had found the treasure.

"Calm down! Who is the detective here? I just need time to interrogate the second guard.

Meanwhile, try not to strangle anyone."

With that, I walked towards the guard. "Good evening there, Mr...?"

"Rathore. And you are?"

"I'm Detective Jacques. I'd like to make this interrogation short. We'll start with the appearance of the thief. Did you see them? Was it a male? Female?"

"Yes, I did catch a fleeting glimpse. It was a female. She kicked me in the shin just after I fainted, you see." He showed me a red welling wound. "A tough woman, she was. Her complexion was fair, I think. She was tall with broad shoulders and long black hair, and she was wearing a black mask that covered her nose and mouth so I couldn't make out her features that well. She also had a dog, Detective, a German Shepherd to be precise."

"Hmmm..." I said, noting it all down. "Thank you, Mr. Rathore, I think that'll do."

The full name's Natasha Paulo Claudia Singh Jacques, by the way. It's pretty mixed up, but believe me, I'm pure Indian.

Strutting towards Aayush, thinking that it was just a matter of time before I tracked this mysterious being down, I tripped over something. It was a bronze dog tag with the name 'Wolfie'. A suitable name for the dog that had made this mess. I kept it safely in my jeans pocket.

"Did you get a lead?" asked Aayush, anxiously.

"Well, we don't have an accurate description, but the thief is tall, with broad shoulders and long black hair. Rings a bell?"

Aayush scrunched up his face, "Well, there's Juh. Then there's Tanks. Both of them are likely suspects. I'll give you their addresses."

"We'll have to divide and conquer. I'll go to Tanks's house, alone. You go to Juh's place with the Chief Inspector. Is that clear?"

"You're the captain here."



A zephyr blowed while I stood in front of an ancient-looking oak door, trying to find the doorbell. Giving up, I just knocked. A little girl with beautiful grey eyes opened the door tentatively. "Yes?"

"Hey, I'm looking for Tanks. I think she might've lost this." I held up Wolfie's dog tag.

"First of all, I don't know anyone called Tanks, and that dog tag isn't ours. We don't even OWN a dog!" Her voice come out an octave higher than before.

She was about to slam the door in my face when I caught sight of the so-called 'Tanks' in a framed picture on the mantelpiece.



Simultaneously a dog barked. The sound emanated from INSIDE the house.

I kept the door open with my arm and raised my eyebrows, "I'm pretty sure that's a dog in there, kid. Now tell me where Tanks is."



Story

"She might be in Samarth Library. I dunno."
She locked the door.

For all I knew, this could've been a bluff. But it was the only option left. Hastily, I started the engine of my motorcycle and went zooming past the surprised people who were peacefully walking on the stone path.



As fate would have it, the library was deserted. Great. Just great. Shoulders slumped, I stormed out of the library shutting the gates behind me with a bang.

There weren't many people out that day. I caught a glimpse of a woman - tall, with squared shoulders and spectacles. She turned for a moment and I saw the pierced eyebrow ring blink in the sunlight. I clicked a picture.

It could be her. All I had was a vague description, but even the smallest of hints was a lifeline for me. I deserted my motorcycle outside the library so as not to attract attention (it was a Royal Enfield Bullet). I started with a jog-trot and when I was in her vicinity, I slowed down to a walk. She turned into a dark alley with discarded waste and dumpsters. I wondered where she was headed.

"Wait! I just wanted to talk. I am a friend of Aayush's," I blurted out, unable to control myself.

As soon as I said that, I realized I had made a great mistake.

"You're helping the wrong guy." She quickened her pace. The thing was, I didn't know these alleys very well. If she took a turn and I lagged, I would definitely lose the trail.

We started running, and Tanks never seemed to tire. She never looked back either. She took a sharp turn, and I sprinted behind her, just about missing a pillar, but I tripped and fell to the rough ground. The suspect was nowhere to be seen!



My phone buzzed in my pocket as I opened my apartment door.

"Juhi's clean," Aayush's distorted voice crackled through the speakers of my phone. "We checked all the surveillance cameras. Not a single soul went in or out of that building last night. I did suspect her, you know. Because she and I had our differences in college. Sabotaged projects, plays, birthdays, the usual. But we've gotten over all that now. What about you? How did the interrogation with Tanks go?"

"Tanks is the prime suspect now. She ran away before I could make contact with her."

Before he could react, I quickly cut the call.

It was almost evening. There was a meeting near the archaeological site in a few minutes. I was supposed to show up with the thief, victorious. But alas, all I had was one measly picture. I trudged half-heartedly towards my room, when the doorbell rang. I cursed.

When I opened the door, I thought I was hallucinating. It was Tanks. I mumbled something incoherent.

"Go ahead, take me captive," she said, smoothly, as if being captured was a speciality in her resume.

I still didn't move.

She sighed, "I'll explain everything. Now would you please step aside and let me come in?"



I was giddy with excitement. There was quite a crowd gathered near the site, buzzing with questions. Aayush was standing by my side and the mayor was shooting apprehensive glances towards us. Tanks was hiding in my car and the police were patrolling the grounds.

"Ahem, warm greetings to all of you present here," I started in a bold voice. "The theft of the archaeological site was quite a shock for all of us. I know who did this. There were actually two of them. One of the culprits is right here, standing beside me." I pointed towards Aayush, while gripping his



Story

hand so he couldn't escape. The crowd gasped and a woman fainted. "The other one is amongst you." Tanks stepped out of the crowd, smirking, a laptop in her hand.

The mayor shouted, "What is this blasphemy, Detective Jacques?"

I ignored that comment and nodded approval for Tanks to start speaking.

"I stole the treasure, yes. But for a reason. This man here," she shot a disgusted look towards Aayush, "used to be a good friend. But he took all the credit for MY research. I found the treasure, so it was my right to claim it. He tried to delete the proof but I had a backup, on this pen drive. I stole the findings merely to tell him that he isn't the centre of this universe; he is a man, not a god. And he has absolutely no right to take all the fame for himself when I deserve it too. It all started when I stumbled across this place and found a coin that suspiciously resembled the ones found in Harappan archaeological sites. I wanted to keep this whole matter low-key but to no avail. No sooner did I start to dig than Mr Aayush found out. Then things went all over the place. He sent out 'trained agents' who tried to steal my research. They were taken care of."

