

Free Libraries Zindabad

Quarterly Round up of Network News

Issue 6 | Apr- Jun 23

Librarians Unite For A Free & Fair Library System

When the Free Libraries Network was conceived in 2018, we only knew that we needed to create a space for library people who were striving day & night to bring books to those who lacked critical access. These library builders and activists, working in small towns, villages, remote hamlets, prisons, hospitals and schools, seemed to recognise as obvious, that readers live everywhere (and not just in big cities where the urban elite live) and that all they needed was access to books, reading & literacy programs and to a space that invited them into reading lovingly and without prejudice. Each FLN member also instinctively recognised that there was only one way to do this - by making the library absolutely free.

FLN brings this understanding into all its programs from book dissemination to curriculum to research and capacity-building. We aim to create a community of trained and motivated librarians, who receive support to deliver excellent library programs to their readers. This support is offered from one FLN peer to another, in order to strengthen the free library movement which calls for India to reform and re-energize its inaccessible and exclusionary public library system. In this edition, we invite some core FLN members to talk about their areas of interest within FLN's many activities and programs. Do read about all that FLN is up to and if you want to join us - let us know!

Purnima Rao
Director, Free Libraries Network- FLN

WE ARE FLN!

FLN members work to build, operate and propagate free libraries that welcome all without prejudice of caste, class, religion, gender & sexual identity, or disability. We strive to ensure free access to books for all and nurture new readers, who may not have the means to do so themselves.

Website- <https://www.fln.org.in/> |
Twitter [@FreeLibNetwork](https://twitter.com/FreeLibNetwork) |
Insta: [@freelibrariesnetworkfln](https://www.instagram.com/freelibrariesnetworkfln) |
Facebook:
[@freelibrariesnetworkFLN](https://www.facebook.com/freelibrariesnetworkFLN)
Email: freelibrariesnetworkfln@gmail.com and for book
distribution:
booksforallFLN@gmail.com



FLN Events and Workshop

Free, Feminist Libraries | Right to Read Workshops | 24th to 26th Mar 23, Jorhat



In this three day workshop, organized with [Akam Foundation](#), 10 FLN member libraries along with other organisations working to create inclusive spaces reflected on what inclusivity means in the library context. The workshop began with a reaffirmation of FLN's core goals and a revisit of IFLA UNESCO public library manifesto. Later sessions drilled down into everyday library practices and problem areas, in the context of making the library a safe space for all. Author Shamim Nasrin talked about

using stories and books, to facilitate having difficult conversations, preparing children for the harsh realities and acknowledging library members' lived realities. The workshop ended with the idea of creating a curriculum framework that keeps Inclusion and Diversity at the forefront. Participants curated books around themes and then designed model programs to further the inclusion agenda.



Author Connect | Vandana Yadav | 14 May 23

Approx 30 FLN library members and others has a chance to enjoy a conversation with Author Vandana Yadav author of 'Shuddhi' (Jnanpith-Vani Prakashan), 'Kitne Morche', 'Ab Manzil Meri Hai', and noted children's author with NBT - 'Neela Aasmaan' and 'Sabjiyon Ka Gamla' . Anchored by Saquib Ahmad (FLN Core group member and founder, Seemanchal Library Foundation), in this conversation Vandana Yadav acknowledged the necessity for any society to prioritise access to reading and education and appreciated FLN's role in furthering this access. She spoke of how reading is thinking. She acknowledged great inequalities in access to literature which should not be acceptable. She spoke about her childhood, her influences, her writing career. Saquib asked her about an author's role or responsibility to write for social change or justice

Vandana responded that at the bare minimum all authors must use their voice to tell their truth. This may lead to writing for justice or not, but the author has an obligation to speak in a true voice. In the Q and A portion, there was a question on the role of authors (and not just publishers)) in the "business" of publishing and in establishing or reinforcing caste and class barriers that create inequality in access to books. Vandana Yadavs view on this was that the Hindi publishing industry has multiple challenges - from rising costs, to reaching the markets

श्री लाइब्रेरीज नेटवर्क प्रस्तुत करता है

लेखक से चर्चा: वन्दना यादव

१४ मई २०२३ || 14 May, 2023

दिन: 14 May, 2023
रविवार/Sunday
समय: 6PM

जगह: जूम (रजिस्ट्रेशन फॉर्म भरने पर आपके ईमेल द्वारा लिंक भेजा जायेगा)



ensuring the authors are compensated as well and publishers profit. In this industry a Hindi author is seeking only to find readers and an audience to connect with. In this backdrop, it is difficult for individual authors to play a role on structural issues like pricing, distribution, removing reading barriers etc. There was also a discussion on how librarians and teachers play a role in introducing literature (complex and simple) to their members and turning them into thinking readers. This reading culture is necessary to create more student

more librarians, more teachers, more authors and literature makers etc and for this we need public libraries and networks like FLN.

