

# AHA! BOOKS!

Arvind Gupta

An individual booklist is found to reflect the compiler's own interests and biases. To that extent this booklist does not lay claim to any objectivity. It contains some extremely fine books on education, popular science, mathematics and children's stories. Over the years, I have been actively involved in translating and popularizing many of these books. At times we have been successful in bringing out low-cost, Indian reprints like for instance *The UNESCO Source Book for Science in the Primary School*, *Tottochan*, *Divaswapna* (all published by the National Book Trust).

There is a general dearth of good books on science activities, toy making, origami, and how-to-do-it books. I am against slotting books for specific age groups, for I feel that a good book is a joy for one and all. Suggestions for widening this booklist would be heartily welcome.

*Divaswapna (Daydreaming)* - Gijubhai Badheka

Originally written in 1928 by a contemporary of Gandhiji. This book is probably our country's most original contribution to world pedagogy. A must for every teacher.

*The Man Who Planted Trees* - Jean Giono

A green classic. A deeply inspiring story of an unlettered shepherd, who plants 100 oak seeds everyday for over 50 years and greens up a totally barren valley. Already translated in 8 Indian languages.

*Mahagiri* - Hemlata

One of the finest picture books for children printed in India. Written by the famous Malayalam writer Thakazhi Pillai under the penname of Hemlata, it has been illustrated superbly by Pulak Biswas -- a great artist.

*The Joy of Making Indian Toys* - Sudarshan Khanna

India has a long tradition of making toys. This book contains more than a 100 simple folk-toys collected from far flung *melas* of the country. This is a

historical collation as most of these toys are fast disappearing by the on march of mass-produced factory toys.

### **The Blackboard Book** - Eleanor Watts

If there is one teaching aid which is to be universally found, it is the blackboard. Most teachers do not know how to use it optimally. This book shows the most amazing possibilities of using the blackboard for teaching language, math, science, geography and history. That one could do so much with a simple blackboard comes as a revelation.

### **Picture Stories** - Radlov

I first read this book as a child and can never forget it. It contains 40 picture stories, which do not preach morals or sermonize. The stories are very intelligent and full of fun. This indeed is the best picture book in the Indian market for the last 35 years.

### **Snake Trouble** - Ruskin Bond

A delightful story of days spent in grandfather's menagerie. This book is a sure shot hit with children.

### **Guess What Am I Doing** – ACCU (Asian Cultural Centre for UNESCO)

As you open the cover of this panoramic book you find 40 children from different countries saying a "Hello" to you, in their mother tongue. Its amazing pictures give you a good feel for different lands. There are simple activities in each chapter.

### **Our Tree Neighbours** - Chakravarti Venkatesh

Written by a professional botanist and a great lover of trees who worked with the forest research institute. Hundreds of copies of this gem of a book are still lying dumped in the NCERT godown. It is never displayed by the NCERT, nor is it in their current booklist. Grab a copy while you still can!

### **Aakash Darshan Atlas** - G.R. Paranjpe

A life-time work of a great science populariser. Only once printed in 1978. A first rate, authoritative book on the night sky giving Indian names of all the stars and constellations. Insist on a copy at the N.C.E.R.T. counter and with tenacity you will get one.

### **Soap Bubbles** - C.V. Boys

This book is a popular science classic. Boys gave a series of 3 lectures along

with practical demonstrations to a juvenile audience at the London institute in 1889. Reprinted for the first time in India by *Vigyan Prasar*. It is simply a great book.

**The Chemical History of a Candle** - Michael Faraday

A stenographic record of a series of lectures supported by experimental demonstration that Faraday gave to children during the Christmas Holidays of 1860-61. A popular science classic for all times.

**Environment and Self Reliance** - Yona Friedman and Eda Schaur

A resource book designed to promote ecological sanity among the masses with topics like "Weed into Wealth" and "Don't Live With Garbage". Produced in a comic form with matchstick drawings and simple captions, this book will endear itself to its readers.

**Riddles in a Tea Cup** - Partha Ghosh & Dipankar Home

A hundred phenomenon from daily life analyzed by two outstanding physicists. This book was first translated into Italian and subsequently into several Indian languages.

**Who's Who at the Zoo** - Ruskin Bond

Two outstanding people -- a writer and a photographer have jointly produced this masterpiece. With beautiful photographs by Raghu Rai and a lovely text by Ruskin Bond, this book will delight all children.

**Idgah** - Premchand

This great story has been rendered by Kushwant Singh from the original Hindi into English. At the fair, poor Hamid, instead of buying toys buys a *chimta* (tweezers) for his old grandmother. A very touching tale.

**Madam Rides a Bus** - Villikannan

A delightful story of a village girl's first ride in a bus to a nearby town.

