

For the young ones to have fun...

With schools closed and children forced to stay at home due to Covid-19, here are some engaging ways to keep them occupied, write *Krupa Joseph* and *Theres Sudeep*

MISSED CALL DO, KAHAANI SUNO!

Give a missed call to 08033094243 to listen to a delightful story from Pratham Books on the phone!



'Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno'

Pratham Books, in an effort to revive storytelling, has launched the second edition of their 'Missed Call Do, Kahaani Suno' campaign in collaboration with United Way India.

You don't need a smart phone or internet connection; give a missed call to 08033094243 and you will receive a call back on your phone. 300 stories are available in four languages — English, Hindi, Marathi and Kannada. A caller can listen to two stories, back-to-back, in the language of your choice. This is available 24x7. "When the same caller dials again, the system recognises the number and it picks the next two stories from the sequence," explains Himanshu Giri, chief executive officer, Pratham Books.

The stories have been carefully curated to help foster listening skills, build vocabulary, and develop an enthusiasm for reading.

They have received about one lakh calls since the campaign began on April 23. Regional languages, Himanshu says, have been the most in demand with Marathi leading the way, followed by Hindi and Kannada. They plan to keep the effort running after the lockdown ends as well.



Children engaged in various activities during the lockdown. DH PHOTOS

Ranga Shankara goes digital

Ranga Shankara's signature storytelling programme for kids, 'The Little Cloud' has gone digital, with 22 stories performed by some of the country's best theatre artistes. The first installment was premiered on YouTube between April 17 and April 28. "We had an overwhelmingly positive response. The second installment is already in the works. We've expanded it to include international artistes as well," says Gayatri Krishna, a representative of the theatre.

Stories for children were narrated in six languages namely Kannada, English, Hindi, Tamil, Bengali and sign language. Each story has been told uniquely; there are puppets, props, stories told indoors or outdoor and stories with live music.

"While Little Cloud has existed since 2008, this is the first time it has moved to the online space," says Gayatri. If not under lockdown, the theatre would be teeming now, with children participating in their summer programme.

"We believe it is important to give children good-quality content; they are the audience of tomorrow," she adds.

It is this passion combined with wanting to keep theatre artistes occupied during the lockdown that led to this venture.

The storytellers for the first edition were B Jayashri (Kannada), Ratna Pathak Shah (English), Arundhati Nag (Kannada and Eng-

lish), Revathy (Tamil and English), Sihikahi Chandru (Kannada), MD Pallavi (Kannada and English), Padmavati Rao (Hindi and English), Adishakti (English), Ajeet Singh Pawar (Hindi), Anurupa Roy (English), Darius Sunawala and Arti Punwani (English), Ipsita Chakraborty Singh (Bengali), Kavya Srinivasan (Sign Language), Kapila Venu (Kutiyattam) and Sharanya Ramprakash (English).



The most viewed story is a Kannada retelling of an African folk tale 'The Elephant's Nose' by M D Pallavi.

The videos uploaded on Ranga Shankara's YouTube channel have positive feedback from parents and children alike. Viewers were appreciative of the range of languages and the ability of the stories to capture the attention of their toddlers.

Gayatri adds that while they plan to scale up their digital presence, live theatre remains their bread and butter.

Early Bird lockdown series

Early Bird, an initiative by the Nature Conservation Foundation, aims to get young people interested in birdwatching. "Birds are the quickest way to connect with nature because they are everywhere. By building an interest in birds, we are hoping we will be able to build an interest in nature," says Garima Bhatia, project manager.

To this end, they have developed educational material such as flashcards and pocket guides, and also conduct training programmes for teachers, eco clubs and bird-watcher communities.

"With the lockdown, people are starting to take an interest in nature. With the reduction in traffic, people can hear bird calls and can see them in larger numbers. We decided to make use of this," says Garima.

'The Early Bird Lockdown Talk Series' has six episodes that cover an introduction to common birds in the country, indoor games related to birds, art-based activities and even a quiz. "We make it a point to design activities that are accessible to beginners of all ages," she explains.

Aruna Bhat, who has been attending sessions with her daughter, says that the sessions are perfectly timed and crafted. "My daughter had a liking towards birds but now every morning she goes to our windows to try and identify them," she says. Conducted over Zoom, the sessions are



Early Bird digital sessions are popular among children.

broadcast via Facebook Live and later uploaded on YouTube.

They plan to conduct a session on bird behaviour and bird songs in the coming week. For more information on the same, visit them on Facebook (@earlybirdindia), Instagram (@earlybirdindia) or Twitter (@earlybirdncf).