All the people stood rooted at their places as if struck by lightning. A policeman stepped forward and said in a nasal voice, "You have done an admirable job here Detective, we would like to take over the matter now."



In the end, all was well. Tanks had to spend mere 10 days in jail as she had stolen the treasure. But the police let her off since she was the one who had found the artefacts in the first place. The 'trained agents' were found in tattered clothes (presumably Wolfie's doing) outside the dumpsters a week later. They were animatedly talking about ghosts and dogs with wings. I wondered what Tanks had actually meant when she said she'd 'taken care of' them. Aayush was sentenced to five months in jail. Someone bailed him out before that, but you should've seen his face when he was imprisoned!

Tanks and I are good friends now. In fact, I gave her a job as my assistant. After all, every Sherlock needs a Watson!



Saving Dalasia

Sunandini Sen

"Hecate!" Ma shouts. "You'll be late for school."

I grab my bag and rush off to join Lara and Alvar on the way to the Academia De La Magica.



"Did you hear the news?" Lara asks.

I shake my head.

"What news?" asks Alvar, twirling his wooden practice sword.

"Some Aerthlings have arrived in Dalasia. They have bought many gifts with them, such as sweets called candy, huge machines named cars and so much more!"

I'm excited about this and hope I can see an Aerthling soon. But all my enthusiasm fades when Fayette, Alban and their crew meet us at the gates.

"Oh look, it's the losers again," Alban sneers at us with his pig face. "With their old and smelly clothes. And selves." They laugh loudly. Our ears burn with shame.

Alvar calms us down. "Ignore them," he says. "No use fighting."

We trudge on, to our respective classrooms.

After school, I'm on my way home, when I find the bullies taunting Alvar and Lara. "Well, well. If it isn't pathetic Hecate." Fayette slyly grins.

"What'll you do, punch us?" Alban snickers. I clench my fists tightly. I try to contain my anger, but my fists break their binds and I swirl like a hurricane, knocking the bullies down.

It's over in a minute, with Fayette and Alban's crew sprawled across the floor.

"Oh no," Alvar whispers, worriedly. "This is not good,"

"Oh dear," I say, the realisation of what I've done hitting me.

Fayette soon gets up and snarls at us, "You'll pay for this, Human." She spits the word. "Be happy I'm not telling the head. I can't be defeated by a human."

We walk home together, victorious, yet defeated.

When I climb the winding staircase to the Isle, I think about the strange glow that emerged from me when I fought the bullies.

Flixes greets me at the door, wagging his tail enthusiastically. "How's my favorite dragon today?" I coo to him, scratching his ears. He barks eagerly.

Later that evening, Ma clears things up with me, when I tell her about what happened today.

Ma says gently, "Let's tell you a story. Long ago, when Dalasia was first discovered, it was ruled by four friends. Two boys, and two girls. They were very different, but lived in peace.

"They decided that their own children would be their successors and protect the land.

"The pair wielding dark magic were called the Sorcerer and the Sorceress, and the other two were called the Wizard and Wizardess.

"Also, there was a fifth protector, known as the Witch. A Witch must have Dark Blood. That means that her ancestors must've been connected to dark magic.

"You, Hecate, are destined to be a Witch. And that is why your magic decided to show today. You have to learn to control your powers."

"What?" I splutter. "That makes no sense! I am a normal Dalasian, not capable of any magic!"

"Then why did we put you in a school meant for magical people, like your friends?" she asks, calmly.

"I-I don't know," I stutter.





"We did it so that you would learn about powers," she answers. "The Aerthlings are bad news. They came a few days ago and are starting to wreck the world. We must make them leave. But the only person who can do that is your very own father, who lives in the stars, literally. You must go on a quest to bring him back." Her face is creased with worry.

I have to believe her, and I must start preparing. I begin by learning more spells from Ma and my friends, and by paying attention at school.

Finally, one stormy night, I am ready. "I love you a lot." I kiss Ma goodbye. Her eyes brim with tears.

"Be careful," she whispers, hugging me. She then summons the ghostly Winds, using her own mystical powers, and I fly with them, up, up, and away, until I reach my destination, the Palace of Peace.

It is located on the moon, connected to the stars, by the String of Destiny. But which star contains my father? I begin opening up all the prisons and the Winds help me. Out of the prisons jump the animals from the constellations, and they begin prancing about.

"I give up!" I sigh in exasperation.

But then, I hear a weak shout from the palace. "Help me!"

I rush in and find my father in a star prison in the main room. He's been screaming for help! I try to help him escape, but the lock's too tight, and the cage can't be broken!

"Who do we have here?" a voice demands. I turn around and see a man with hair made of icicles.

He must be the ruler of the palace. I gulp.



He says, "If you can answer my riddle, then I shall set your father free."

I nod nervously.

"What walks on four legs in the morning, two legs in the afternoon, and three legs in the evening?" he asks.

I think and think, then it hits me. I answer, "Man."

He lets my father go and we run to each other, crying and hugging. I tell him about Ma and his eyes glisten with tears.

"We must save Dalasia from the Aerthlings," he says. "They won't listen to our pleas to leave. We'll have to do something drastic."

I nod and command the Winds to take us home, where Ma is waiting for us. After the greetings and crying and hugging is complete, Dad says he has a plan.

"But we need the help of all of the magical creatures and Dalasians for it," he explains. We agree and work to get a magical connection to all creatures, near and far.

After two hours, everything is set.

"Now, the evil Aerthlings and their leader Mr Conner are on their way to the Flagpole of Promise to celebrate their victory over Dalasia. On their way, the Kraken and the Loch Ness Monster will capsize the boat and turn it over, while on land, Goblins, Gremlins, Feyfolk and Elves shall wreak havoc on the Aerthlings and their houses. It's a perfect plan," Ma tells some pixies on the phone. "Get ready to cause chaos!"

After a while, Dad shouts excitedly, "It's happening!"

We run to the living room, where he has managed to gain live footage of the boat from a CCTV camera.

Story

We wait and watch for a while as the water and the monsters take over. Aerthlings run screaming, and are eaten whole. We all excitedly shout and congratulate one another.

"The water control officers should be arriving soon. They will then imprison the survivors in the Tower of Terror for quite a long time," Dad says, grinning. "They destroyed our environment, so they'll be punished."

