

Parag Honour List 2020

A curated collection of
outstanding books in English
and Hindi for children
and young adults



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AN INITIATIVE OF
TATA TRUSTS



Parag Honour List 2020

A curated collection of outstanding books in English and Hindi for children and young adults by Parag Initiative of Tata Trusts. This list, published annually, comprises noteworthy books of the year with brief information about each title. It has been created with careful screening and multiple reviews by experts in the children's literature sector. The list aims to promote access to a comprehensive, curated list of good quality children's literature that librarians, teachers, parents, and children can refer to and read.

As per this year's criteria, we received original writings in the category of picture books, young readers and young adults, both in fiction, non-fiction and poetry, from 26 Indian publishers that were published between October 2018 to September 2019.

We hope this list will enable a wider readership to some of the best Indian children's books!

FICTION

Picture Book



Behind the Lie

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2018

Author Asha Nehemiah
Illustrator Aindri Chakraborty

This looks like a picture book but behind the cover is a mighty important theme. Asha Nehemiah has touched upon domestic abuse in a moving and direct manner. Aindri Chakraborty too enters into this theme with chilling pictures. And yet, the story is written with hope even though there might not be a final solution. That too is real. Teachers, librarians and parents must help the young reader navigate this book with care.



I didn't Understand

Publisher: Tulika
Published in 2018

Author Mini Shrinivasan
Illustrator Shubham Lakhera

You may not understand why the child on the front cover of this warm, loving book animated by pictures that are now small, now large, now really up close, touching your nose. Timira Gupta's simple text finds the perfect balance in Rajiv Eipe's dramatic illustrations in earth tones that will resonate with anyone who has ever taken a little one on a walk.



Lila's loose Tooth

Publisher: Tulika
Published in 2019

Author Mamta Nainy
Illustrator Habib Ali

This sweet, simple, utterly believable story has a denouement that is breathtaking in its ingenuity. Author Mamta Nainy's little Lila and her heart-felt dilemma are vividly visualized by illustrator Habib Ali. This familiar and funny and tender picture book will resonate with readers of all ages.



Machher Jhol

Publisher: Pickle Yolk
Published in 2018

Author Richa Jha
Illustrator Sumanta Dey

The murky and slightly mysterious illustrations draw you into young Gopu's hazardous journey across a bustling city. Only at the end do you realise why his journey is made up of sounds, smells and precisely measured steps.

FICTION

Picture Book



Nani's Walk to the Park

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2018

Author Deepa Balsavar
Illustrator Deepa Balsavar

On her way to the park, Nani has many little detours, that take her little grandson and us on a fascinating journey through city spaces teeming with activity, people and colour. The 'big book' format perfectly suits the detailed and charming illustrations. Author and Illustrator Deepa Balsavar's detailed illustrations have potential for much discussion and sharing of experiences.



Pishi and Me

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2019

Author Timira Gupta
Illustrator Rajiv Eipe

Pictures and words do a slow dance in this warm, loving book animated by pictures that are now small, now large, now really up close, touching your nose. Timira Gupta's simple text finds the perfect balance in Rajiv Eipe's dramatic illustrations in earth tones that will resonate with anyone who has ever taken a little one on a walk.



Snip

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2019

Author Canato Jimo
Illustrator Canato Jimo

Canato Jimo's wordless picture book will leave you feeling utterly enchanted and filled with joy following the antics of two little ones who lay their hands on a pair of scissors. True, we must never leave scissors around for little hands to find, but what happens in the pages of this book will only bring a smile to your face, and another, and another.



The Runaway Peacock

Publisher: Tulika
Published in 2019

Author Niyatee Sharma
Illustrator Shailja Jain Chougule

As you follow the peacock's adventurous journey, your eyes linger over the details in Shailja Jain Chougule's cheerful illustrations that beautifully balance Niyatee Sharma's story. Although the idea is not entirely new, the telling draws in readers by taking them into confidence.

FICTION

Picture Book



The Village with a Long Name

Publisher: Children's Book Trust
Published in 2019

Author Asha Nehemiah
Illustrator Suvridha Mistry

A fun and funny picture book full of endearing characters from a unique village that thinks it has a problem, and tries to solve it, with hilarious results.



Welcome to the Forest

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2019

Author Bhavna Menon
Illustrator Kavita Singh Kale

A forest walk is the most wondrous experience for every child and that is how Tulsa and her friends feel when they are invited for a special walk with caring forest officials to steer them around. They touch, feel, smell, listen to, and get to know so many creatures. The illustrations are rich and respectful with colour. At the end you hear this is a true story and you feel enriched by this experience too.

