

Literature for Young Minds

The Junior Kolkata Literary Meet is a literary festival for young readers of Kolkata, brought together by Think Arts and Tata Steel Kolkata Literary Meet. It was held from March 24-26, 2022. Anisha Dutta, VII, DPS, Ruby Park, takes us through the three-day event and meets some of the authors and speaks to them about why participating in JKLM 2022 has been special for all of them.

Day 1

On a balmy, spring morning, the primary students were treated to an interesting session with the author Lavanya Karthik and her book, *The Boy Who Played With Light* - Satyajit Ray, which takes a dive into the childhood of Satyajit Ray. Next was another delightful session with Andaleeb Wajid who spoke about her book *Asmara's Summer*, the Story of *Asmara* having to live with her grandparents instead of going on a trip to Canada with her parents. This was followed by an engrossing conversation with E.P. Unny, a political comic artist, about RK Laxman's legacy on his centenary.

The young readers of Classes V and VI were all in for a treat as the first session for middle school students was by Jashodhara Chakraborti to help educate children about how to translate their first book. The second session was by Likla and Kripa for their book *Somnath Hore - Wounds*, about the artist Somnath Hore whose paintings showed the sufferings of the common people during the British

sign. Following both, an interactive session was conducted where the authors responded to questions asked by the young adults participating in the Literary Meet through the Facebook Live Chat.

Day 2

On March 25, the primary students

My Grandmother's Masterpiece and about how even your hobby can become a successful career. Young readers took a deep dive into the stories of the author Leela Majumdar by Santanil Ganguly. The middle school kids had a chance to interact with author Menaka Raman about her book, *Loki Takes Guard* which educates them about gender-discrimination and how girls aren't allowed to play sports like cricket which are considered to be 'boys' sports' even in today's society. The children were then taken on a journey through the natural world solving crimes with Ruddy, the mongoose detective in Rohan Chakravorty's book, *Naturalist Ruddy*.

Day 3

The final day of the Junior Kolkata Literary Meet, started off with the Bengali book *Satyajit Chelabela* by Poorna Banerjee about Satyajit Ray's life when he was a child. The next session took all the students on a trip to a mythical land in CG Salamander's book, *Maithili and the Minotaur*, in which a girl called Maithili lived in a land filled with monsters and creatures. With this, the flurry and excitement of the Junior Kolkata Literary Meet came to an end. It proved to be an enriching experience for all the young readers the only regret being they couldn't attend the fest offline and meet the authors in person. A Junior Literary Fest is a wonderful con-



MENAKA RAMAN

Menaka Raman is a former advertising copywriter, communications consultant and columnist. She has been writing since her childhood, mostly stories about birthday parties, water parks and floating cake disasters. As an adult, she continues to write stories - some are still far-fetched while others are not. Here's what she says about her recent book *Loki Takes Guard*.

Why did you pursue writing as your career?

I've been writing stories since I was in primary school! And even though there have been some deviations - I thought I wanted to be an engineer, a software programmer at one point, I was always doing something related to writing - whether as a copywriter in advertising, writing a parenting columnist and later as a communications



think I feel a great sense of responsibility to them to write books which are fun and engaging and which they enjoy reading. **What is your message to readers through your book, *Loki Takes Guard*?** Don't give up on your dreams, even when everyone around you is telling you to! And keep your friends close!

LIKLA & KRIPA BHATIA

Somnath Hore: Wounds brings children closer to the feelings of pain, anger, fear and uncertainty through the life of the eminent artist Somnath Hore. This picture biography is about the eminent printmaker and sculptor's journey with the wounds of the world and how

book particularly about Somnath Hore?

Likla: 2021 was the occasion of Somnath Hore's birth centenary. *Somnath Hore: Wounds* offered a chance to look back at history and consider its connections to our present.

As I read about the Tebhaga Movement in his journals in December 2020, the News Channels were flooded with footage of the Farmer's Protest in Delhi. Our book became an opportunity to further that connection through time with young readers and the future. It was an honour to dive into the life and philosophy of an artist who brimmed with empathy; an artist who looked at the pain in the world straight in its eye without flinching.

Do you have any wounds?

Likla: Everyone has wounds, so visible, some invisible. As a child, I was extremely sensitive to pain, especially of the animal world. I remember my family got used to the many res-

What is the most interesting part about an artist like Somnath Hore?