We hear later that on land, the magic people have done their job nicely. Not a single free human is left.

A week later:

"And that's how I helped Dalasia get rid of the evil Aerthlings," I finish my story as everyone claps and cheers. I wave to my parents in the first row of the huge hallway, where the Yearly Young Awards Convention is being held.

Now, Dalasia is free of evil, and Mr. Conner, with his minions, is locked up in the Tower of Terror forever. The rest of the humans

have escaped, leaving no trace behind. I was invited to this Convention for my role in saving Dalasia, and all her people.

Alvar and Lara walk up to me and say, "Congratulations Hecate! We're really proud of you!" They hug me tightly.

"So, will you forget us, now that you're famous both in school and in public?" Lara asks, hesitantly.

"Of course not!" I laugh. "You're my best friends!"

"Glad to hear it," Alvar replies, and we smile at each other.

"Come on," Ma tells me. "We're going to that pizza place with your friends." I tell them to go ahead; I need a moment to myself.

They leave, and I think about what has happened in the past few weeks. I never could've imagined it. At that moment, someone drops a package and walks away before I can say anything. I open the box and find a note.



You are now a powerful witch,
You've got powers, you can switch:
To animal, bird, whatever you want,
But the one thing which you can't
Undo is the curse, strong and deep,
Into your veins, the spell does seep,
There's no cure, no remedy at all,
You cannot stop it, nor can you stall.
An old healer-witch right here was burnt
When the townspeople learnt,
Who she really was, magical at heart.,
So, with her life, they made her part.
They didn't listen, so a curse she placed;
The whole area was cursed, the people, crazed.
"With every bit of my power, I curse you all,
Remember one day, this town shall fall,
Your sweet children shall bear the mark
Of an unjust act, may their lives be dark,
You can't escape this unbreakable bind,
You'll all be trapped, inside your own mind.
The day will come soon, I know it's near,
Townspeople, you have lots of things to fear.
Monsters and creatures, they'll spare none,
They'll steal your family, your children, your sons.
This curse shall prevail, it surely will,
When the last leaf withers and the water's still."

I can feel a sense of dread creeping upon me.
The worst is yet to come.

This, I Believe

M. Siddharth

The scorching sun. The lights change: green, yellow, red. A furious cop waves his lightsabre, fighting honking vehicles and reckless riders. What does all this mean to you? This is a scene that we face daily in our lives. Both young people and old people face problems while crossing the road. There is so much traffic, with cars coming so fast, that people find it difficult to cross.

I want to tell you a story that happened to me. One day, when I was crossing the road on my way home from the park, a car nearly hit me. For a second, my heart stopped beating. Everyone else who was crossing with me yelled out and then finally, the car stopped an inch away from me.

I believe pedestrians should be given more respect when they are crossing the road. Even though there were signs saying 'Beware! Children Crossing', the uncle who was driving came really fast.

The other thing that disturbs me a lot is that some people on bikes honk too loudly. Why don't they realize they are making sound pollution and scaring stray dogs too?

Some people don't make way for ambulances; some even try to overtake ambulances! The person inside might be suffering, and something might happen to the sick or injured just because we want to drive fast.

1,214 road crashes occur every day in India. If we all start following traffic rules, then it will start to spread like an infectious disease, and everybody will follow the rules. Parents should not only teach their children to follow rules but also follow rules themselves. It might be a small thing to do, but when everybody starts doing it, it will have a huge effect.

Thank you.

WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

During our nonfiction module, we drew inspiration from an international project, '**This I Believe**'. We chose topics we feel passionately about, and wrote persuasive speeches, attempting to convince our audiences to act.



Familiar Room

janvi barman

I need a place to gather my _____
 A dusty room I've grown to love lots
 Lined with shelves, long and big
 Into their contents I delve and _____
 To find the objects that fuel our _____
 And have universes within their binds
 Comforting, cosy, tranquil, _____
 Peaceful, devoid of chaos and riot
 This is the place I was born to be
 This familiar room called the _____

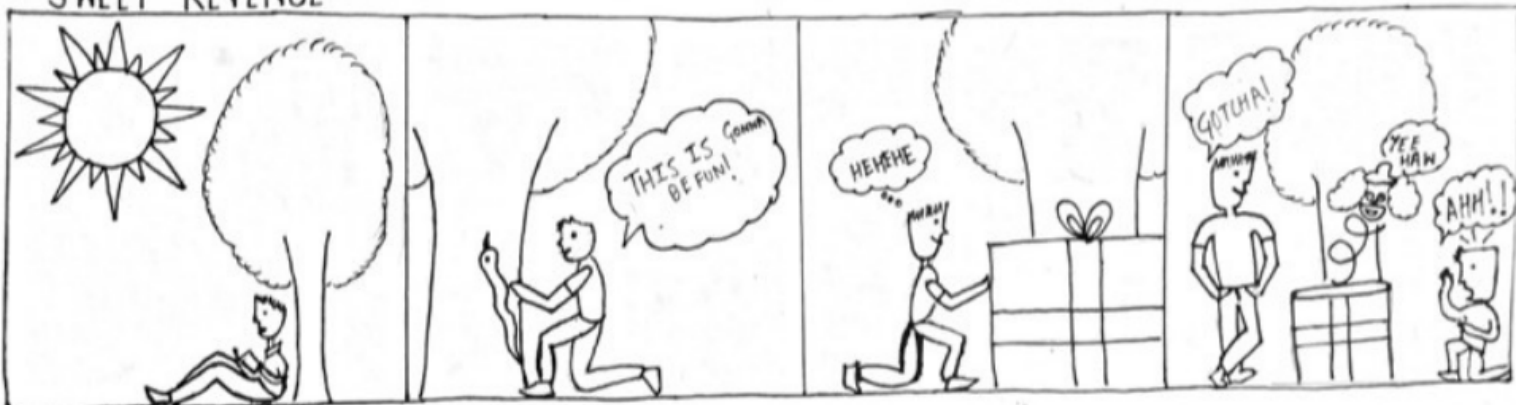


WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

We had a session on comic-making with Greystroke - illustrator, author and filmmaker.

SWEET REVENGE

Himarsha Mulchandani



More Poetry

Pollen of Love

Shaza Farooqui

The flutters in my stomach,
The shiver down my spine,
That fire in my heart,
Are those butterflies?