Click- [here](#)- for Youtube link to full talk or find FLN channel on You Tube

Other FLN News



FLN's policies: Click this [link](#) to see the first draft of FLN policies. These are some guidelines for FLN as an organisation and will keep growing as FLN grows. For now please write to madhumita.rajan@gmail.com with feedback and comments.

Monthly reflections: We have begun a practice on the FLN whatsapp group to spend sometime, every first Sunday of the month to reflect on some of our core FLN values. We feel that this time helps us come together as a community and reminds us of why we do what we do and what our core motivators are. Please join in every month and please talk about whatever is on your mind.



Just a Question



What is my library's responsibility in communicating my libraries vision, mission, ambition and politics to my library members, to the community and to the world at large

Does my library have a responsibility to garner support for a movement that calls for free and inclusive libraries?

FLN in Spotlight

In this issue, in place of library profiles we hear from some FLN members about FLN's programs and outreach activities.

BooksForAll Program: FLN's 'Books For All' (BFA) Program (spearheaded by Kutumb Foundation and TCLP) sends free books at zero cost to FLN member-libraries. Since 2019, this program has sent over 28,000 books to over 151 libraries. Vipin Chauhan took control of the Books For All program in 2020 and in 22-23 alone 17,000 books have reached 69 libraries. Vipin, a TCLP library member since childhood (also a student council member in 2017) was one of the first volunteers/members of The Community Library Network (TCLN) which later turned into Free Libraries Network. He manages the day to day of the BooksForAll Program along with all the strategizing, sourcing, storing, dispatch, maintaining of inventory and dispatch records.



Conversation with Vipin Chauhan

Where do books for the Books For All program come from?

V: FLN leverages its relationships with publishers and individual book donors to build a collection of high quality books. One year we received from the organizers all the books that were winners of JCB literature awards. Recently Scholastic Asia Team donated over 2000 excellent children's titles as part of their program connecting educators with community libraries. We have received good set of books from Hind Pocket Book and Penguin Random House. I also purchase books. As FLN we have negotiated excellent discounts with many publishers. For a full list of FLN compact signatories which includes over 26 publishers and 75 authors, illustrators etc., please email me. Publishers like Tulika Ekalavya and HarperCollins India have been very supportive- both in donating books and generous discounts, but also in showing solidarity with the movement. There are many other publishers also who offer discounts not only to the BooksForAll program, but to any FLN library member as well. Sometimes, we also identify new publishers (currently not compact signatories) and place orders to fill a specific need. For example, with help of FLN members, I curated a set of books for legal literacy in Hindi and English and purchased them from ISI for BFA



How do FLN Library members get books?

V: Every FLN library member can send me a request for books. They should write to booksforallfn@gmail.com with this filled out [google form](#). Then I will put together a box of 80-100 books. The books are curated based on average reader age, language, theme etc. Sometimes books are readily available from the inventory. Other times, I create a list and purchase the books from publishers and independent booksellers after negotiating rates. Still, the libraries don't always get exactly what they want. Sometimes, books are just not available or too expensive or published but out of stock. Storage space for the BooksForAll Program is also limited, so I buy only few very popular titles. Rest of the space is used for books received through donations from individuals and publishers. Books are typically sent by India post and FLN bears the cost for posting, for the space, for purchase of books, for packing etc.

Are there any books that FLN BooksForAll Program will not send?

V: There are no such "out of bounds" books. Personally I am a fiction/ literature lover and in these days when textbooks are being censored, I feel literature holds timeless truths. The BooksForAll Program does not stock or send study material, books for competitive exams etc. They get out of date very fast and it is not practical for me to stock it or purchase it. Besides this we may not be able to purchase very expensive board books or books in a specific language, though we are willing to initiate dialogues with publishers if enough FLN member libraries need a certain kind of book.

When is the BooksforAll Program busiest?