Kripa: Somnath Hore's art stands testimony of its time, its people and their problems, yet is timeless. Even his earlier sketches which are representational and the later works like the Wound series, which are non-representational, bear the capacity to move viewers of every epoch. To me, the most interesting part about Somnath's art is that, although they may depict an emaciated, famine-stricken human being, it implicitly speaks of the human condition largely. It is interested in connecting the threads of collective human suffering. What is furthermore interesting in this unique art is that the medium itself, say, paper, becomes both, the bearer of the pain and the messenger of pain.

Do you encourage aspiring artists to make art with the same intentions as Somnath Hore?

Kripa: In a non-imposing way, yes. The idea of this book is to encourage aspiring artists and children to decipher the intent of the artist by setting a context to the art in a nonlinear and non-chronological format. Further emphasising that intent can enhance art's function that is how art affects the viewers in the aggregate, human culture. Once the context of the story is established, the book moves to its last segment *Create like an Artist*. Here you find a few open-ended questions wherein the readers are encouraged to respond to these questions in their own style and voice.

JASHODHARA CHAKRABORTI

Eminent translator Jashodhara Chakraborti speaks about the art of translation and her involvement with Kolkata Literary Meet.

What do you think makes someone a good translator?

An ear for both languages, a love of accuracy and the desire to uphold the author's meaning rather than the literal turns of phrases. Most translators are not remembered,

only the author is. So, you have to be okay with that anonymity.

Who inspired you?

I got inspired by two translators, Arunava Sinha and Aruna Chakraborti, who have extensively worked with Bengali books. They jointly exposed me to the best of Bengali stories and I saw with my own eyes the power of reach with a translation in a new language. I think all good stories should be translated into as many languages as possible.

Do you have any message for the aspiring authors?

Please read a lot and start writing as early

as possible. Do not show your early work to anyone, just revisit it after six months and if you have kept up your writing, you will have an idea on how to improve it. In the early attempts, it is fine to be inspired by your favourite authors. As you read more widely and continue to write, your own style will emerge. Your parents will always want you to write like the latest 'hit' writer. Please ignore them and focus on finding out what you like and your own style.

What are your goals now?

I would like to read and write for a living for the rest of my days, whether it is fiction, non-fiction or writing for business organisations.

I would like to translate many more books from Bengali to English and vice-versa.

What are your other hobbies?

I love music and make it a point to listen to music every day or at least sing a little.

Has anyone been your constant support / anyone who has helped you a lot in this journey?

My best friend, Indira Basu, has been a constant source of support and encouragement. Other close friends have also stepped in and lent a helping hand; friends have offered work, interesting projects - I have been very fortunate!

Which is your favourite translated work?

It has to be *Tintin* translated by Narendranath Chakraborty into Bengali and *Asterix*, translated into English by Anthea Bell. Later, I enjoyed Arunava Sinha's translation of Sankar's *Chowringhee* which first got me curious about translations. There is a Russian author called Boris Akunin, whom I discovered, thanks to Andrew Bromfield, his English translator.

Is translation a skill which can be acquired by children?

Absolutely not. You have to actually understand and feel a book that is too difficult so you don't give up midway.

RUCHIRA DAS

ThinkArts was founded in 2013 to bring imaginative, out-of-the-box experiences for children and young people through an engagement with the arts. Ruchira Das, the Founder and Director, ThinkArts, speaks about her experiences of leading the group and of working with children to incline them with various forms of expression in art.

You've been doing an excellent job for children, do you plan to include any children authors in the JKLM?

At JKLM, our efforts have been to



Ruchira Das

bring a diverse range of books, for children of different age groups. If there is a book by a child author that we would like to share with our audiences, then definitely we'd include it in the schedule. During one of the previous editions, we did have a 9-year-old co-author of a book as one of our speakers.

Do you have any message for the TTIS readers?

Read, read and read!

Which authors were you particularly excited about?

That's a tricky question which doesn't have a simple answer. Each of the sessions is special in its own way!

How was the response to this year's JKLM?

This year's JKLM was held both online and offline. Since Covid vaccination is available only for ages 15+, we decided that we'd do four offline sessions at the Victoria Memorial Hall, the venue for the parent festival, Kolkata Literary Meet. It was a challenge to bring students back to a live venue. March is also much hotter than January when we usually have the Literary Meet and several schools were busy with exams, term break and such. However, those who attended had a great time at the sessions and the speakers also enjoyed the interaction. The online sessions were very well received and children, parents and teachers shared a very positive response and were appreciative of the curating.

What do you envisage for next year's JKLM?

We are still reflecting on this year's JKLM and haven't really begun thinking about the next.

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