This can't be any good,
These are signs of love,
The beautiful and destructive,
The refreshing and engulfing.



This butterfly has passed me the pollen of love,
That is passed to every other person like me,
That clever little butterfly who acts like cupid,
Has got a little bud like me in love.

This butterfly that lives within your hearts,
Can be broken by everything around,
And that's what makes it so powerful,
It's strong enough to hold its ground.

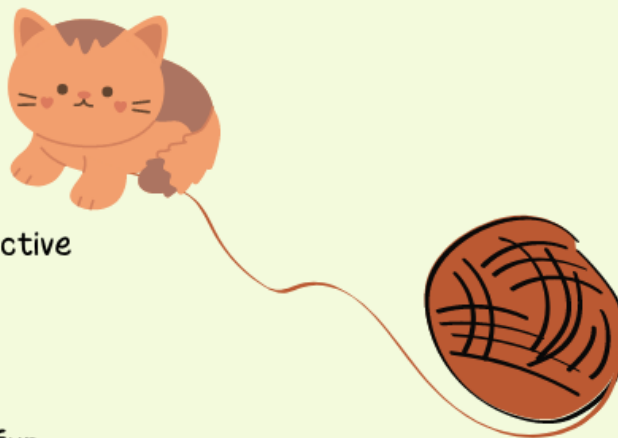


Isn't that little butterfly bold and true like no other?
Isn't she looking alive and extraordinary?
How she thrives so beautifully,
Makes me wonder if we're just as special.

That little butterfly with the power so great,
That little butterfly that breathes in the worst of times,
That little butterfly who shares that supreme power called love,
That little butterfly is the reason we're who we are.

little creature

janvi barman



it hides in the shadows, eyes peeled
 waiting for the moment i decide to be productive
 when the time is right, it paws my foot
 and looks up at me with innocent hazel eyes
 silently begging me to stay longer and play
 and comb my fingers through its soft, dark fur...
 i give in to its pleading, after all,
 what harm could such a little creature do?
 tempting me to forget about things i care about,
 the kitten cuddles up to me
 with each passing moment, pending work gets easier to ignore
 and logic and reason get harder to acknowledge
 until the big strong dog of determination
 makes it scurry away with fierce barks
 scaring it into its shadowy corner once more

Tiger in My Blood

Devangshi Duttagupta



Birdsong

Samanvitha Prasad

Happiness is the sweetest of birds
 That lives in my heart
 That always tweets to me
 Whenever I am down

Sadness can destroy it
 But only for some time,
 For I feed it kindness and love
 The most that I can find

The emperor of the jungle is the angriest of beasts,
 He resides in my head and swims in my blood.
 He reminds me to never give up,
 And makes me a burning star.

When I start to feel caged,
 He roars out loud and reminds me of my freedom.
 When I start to back away from hurdles,
 The fearsome tiger growls inside my heart.

I never let happiness come near this creature
 As it can put it to the sword.
 My tiger thrives because of the anger within me,
 Without him, I'll lose what makes me strong.

This, I Believe

janvi barman

Search the web for the definition of gender. Practically every source will give you the information that gender is a social construct. The concept varies from society to society. For example, in most parts of India, gender binary and gender roles are heavily enforced. Gender identity can be a wonderful and freeing form of self-expression for some, while gender roles bring people down.

I've been fortunate enough to not have encountered much gender discrimination first-hand. But it crushes me to hear other women being told to "sit like ladies", to "let men deal with important matters" and to "laugh more femininely". Let's not forget the struggles of men. "You throw like a girl." "You scream like a girl." "You run like a girl." "You dress like a girl." When will men be allowed to do anything that isn't the "manliest" act on earth without being harassed and humiliated? What's so wrong with being feminine, anyway?

No one will ever perfectly fit into these stereotypes because they are always changing. For example, skirts were originally gender neutral. High-heeled shoes were made for men in the cavalry. Pink was considered masculine and blue feminine. If we dropped

these standards, everyone would be able to express themselves better – even those who sacrifice happiness to fit into gender roles and enforce them on others.

Those who try to speak out against narrow-minded, nit-picky people are viewed as though they are gophers that pop out of the ground and shriek in shrill voices. They're called oversensitive. They aren't taken seriously. So they stay silent, living in fear that they'll only get rolling eyes and laughter in response. Doesn't that make you angry?

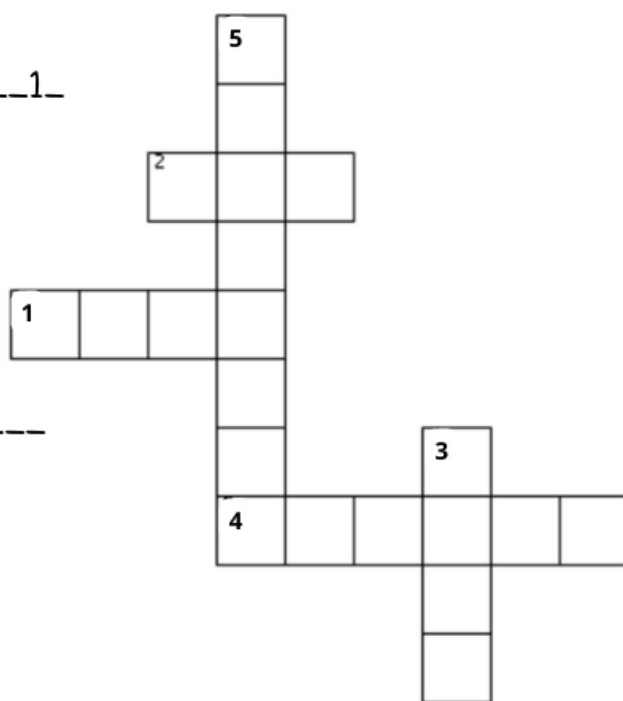
We're surrounded by judgement of those who don't fit into the strict standards of our society. We're growing up in this environment. We're being raised this way. We're being taught what it means to be a man or a woman. But I believe we can unlearn these harmful stereotypes before we pass them on to the next generation. I hope that one day, we will be able to express our gender the way we wish without being scared. We need to start embracing and stop excluding those who break pointless standards society has set for them. It's time we fight back in whatever little ways we can.