**One Straw Revolution** - Masanobu Fukuoka

Without using any chemical fertilizers, pesticides, this remarkable Japanese microbiologist has produced the highest yield of rice for 50 years. A book strongly opposed to the industrial-military paradigm of development. A deeply philosophical book which has changed lives.

**The Little Prince** - Saint Antoine De Exupery

This fable has endeared itself to both young and old alike for more than 40 years. A deeply philosophical book.

**Number Fun with a Calendar** - P.K. Srinivasan

The calendar hangs on every wall. We see it but never very carefully. That an ordinary calendar has so many lovely number patterns is strikingly brought out in this book.

**Water** - Rama

A wonderful introduction to one of our greatest resources -- water. Simple and lucid.

**UNESCO Sourcebook for Science Teachers**

A bible for activity-based science learning. It shows how science can be made joyous and comprehensible for children, by doing simple experiments using ordinary materials used in daily life.

**Days with Grandfather** - Shankar

This delightful book was written by Shankar -- the founder of the *Children's Book Trust*. It brings alive the joys of childhood in a quaint village in Kerala. A wonderful book for children.

**Sujata and Her Elephant** - Shankar

A giant, ferocious, pachyderm responds to the love of a poor village girl. If an animal can respond positively to love and kindness, what about human beings? The book carries a message of love and peace.

**Mama Moo On The Swing** - Jujja & Thomas Weislander

The first Swedish picture book for children to be reprinted in India. It has lovely illustrations by Sweden's best-known artist Sven Norksvik.

**Dear Pichy** - Simret Kaur

The author rears an orphaned baby squirrel. The book sensitively portrays the life and habits of a squirrel. A field naturalist's insights have been woven into the fabric of the story.

**The Child's Language & the Teacher** – Krishna Kumar

The book contains extremely relevant ideas and activities on teaching language to children. These ideas have been distilled from the works of

renowned pedagogues. The book is simple and lucid. Essential book for language teachers.

**Teacher** - Sylvia Ashton Warner

First published in 1963, 'Teacher' was immediately acclaimed as a seminal work -- one which radically altered the way in which we transmit knowledge to the young. 'Teacher' is essential reading for all those concerned with helping children grow into life loving adults.

**The Song of the Bird** - Anthony de Mello

This book is for people of every persuasion -- religious and non-religious. It freely draws from the mystical traditions of Buddhism, Zen, Christianity, Hinduism, Sufism. Everyone loves stories with a subtle message of universal, peace, tolerance and freedom.

**Swami and Friends** - R.K. Narayan

A delightful book by India's most reputed author. This book describes the pranks, escapades, school experiences of a young boy in a small quaint town in South India. A very popular T. V. serial was made on this book.

**Joy of Learning Part I & II** – Centre for Environmental Education

Two extremely well produced books on activity based science and environmental studies. Relevant for middle school children.

**Spiders** -- An Introduction - Vijaya Laxmi

This book introduces the world of spiders both to the layman and the amateur naturalist in simple terms but with professional insights and details. A great book on natural history.

**The Indian Elephant** - Ajay Desai

Written by a field biologist after research on elephants in the wild for over 12-years. This book is one amongst a series of books edited by the eminent environmentalist Bittu Sahgal on India's diverse and enchanting wildlife.

**Bahuroop Gandhi** - Anu Bandopadhyay

This is certainly the best book on Gandhi ever written for children. It has a foreword by Jawaharlal Nehru and some brilliant caricatures of Gandhi by the cartoonist R.K. Laxman.

**No-Cost, Low-cost, Teaching Aids** - Mary Ann Dasgupta

A comprehensive practical guide that gives instructions for making simple teaching aids for primary school.

**Danger School!** - IDAC Document

The most subversive cartoon book on schools ever written. It tells you how clever children are rendered stupid by the bureaucratic structures of the school. A must for all parents.

**UNESCO Sourcebook for the Science in the Primary School** - Wynne

Harlen Jos Elstgees

This is simply a great book on activity based science teaching using simple materials. Just reprinted by N.B.T. at an unbelievably low price of Rs. 60/-. This book was available abroad for US\$ 20. A must for every science teacher.

**To Be a Slave** - Julius Lester

A Newbery Honor Book. This book is about how it felt to be a slave. It is told through the words of men and women who lived as slaves. One of the most powerful documents to appear in children's literature.

**Against All Odds** - Stephen Krensky

This is a book about 4 people who realized the peril to our environment and vowed to do something about it. John Muir saved the Yosemite National Park from ranchers; Rachel Carson, a biologist fought the pesticide industry; Lois Gibbs helped build a neighborhood on a toxic waste dump and Chico Mendes died saving the rainforests of Brazil.