V: Always. I usually have 4-5 requests from libraries per month. In March there is usually a sharp rise upto 9-10. When I post in the Whatsapp group there is a spike. Maybe there will be one after this newsletter. Whenever any workshop is organised, I get busy. I create curated lists based on the workshop theme and arrange for it to be sent to workshop session both for use during presentation and also usually every workshop participant gets a curated book bundle to take back to their library.

Which FLN members qualify for books?

V: All FLN members. First priority is for those requesting books for the first time. Second to libraries in remote areas and libraries in rural areas. Third to special interest groups - groups that face multiple exclusions, like child care institutions, prisons etc. Almost 90% of FLN library members have received books from this program.



Why BooksForAll?

V: The point of this program is only to highlight the lack of access to books. FLN is first and foremost a collective of free libraries, a network to bring together community and free libraries, an advocacy group. FLN is not a donor. The Books For All program is just a means for us to use our collective strength to acquire books directly from publishers at a discount or redistribute individual library's excesses. We use this program to speak to publishers about locations and populations that do not have access to books. We use this program to educate ourselves of how massive this access gap can be.

What is your favourite part of BFA?

V: I like speaking to libraries, understanding their needs, and learning more about our FLN members. I have just rolled out a feedback program where I will be calling all libraries that have received books under this program and understand how the books met their needs and get feedback to improve the program.

What is the most irritating thing about this program?

V: I get irritated when I receive books in bad condition from donors- torn or completely out of date or with scribble marks all over them etc. I can still salvage most books, but I don't like the attitude that "free books" means books of any quality. We all deserve access to good high quality books.

What should FLN Libraries do to benefit from BFA program?

V: Please email me or call me. Please use the [google form](#) to requisition books. Once you have received books, please send a letter or email acknowledging it with three photos - of the box received at your library, of the books with the "Books For All stamp" pictures of children reading the book and name of library clearly visible.

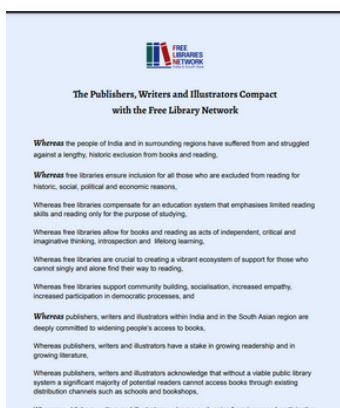
Publishers Compact: The Publishers, Writers and Illustrators Compact is an agreement between FLN and the signatories. It lays out a vision and roadmap for Publishers, Authors, illustrators and those involved in bookmaking (and distribution and selling) to be part of the Free Library Movement. This compact is available here- <https://www.fln.org.in/fln-advocacy/>. Mridula Koshy (from The Community Library Project), writer, free library movement activist who has inspired and mentored many of our current FLN Member Libraries spearheads activity relating to the Compact.



Conversation with Mridula Koshy

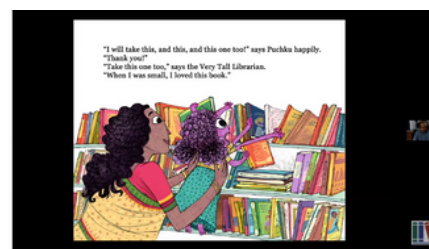
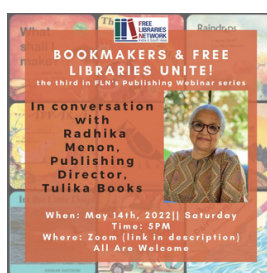
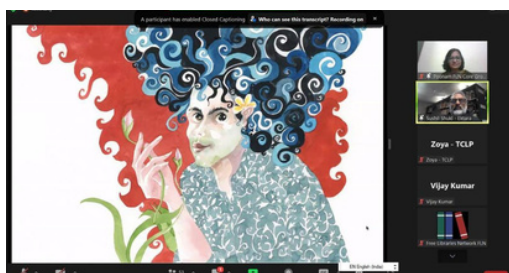
What is the Compact?

M: Publishers, authors, illustrators, and all those involved in creating books are very closely linked to Free Libraries. All content creators, especially of books- seek primarily only one thing- a connection with readers, an audience, to be heard. Free Libraries provide exactly this. In addition Free Libraries are inclusive and expand universes- it expands the world of readers, it creates future writers, maybe future editors, or reviewers, or bookmakers etc. Free Libraries are not only places where we read, think and engage, but as an off shoot it also creates a much richer literary landscape. The Compact itself is a document - a vision and a road map of how authors, publishers and illustrators can align themselves to support free libraries and how they can be part of this movement for free libraries. For me the Compact is a tool- a tool to organize, a tool to start conversations- conversations about transformations free libraries can bring.