My Favourite Destination

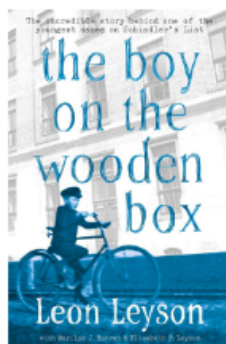
Samanvitha Prasad

A library is colourful, cosy, quiet and neat,
 Where you can pick up a book and have a ___1___
 In a library, you can be
 Anything from a fairy to a _2___
 In a library, you can find ,
 People and places of every ___3___
 A library is a place for imagination
 In it, you can go to a completely new ___4___
 The library is a wonderful _____5_____,
 It is my favourite destination.



1. it serves the purpose of giving rest
2. an insect
3. nice people are generally described as gentle and _____
4. soldiers fight for their _____
5. the opposite of destruction

Book recommendations from Sunandini and Siddharth



This, I Believe

Vivaan Chaudhry

Recently in the classroom, the topic of gender equality came up for discussion. I thought to myself: why do we need to discuss this? Are girls and boys not equal?

Surprisingly, many of my friends (boys) believed that they were superior to girls for no particular reason. Only a few of my friends were also shocked like I was.

As I did my research, I discovered that in many cities of our country, girls are not given equal opportunities to study or work. They must, from their childhood, begin assisting their mothers in the kitchen. I was also horrified to learn that in some countries women are supposed to cover their faces and are not allowed to drive. This motivated me to write a poem, so kindly allow me to share it.

Gender equality means girls equal boys.
If boys go to school, so must girls.
Girls are more than pink and pearls.
Men think they are superior,
Really, the thought's inferior!
If any man is rich, they think they are the best.
This is so not true, please put this thought to rest.

This is not how men should act,
We all are equal – indisputable fact.
Give women a choice, don't force them to cook.
Instead of the pan, try giving them a book.
Though I am a boy, I still care about
Gender equality, it's the right route.
Let's stop this injustice and let us begin,
A time when we all get a fair and equal win!

I do have a question for my peers who believe that they are superior. How do you think you came into existence? Had it not been for the female gender, you would not exist. Imagine if you had no opportunity to study or play a sport, or if you were called inferior. You would not be the same person today! In order to change the world we need to change the way we think and offer equal opportunity and only then will gender equality truly begin.





WHAT'S THIS ABOUT?

In class, we read 'The Night Monster' by Sushree Mishra. Then, we wrote anonymous letters to our greatest fears. Other participants took on the role of the fear and wrote back. Here's a sample.

Dear Mr. Dark,
You have a scary persona. When I'm around you, my heart thumps against my chest so painfully it feels like those moments will be my last ones. When I listen to you, you make me imagine sounds that are enough to send creepy chills down my spine. Ululations, hissing sounds, howls... ugh! Why do you do that? It's so irksome and weird. Can't you give me peace? Can't we declare a truce or something? Should I literally stand by my bed, waving a huge white flag so you won't come near me?

Dear Writer,
I promise don't mean to scare you. I'd like you to read your letter again. You say you imagine noises that send chills down your spine when I'm near you. Imagine. I don't think you're scared of me. I think you're scared of things you associate with me.
I don't mean to sound like a narcissist, but there is no light without darkness, just like there's no yin without yang. The moon, the stars, jellyfish, fireflies, glow-sticks... none of these things would shine if they weren't in darkness. Nothing can shine without a little bit of darkness, including you.
This is me waving my big white flag. I'm afraid I can't stay away from you, but I hope this letter helps you be more comfortable with me.
Yours sincerely,
Mr. Dark

Graffiti

janvi barman

The chemical smell of paint lingers in the air. We stare at the wall. It's covered in colours and patterns of every kind. The paint is still partially wet. This can't have happened too long ago. I appreciate the beauty of the artwork, but it's painted onto a school wall. It's vandalism. Hiran and I look at each other. They crouch down and pick up what looks like the cap of a spray paint bottle.

"You're seeing this too, right? I'm not hallucinating or anything?" they ask.

"Nope, looks pretty real to me," I reply.

"Let's report it, real quick."

"We could do that, or we could just leave and let someone else discover it," I suggest sheepishly.

They raise an eyebrow at me. "You are a terrible influence. Come on, let's go to the office and report what happened. It'll take, like, five minutes."

"We just finished basketball practice, dude! I'm sweaty and tired and I just want to go home," I whine.

Hiran pauses. They finally speak after a few seconds of pensive silence, "When someone else finds this tomorrow... we're going to be the prime suspects. Since art club got cancelled today, only the basketball team's staying after school, and we're the only ones who showed up. If we report it ourselves, people won't be suspicious of us!" I open my mouth to respond but they've already grabbed my arm and are dragging me to the office.

"Wait!" I yell.

They stop walking and look at me, annoyed. "What?"

"There are footprints. Look." I free myself from the teen's grip and walk over to a few stray drops of paint that were stepped on. I bend down for a closer look. They do the same beside me. "I think I can make out a shoe size ... it's either a six or an eight."

"I'm impressed," they say. Hiran's younger than me, but they're a lot smarter. I feel validated by their comment. They look around before crawling over to another shoe print. "Yeah, that says eight," they confirm. They stand up and straighten out their clothes before stretching their hand out to me. I take it. "There's a reason we discovered this crime together. Destiny has decided that we're detective partners," they declare, shaking my hand. I think they're joking for a second, but they seem dead serious.



We enter the principal's office. There are a bunch of kids sitting there. I recognise a few of them and realise they're all from the art club. Hiran smiles at them before walking up to the receptionist without hesitation. I follow half-heartedly.

"Good afternoon," Hiran greets them.

"What are you kids doing here so late after school?" the receptionist asks. Hiran sums up the entire situation with ease. They don't miss a single detail. I stand behind them, playing with the straps of my backpack awkwardly.

"I'll go have a word with the principal. Thank you for bringing this to our attention, dear," they say before disappearing behind a worn out wooden door. Seconds later, a girl I know, Ayanna, walks through the front door and sits down with the other kids, putting her bag on the floor.

Hiran turns to her. "What's up, wasn't art club cancelled today?"

"Yeah, but our parents still think they have to pick us up late, so we've just been waiting here the entire hour," she replies.