DH PHOTOS/SK DINESH

Summer blooms, colours of hope

SHOBHA NAGNUR

Come summer and cities and countryside burst into a riot of colours. Not finding better words than D V Cowen, the author of *Flowering Trees and Shrubs in India*, I quote: "Every year from March to May, when the air is at its hottest, the ground is parched and cracked, and a film of dust covers every leaf and branch, one watches in awe that miracle of nature which brings forth from the branches of so many trees such an extravagant abundance of colourful blossoms and clean, polished foliage. From where, one asks, do these trees get sufficient moisture when no rain has fallen for months. The bright new leaves alone would be a happy sight and one's eyes with the incessant glare of an Indian summer gladly rest on them, but with blossoms of every hue as well, it is impossible to be unaware of the galaxy of colours. It is at this time of the year that so many people feel the urge to know more about the trees they live amongst."



The city planners have luckily, for the inhabitants, taken care to sublimate the harshness of the urban concrete by creating avenues of verdant trees that not only give shade but also bear flowers. Come March, it's springtime, when nature is ready to let these trees show off themselves in full bloom, alluring the human senses.

Alas! This year, the fate of these trees is akin to those that flower, only to bluish unsee.

in everyone's life these days, but it is a barren time. On the other hand, less human intervention has helped nature, people say. Birds are chirping, butterflies are flying freely, adding colour and vibrance to nature.

Very few, however, have a chance to stand and gaze upon the charmingly shaped and attractively coloured flowers that bathe the boughs, and the life around them.

Anyone who has come out is mostly out on some errand like

buying grocery, and is only waiting to hurry back to the safety of their home.

But the truth is that the beautiful creations of nature remain undaunted by Covid-19, continuing their march of life in full glory. These flowers and trees seem to be teaching man the true meaning of life by saying, "I do my job. It does not matter whether I am rewarded for it."

There are some lucky ones still, even during these days of social distancing. They have the luxury of enjoying the beautiful blossoms from the safety of their balconies and terraces, or a peep through the windows.

What about the majority who are packed in the narrow-laned houses and hidden flats? Luckily, not all windows are closed. As they say, if one closes, another opens.

Reading about the city blooms may be one such opening, that lets the readers travel with the writer, and walk down the memory lane, to that normal summer of the year just gone by.

FEEDBACK

Send your ideas and comments to: spectrum@deccanherald.co.in or Spectrum, c/o Deccan Herald #75, M G Road, Bengaluru-560001

Lockdown time made purposeful

SHRUTHI SRINATH

Three young men from Belthangady taluk in Dakshina Kannada used their lockdown time to tackle a problem older than the coronavirus pandemic: pollution.

A few days into the lockdown, the trio of Avinash Bhide, Vrishanth Khadikar and Purujith Bhide set out towards River Kapila — a tributary of the Netravathi — that flows through Arasinamakki village first and then Shishila village, in close proximity to the Western Ghats.

They started picking up the litter along the road parallel to the river, on the river bank, and then from the waters.

At the end of the clean-up, "We had collected eight sacks of - or about 500 - beer bottles and cans, five sacks of plastic waste, and also chicken waste," said Avinash, a farmer and an electrician from Arasinamakki.

"This cleaning would have happened anyway, but on a weekend, because we are all busy on other days. The lockdown got us together sooner. It's our little contribution as citizens. As for the social distancing, we maintained it. It was localised, and we did not invite anyone from outside for the clean-up," he said.

Vrishanth is an editor based out of Dharmasthala and Purujith is a student pursuing MBA, and their friendship of 10 years has seen many clean-ups in and around the Western Ghats.

"The trash keeps coming back," rued Avinash and painted the bigger picture, "Kapila has a catchment area of about 200 sq km and the water inflow capacity sometime back was 3,000 cusecs, during rainy season, so during summer,



Avinash Bhide, Vrishanth Khadikar, Purujith Bhide cleaned up the riverside and collected 10 sacs of beer bottles and eight sacs of plastic waste.

it's at least 500 cusecs! And the major irritant at Arasinamakki is people washing their vehicles. This leaves a film of oil and grease on water. There is also dumping of chicken waste. The same water goes to a village," recalled Avinash.

Shashikala, Arasinamakki Gram Panchayat President, said, "We have a flex declaring that all activities that pollute the river are banned, and people will be fined if they do so."



Trash littered near the bank of River Kapila.