What does the Compact require from Publishers, writers and illustrators?

M: The Compact requires publishers to provide free of cost books to Free Library Network, or significant discounts for FLN member libraries, or to work together to create an industry standard for "library edition prices". I believe the most important ask of the Compact is for bookmakers to acknowledge that they have a stake in the free library movement, to acknowledge that there is a historic exclusion to reading (based on class, caste, gender etc) and to acknowledge the role of free libraries in bringing into its fold excluded readers, for supplementing education system, for encouraging critical thinking and providing an avenue for life long learning and collective action. The compact simply recognizes publishers writers and illustrators genuine commitment to widen access to reading in India



FLN Publishing Webinar 2: Bijal Vaccharajani, Deepanjana Pal and Rajiv Eipe

Glimpses from some Publisher webinars with FLN- Ektara, Tulika, and Paratham

What has the response from Publishers, Writers and Illustrators been with respect to the compact?

M: Typically responses from the bookmaking community has been positive. They recognize that there is a natural partnership between libraries and bookmakers and a common aim to broaden readership. A full list of compact signatories will soon be available on the FLN website. Till such time, message on the FLN whatsapp group or write to Vipin at booksforallfln@gmail.com for updated list of compact signatories. Bringing in signatories to the compact is not without its hiccups. I attribute this mostly to the fact that our FLN committee for the compact hasn't had time to meet and focus on consistent follow ups. Other hiccups could be publishers either not having sufficient autonomy or decision making powers locally or not fully appreciating the value that free libraries can bring. However, this is a natural partnership and mostly the response is positive.

What are FLN's commitments under the compact?

M: FLN pledges to support hundreds and thousands of libraries that are free and welcome all to library membership, promote a pedagogy of reading for the pleasure of thinking, cultivate community ownership, to document, assess, analyse and practices that invite new readers, first generation readers and are successful at inviting non readers and maintain high standards for free libraries, among other things. One of the most important jobs FLN should do and can do with the support of publishers, authors and writers is advocate for an excellent public library system and infrastructure that will serve all the people of this country.

What are the practical benefits of the Compact?

M: FLN receives generous discounts on books from Publisher Signatories. Many authors and illustrators have supported FLN member libraries and we have hosted author meet and greets, book launches or other workshops. Though I find the value is elsewhere- it is in building allies. For me, the compact is an organizing tool. A tool to start conversations- about what readership means, about who creates literature, who controls reading. It is in making publishers see the role of free libraries not just in broadening readership, but also the publishing ecosystem. It makes writers, illustrators and other book making communities think about exclusions that exist- caste, gender, class etc. I see the Compact as critical in starting conversations, in finding allies, in constantly demonstrating the value and worth of a free library.

What next for the Compact?

M: While the compact has over 26 publisher signatories and 75 writer and illustrator signatories, we still need to speak to and find allies with many many more, especially publishers in the vernacular language as well as authors and illustrators. What we need is for all FLN member libraries to share with the collective their favourite publishers and relationships with local publishers that we can broaden to service the full network. We need all our member libraries examining their collections, the publishers they favour and talk to the publishers about free libraries, about what it does for a reading culture, about historical exclusions to reading and what the free library movement seeks to achieve

Publishers Compact | See the Compact in [Hindi](#) and [English](#). See publisher webinars- [here](#). For a full list of compact signatories- please watch the website. In the meantime please write to booksforall@gmail.com. To be part of the publisher outreach committee write to freelibrariesfln@gmail.com

Curriculum Committee and program: One of FLN's aims is to create a "Library Curriculum" or set of documented practices to help turn a library's core aspiration into a reality. Prachi and Rituparna have volunteered to head the Curriculum Committee for FLN. Below is a conversation with Prachi, FLN core team member, Co-director at TCLP. With a background in education, Prachi is a researcher and a "read aloud" lover

Conversation with Prachi

What is a Library Curriculum?