Hiran pats her shoulder in consolation. "That's messed up. Where'd you go?"

"Bathroom."

Hiran raises an eyebrow. "With your bag?"

Ayanna opens her mouth to respond but the old door creaks open again.

"It's getting late, dears. You should head home, we'll deal with this tomorrow. Thank you again for reporting this. Any other student would've-"

"No problem," Hiran interrupts their dramatic speech of gratitude. "Have a good day!" They wave bye to Ayanna before grabbing my hand and pulling me out of the office.



Story

I lie in my bed, staring at my ceiling fan, barely visible in the darkness. I should be asleep by now. Rolling over onto my stomach, I grab my phone and open Hiran's contact. My finger hovers over the call button. It's late, and I don't want to wake them. I hit the button anyway.

"You still up?"

"No, in fact, I am completely asleep. I picked up your call while completely unconscious."

"Cool. I can't sleep. Who do you think did the, um, wall painting stuff we saw at school today?"

There are a good few seconds of silence from the other end before Hiran starts talking again. "I have a gut feeling we're not looking for someone with size eight shoes. Those shoe prints looked ... intentional. We're looking for someone who holds a grudge against a person with size eight shoes."

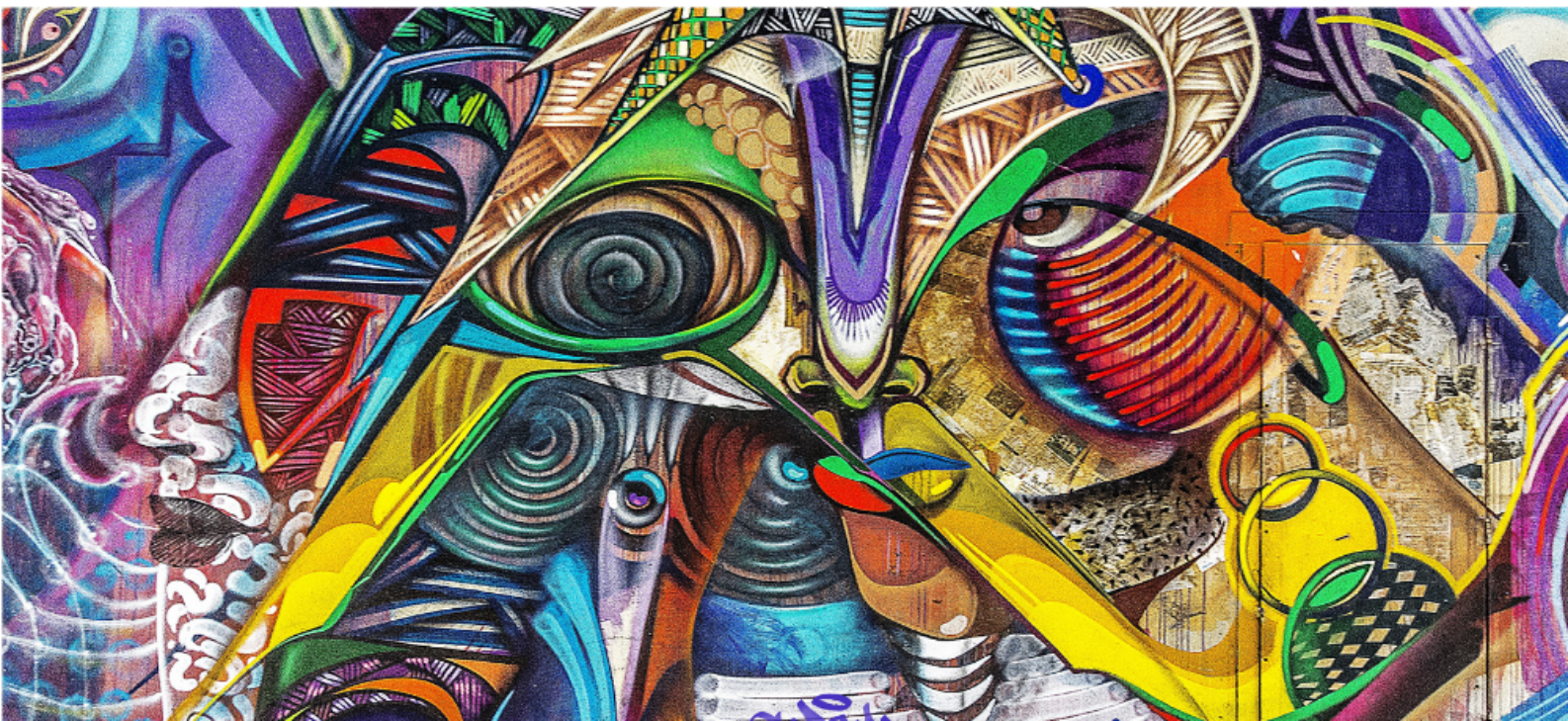
Hiran's smart, but they have a history of reading too far into things. "The prints weren't that noticeable. You of all people didn't see them at first, dude."

"Well, that could be a possibility ... no, no, trust me. My gut is always right. And it has to be someone from the art club."

"If you say so. Sorry for doubting you, Almighty Royal. My apologies."

They sigh. "Go to sleep. Talk tomorrow. Goodnight, Ansh."

I open my mouth to respond, but the call's ended. That's the first time in a while Hiran called me by my name. Usually they address me as something along the lines of 'idiot', 'stupid', 'little brained homo sapien', and so on. It's a nice change.



I haven't been able to talk to Hiran the entire school day. But in ten minutes, I'll be out of class, and I'll find them and we'll figure out who made the ... wall-painting-thingy. Hiran's waiting outside my class when the bell rings as students begin to file out of the room.

"Hey, simpleton, we got called to the principal's office," they tell me. "Shakalya, you've been summoned too," they address a short girl, sitting a few benches behind me, who I realise was in the office yesterday.

I walk up to them, Shakalya following me. "Did you just say 'summoned'? Nerd," I tease them, ruffling their dark hair. I know they heard me, but they ignore me anyway.



"You three have been called here as you brought the graffiti on the wall near the basketball court to our attention," Mrs. Singh starts in her nasal voice. "Now, Shakalya thinks she might know who-

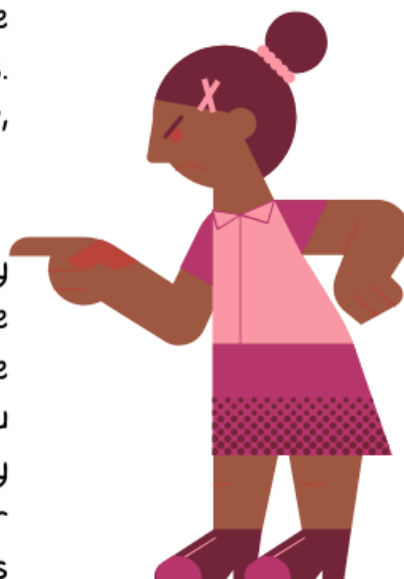
"I think it's you two," Shakalya promptly interrupts her. "Today Coach told off some people for not showing up for practice after school yesterday. He said only you two showed up, so practice was probably cancelled. No one else was there after school except the art club, and all of us were in the office. The only reason you reported it was so you wouldn't seem suspicious! It has to be you!"

Shakalya seems upset that the colour hasn't drained out of our faces like she hoped. Mrs. Singh smiles a little. "This is a serious accusation. I think Mx. Anand and Mr. Deo should have a chance to defend th-

"We did have practice. We found the scene when we were heading out of school," Hiran says with a grin. "I think what's happened is that Shakalya's so desperate to find the culprit that she's drawing conclusions from barely any evidence. By the way, we found size eight shoe prints. Shakalya, what's your shoe size?"

"...Eight," Shakalya replies, timidly.

Hiran continues, "It wasn't Shakalya, though. She's trying to give herself a good image by finding out who did it. But she wouldn't vandalise the school. It would ruin her reputation if she got caught."



I look out of the window and see Ayanna. She's looking at the bottom of her shoe, and something clicks in my head. "I know who the culprit is. We'll be back in 2 minutes," I say as I exit the office, taking Hiran with me.





"You think you're on to something, Ansh?"

"It's Ayanna. I know it's hard for you to realise it's her since you're friends and everything, but it is. Trust me."



Soon, we're back in Mrs. Singh's office. There are five people in the room this time — me, Hiran, Shakalya, Mrs. Singh, and Ayanna. Everyone's eyes rest on Ayanna, waiting for an explanation from her. Finally, she speaks.

"I ... I did it because I was frustrated. Because my parents don't like that I'm passionate about art. Art club is the only time I get creative freedom, and I got angry that it was cancelled. I said I was going to the bathroom and left the office, that's when I vandalised the wall."

"And ...?" Hiran urges.

"I made a shoe print by mistake that showed my shoe size, six," Ayanna continues hesitantly. "I turned it into an eight because I know Shakalya has size eight shoes. She's always trying to frame innocent people to make herself look good, and I knew she'd do the same this time. I figured I could make her out to be the culprit."

Mrs. Singh glares at Ayanna, then Shakalya, and then speaks up, "Shakalya will be taken care of, kids, don't worry. Now, I'm not sure I can help you when it comes to creative freed—"

"We can choose specific walls in the school that students can have the freedom to draw or paint on," I pipe up. I feel bad for



interrupting Mrs. Singh. People seem to do that a lot.

"I'm not sure if that's pos—"

"Would you please consider implementing the concept if I start a petition and get at least, um, 500 signatures from both students and staff?" Even I impress myself with my quick thinking.

"Get the signatures first. Then we'll see. Mx. Anand and Mr. Deo, you have permission to leave. Not you, girls. Both of you are still in trouble."



It's been a week since we solved the wall-painting case. We managed to get enough votes for my petition and my idea's being reviewed by the school. Hiran and I are sitting on their bed. I'm watching them idly pluck the strings of their guitar.

"Hey, Ansh, I'm proud of you for realising it was Ayanna. You knew I'd never suspect her just because we're friends. And the petition thing. And ... I guess you were half-right about the shoe print being made by accident."

"It's just your influence," I smile at them. They smile back. Putting their guitar down, they slide over to me and put an arm around my shoulders. I'm a little taken aback – that's not typical Hiran Behaviour.

"Also, you keep saying 'wall painting thingy'. The word's graffiti, halfwit."

Safe Haven

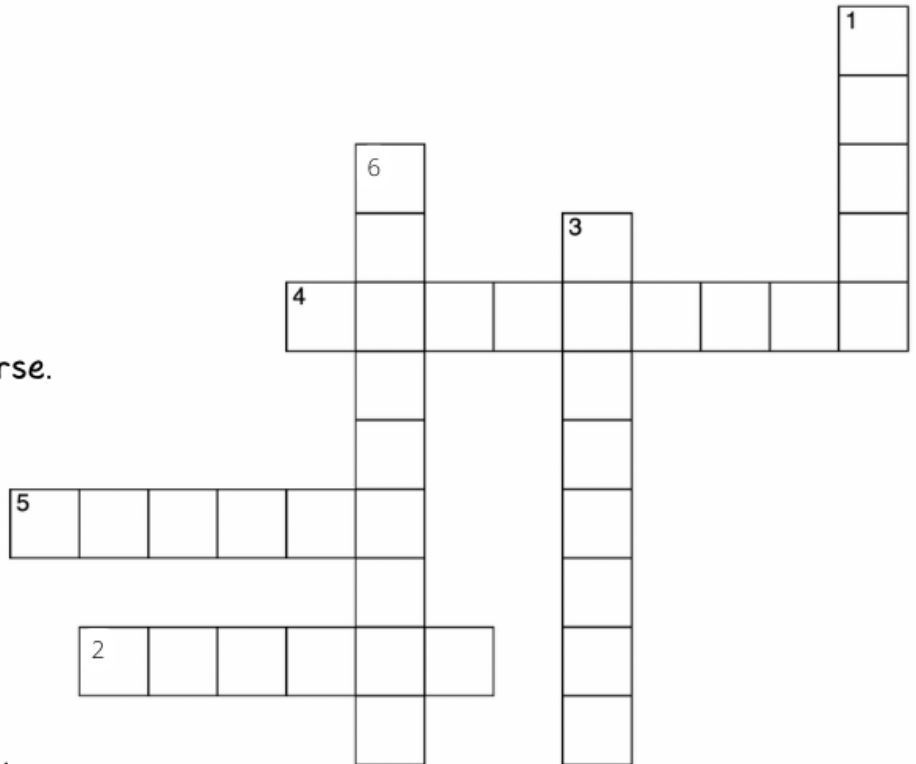
Himarsha Mulchandani

While the world falls apart,
When peril plays its part,
When there's no ___1___ inside,
I've got a place to hide.