P: Every Library has its purpose and objective. FLN libraries have great clarity of vision- all FLN libraries just by being free recognize the role of their library in breaking down barriers to reading. All FLN libraries are bringing about some kind of social transformation and are working for a more equitable society. A Library Curriculum is tool to recognize (and name) your library's vision, its politics, its aspiration and then translate this to your library's practices, programs, your libraries staffing policy, your library's outreach program etc. Some elements of a curriculum are - programs, structures, processes but it is more than that. For example- "Read Alouds" can be one element/ one tool of a curriculum. That they exist is a function of the curriculum recognizing that reading does not come naturally to all. The curriculum should also provide guidance for questions like - how often should there be read alouds? This means the curriculum takes into account the effect of access and exposure. The curriculum can also help provide answers to questions like =What kind of books will be read? Will there be real alouds on specific themes? Who will do the read alouds? What will the relationship between the person doing the read aloud and listener be? How to create space and training for member to member read aloud?



What is the role of FLN's Curriculum Committee?

P: FLN member libraries are developing some new and innovative library practices that arose out of challenges faced in their communities. Besides this, many FLN libraries have adopted common practices, which naturally flow from the decision to be "free libraries". One of the things I want to do is observe the new library practices developed- be it in curating books, how books are shelved, under what categories, what kind of special programs are being developed to put first generation readers at ease etc. I want FLN libraries to identify these practices that they have developed and document them. The curriculum committee wants to encourage dialogues between FLN libraries and I hope in these dialogues we will be able to identify why we do certain things and how they connect with the overall mission of reducing barriers, and reducing inequalities. Secondly, through this dialogue between libraries and users of libraries, the curriculum committee is also trying to break down existing hierarchies which value certain people/start as "curriculum creators or knowledge creators". We want to create a new form of knowledge creation that is participative.



Can you elaborate with some practical examples?

P: We recently had a workshop in Assam - on creating Feminist libraries. In this workshop the Curriculum Committee was an active participant, but we were not teaching anything or providing a training. Our role was to set up a platform for free libraries to jointly reflect and share ideas on what a Feminist Library Curriculum could be. We created a policy on inclusion, we curated books that further the conversation on feminism. We fashioned programs in which those books could be used- one was a reading circle program, another was a theatre based program. The idea being that participative theatre can break down the hierarchies between creator and consumer. This is what a curriculum should do- it should be created jointly and it should help a library devise programs, devise its structure as an organisation, decide who will be owners/ decision makers etc.

What is the first task of the Curriculum Committee?

P: Conversations. First we want to observe many of the practices in FLN libraries, ask FLN members to study their programs and library practices that developed and see how it relates to the libraries vision. We want to document many of these practices. This will really show our collective strength. This is the true value we can bring as a network. For example: Chetana Trust, an FLN member that operates in Chennai, - has developed some extremely simple, cost effective solutions that makes the library welcoming to those with disabilities. These include simple actions like outlining the pictures in illustrated books with fevicol, so the pictures can be felt by touch. This is only one example. Please look at their website to find more such simple actionable steps almost all FLN libraries can take right away. Documenting these practices along with other such innovative solutions from FLN libraries and making them a freely usable resources is a real value that the Network can bring to library movement and library practices.

How can we support the Curriculum Committee in its work?

P: From librarians, we need more conversations - around practices developed- how these practices make some vision of the library. A reflection to see the common thread between different library practices, be it book circulation, or read aloud, or games time or arts and crafts activity. There is a common thread usually- which has to do with the library acting as a welcoming space for all and actively having programs designed to reach those who otherwise have some kind of barrier to reading. So we would like librarians to document these practices, while naming how they link to the library's vision and use this to inform their future programs. We also need different kinds of support from other stakeholders. For example, we do need help from publishers to help us fill the content gap that exists. For example, many FLN libraries struggle to find books that reflect the lived reality of their members. Almost all of us have a great demand for books in the vernacular language. Other stakeholders have different kinds of ways to support this mission of the Curriculum Committee. I think the work of this committee is valuable because it's a demonstration of ideas that can and do work.

Book Nook

FLN Recommends

FLN Working Group's favourite books- across age group, across genres, and languages

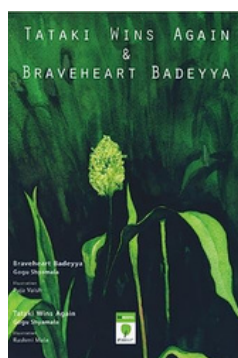
Vipin Chauhan's (BFA) Pick



Paro Ki Kahani by Sadhra Mehendi published by Katha

Here is a story of a woman/girl - Paro who wants to live life on her terms and do as she pleases and the many barriers she has to overcome to achieve this universal human right

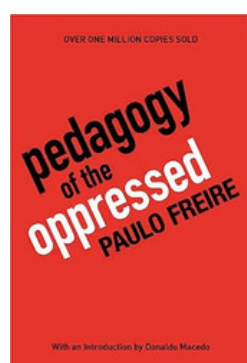
Mridula Koshy's (TCLP) Pick



Tataki wins again by Goglu Shyamala, published by DC Booka and Ekalavya

In this short story, Gogu Shyamala tells of 12 year old Balamma who is is brave enough to do so before the water can be diverted to the Karnam's fields. When everyday acts become acts of defiance, will Balamma be able to stand up to the Karnam?