I can be a ___2___,
And conjure up a ___3_____.
Or perhaps ride a horse,
Through the ancient lands of Norse.

___4____ of the unknown,
Once hidden is now shown.
Venture into the cold,
Each ___5___ will unfold.

You'll guide me through the dark,
You'll be my ___6_____,
I'll do well to remember,
I'm fire, but you're the ember.



1. Something the Ukraine – Russia conflict needs (opposite of war; rhymes with cease)
2. Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and _____ry
3. A severe snowstorm with high winds
4. Something you know and are aware of (near rhyme – college)
5. _____ Seven – by Enid Blyton
6. Original name of Iron Man





This, I Believe

Samanvitha Prasad

In December 2021, my family and I went on a holiday to Coorg. I was really looking forward to going there, as I had heard tales about its beauty and greenery from my mother. As we were on our way to the hotel in Coorg, some people from the municipality came to us and told the driver that he had thrown some paper out of the car (which wasn't true; we hadn't thrown anything out). That was when my eyes fell on the plastic and garbage scattered everywhere amidst the greenery. I felt sad to see all the garbage thrown everywhere – juice bottles, chips wrappers, leftover food and whatnot. My mother was shocked to see how dirty the streets were compared to when she had lived there. After I came back from the trip, I thought about all that I had seen in Coorg, and I started reading about it. I started wondering about what I can do to reduce pollution. Do you know what pollution and climate change are, and how they are related to what is happening around us?

Pollution, lack of cleanliness and global warming – the three are interconnected.

First, pollution. Plastic overuse is one of the major causes of pollution around us. Most of what we buy is made of plastic. Food and other supplies also come in plastic bags. And once the product is used, most of us just throw the wrapping away in the garbage.

Plastic bags are scattered everywhere on roads, leading to dirtiness all around. The plastic gets into water bodies and the soil. Since the soil gets affected, food also gets affected. This causes problems in our health. And when the water gets polluted, we have to get water purifiers, increasing the consumption of power, leading to more greenhouse gases.

Global warming is due to the huge amount of greenhouse gases discharged into the environment. These gases cause an increase in temperature. The effect of that, we are seeing today. Most of those in North India are experiencing hot weather like never before. Higher temperature means more use of fans and ACs, which use electricity. Coal is used to generate electricity. Coal leads to higher generation of greenhouse gases.

So now we are in a vicious cycle. There are some simple steps we can take in our everyday lives – carry cloth bags when we go shopping, get groceries in paper bags, switch on lights only when required, segregate waste, give plastic for recycling. We must consume as per our needs and not as per our greed. These are just small steps. But young people like us can do these little bits to help. And then educate ourselves and speak in small forums. These small steps by many of us will definitely add up and make a difference to the world around us.

The Book Thief



Vivaan Chaudhry

A detective, we hire, to catch a criminal pro
We have to be secretive, for the thief may get to know,
To help you understand the code, it is given below.

actual letter	a	e	i	o	u
coded letter in poem	y	a	e	i	o

Ciold et ba tha lebryreyn, bacyosa wa kniw sha livas biiks?
Bot tha datacteva syw tha CCTV, sha brioght byck whyt sha tiik.

E bat et's tha gaaky Gryda 5 ked, whi stynds ferst en aych axym.
E ym sora ha's nit si breght ynd hes entalleganca es y scym.

Tha datacteva spead in tha gaaky ked ynd syw hem mykeng nitas.
Ha pot avary biik byck en tha shalf ynd snaykad nitheng en hes ciyt.

Why dias tha vilontaar spand si moch tema en tha niiks?
E bat ha's tha biik theaf, ha most ba laydeng avel criiks.

Tha vilontaar? Y Midal Ked! Ha navar stila y dema.
Ha wys y sacrat soparhari feghtng ygyenst crema.





Ha en fyct styrtad ti yssest tha datacteva en silveng tha cysa.
Ha livad y giid mystary, tha biik-theaf ha wyntad ti tryca.

Tha vilontaar ynd tha datacteva envastegytd ynd spead.
Thay syw tha lorkeng jynetir, sospeceios Mr McBreda.

Thay fall enti y sacrat chymbar, yftar thay poshad y bottin
Diwn en tha chymbar tha jynetir syt raydeng, chimpeng y peaca if mottin.

Setteng next ti y pela if biiks, ha hyd y goelty liik,
Et wys ybondyntly clayr, Mr McBreda wys tha criik.

Tha dayn was yngry ynd opsat, tha jynetir wys ti ba blymad,
Bot et wys nit raylly y thaft, ynd McBreda wys queta yshymad.

Ina axtry jib fir tha jynetir ynd y scildeng thyt wys byd,
Ti rayd stireas ti tha lettla inas! niw avaryina wys glyd.

B

C

BONUS PUZZLE!

What is the one
letter (besides q)
that is missing in
the poem?

Answers

Who Am I?

Puzzle Poem

I am a home of universal learning and leisure
I am present in grand palaces and small quarters
I am the place which leaves of trees call home
Who am I?

A library!

Familiar Room

1 thoughts
2 dig
3 minds
4 quiet
5 library

My Favourite Destination

1 seat
2 bee
3 kind
4 nation
5 creation

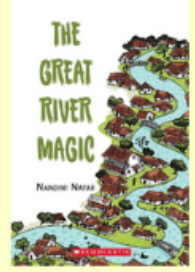
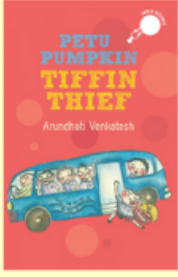
Safe Haven

1 peace
2 wizard
3 blizzard
4 knowledge
5 secret
6 Tony Stark

The Book Thief

p. 36 The janitor, Mr McBride, is the book thief!
And the letter 'u' is missing in the puzzle.





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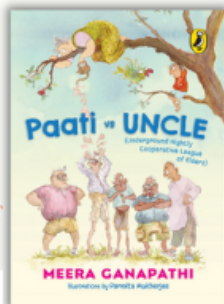


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