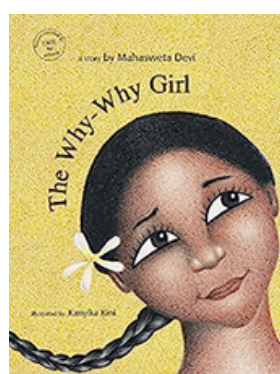
Prachis (TCLP) Pick



Pedagogy of the Oppressed by Paulo Freire

Published first in Portuguese, the methodology in this book has helped to empower countless impoverished and illiterate people throughout the world

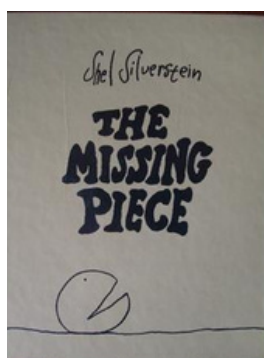
Rituparna's (Project Kitape Katha Koi) pick



The Why Why Girl by Mahashveta Devi, illustrated by Kanyikakini, published by Tulika

Published in many languages, this favourite children's book - a tribute to Moyna, from a tribal village, whose curiosity and courage to question gets her nickname "the Why Why girl".

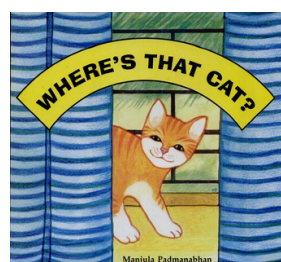
Purnima's (FLN director) pick



The Missing Piece by Shel Silverstein

A charming picture book about a circle (?) singing and rolling and looking for its missing piece. A must read book which very simply tells us that we are complete as we are.

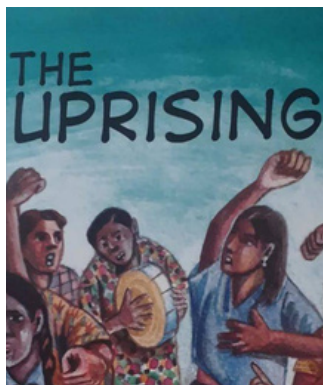
Jatin's (Bansa Library) pick



Where is the Cat by Manjula Padmanabhan by Tulika

A seemingly simple book following Minnie in her search for Pooni the cat- in a busy city street, delightfully illustrated with many details - showing us all kind of people to talk to and things to look at.

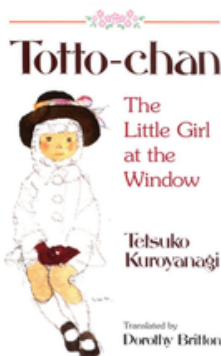
Poonam Bhonsle's (Korku Vachanalay) pick



The Uprising by Rinchin ,
Illustrator: Lokesh Khodke
published by Muskaan

In this comic, read about a group of young children go for a swim in the local pool (supposedly belonging to all) with their new teacher friend. And the uprising that follows.

Puroht Batsala's (Deepalaya) pick



Totto-Chan: The girl by the Window by Tesuko Kuroyanagi.
Illustrator: Chiciro Iwasaki

Originally published in Japanese - a semi memoir of the author's school founded and run by Headmaster Sosaku Kobayashi, who firmly believed in freedom of expression and activity and set out to create the ideal school that respects its children.

Banupriya's (Reading Space) pick



Sidewalk flowers, by Jonarno Lawson, Illustrator : Sydney Smith published by Groundwood Books

This wordless picture book is an ode to all things small- gestures, things, people. A little girl collects wildflowers around her distracted father. Each flower becomes a gift transforming both giver and receiver.

Madhumita's pick



The Wee Free Men, by Terry Prachett Published by Doubleday

Follow 9 year old Tiffany who has to rescue her little brother kidnapped the Queen of Fairies, armed with a saucepan and accompanied by the Nac Nac Freegles- a rowdy and ferocious magical tribe- only she can see