NON FICTION

Picture Book



Anna's Extraordinary Experiments with Weather

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2018

Author Nandita Jayaraj
Illustrator Priya Kuriyan

Nandita Jayaraj has captured the very essence of the scientific temper through her charming and informative story of scientist Anna Mani among other things, for her work with weather. Written with a light touch and a sense of wonder that's captured so movingly in Priya Kuriyan's illustrations, the book is a much-needed yet rare treasure in the basket of science writing for children.



Critters Around Our Homes

Publisher: Kalpavriksh
Published in 2018

Author Sanjay Sondhi
Illustrator Sushma Durve

Spectacular illustrations add to the charm of this simple book about the creepy-crawlies that surround us in our urban homes. Through a very personalised account, the writer gives us just enough information to keep us engaged and curious.

NON FICTION

Picture Book



The Poop Book

Publisher: Kalpavriksh
Published in 2018

Author Tejaswini Apte-Rahm and Sujatha Padmanabhan
Illustrator Priya Kuriyan

Children's favourite joke subject makes for a funny and very informative book about the variety of ways in which animal excreta is produced and used by a variety of creatures, from caterpillars to hippos. The puns add to the fun.



Tine and the Faraway Mountain

Publisher: Pratham Books
Published in 2019

Author Shikha Tripathi
Illustrator Ogin Nayam

The short bios on the inside back cover of the book reveal that both writer Shikha Tripathi and illustrator Ogin Nayam are daydreamers. Together they have recreated the real story of young Tine Mena who worked with determination to make her dream of climbing mountains come true. Even as the story salutes Tine's achievements, it touches your heart. It will inspire anyone who reads it, anytime.

NON FICTION

Picture Book



FICTION

Young Reader



Humongoose Family

Publisher: Tulika
Published in 2019

Author Zai Whitaker
Illustrator Niloufer Wadia

The story and the language both flow effortlessly. Zai's relationship with the animal world and her lightness of touch make this book a sure hit for young readers. The Mongoose characters are well rounded and the distinctive illustrations by Niloufer bring them to life. The episode with Raja, the old tracker mongoose had a 12 year old reader in gales of laughter. An enjoyable read.



Fourth Friend

Publisher: National Book Trust
Published in 2019

Author Manoj Das
Illustrator Sisir Dutta

This is a story every young child must read. It has a quality of tenderness and affection between the four friends which is spontaneous and unforced. Just when you begin to think it is a fanciful tale and hardly believable, Manoj Das brings the reader back into the realm of reality with a deft touch. Sisir Dutta's illustrations are extraordinary in their ability to put the reader right in the middle of the adventure.



Ghost Stories/Adventure Stories Flipped

Publisher: HarperCollins Children's Books
Published in 2019

Author Various Authors
Illustrator Shamika Chaves

Two for the price of one! Who can resist a bargain like that? Fortunately though, the selection of the pieces is uniformly good. There is a dearth of good short story collections in the Indian market so this flipped book is a welcome entrant to children's literature. Look out not only for the familiar authors but the new ones too. They are good!



Owlet Not Out

Publisher: Talking Cub by Speaking Tiger
Published in 2018

Author Ranjit Lal

A 16 year old pudgy boy might seem like an unlikely hero. But Ritesh, alias Tubby, endears himself to us through his reluctant but growing attraction to a girl wrestler in his class, his care for an owlet, and for his batting prowess on the cricket field. With never a dull moment in his life or in the story, young adult readers of 15 and above will relate to this book and to the satisfactory ending!

Young Reader



Pops!

Publisher: Duckbill Books
Published in 2019

Author Balaji Venkataramanan
Illustrator Twigg

A young boy's attempts to reconcile his image of his estranged father with the rather less wonderful man who actually turns up in his life. A funny and loving look at families and how they learn to live, together or not.



The Wind on the Haunted Hill

Publisher: Penguin Books by Penguin Random House India

Author Ruskin Bond
Illustrator Jit Chowdhury

Children never seem to tire of hearing ghost stories. Here is one by the master story teller about three children who live near an abandoned and "haunted" village. The story is neither ghoulish nor is it gory but with help from the natural elements, Ruskin Bond weaves a tale and believable genre with just enough chills to satisfy the young reader. The illustrations evoke the place and the atmosphere sensitively.

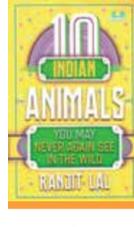


Walking is a Way of Knowing

Publisher: Tara Books
Published in 2018

Author Madhuri Ramesh & Manish Chandi
Illustrator Matthew Frame

A gentle, evocative book about the wonders that hide in the forest and the wise people who live there, this is a book for all ages – a lilting read-aloud for small children, and a fascinating and wondrous experience for older readers. The book invites readers to look at the world with an open mind and an equally open heart.



10 Indian Animals

Publisher: Duckbill Books
Published in 2019

Author Ranjit Lal

Ranjit Lal is at ease with writing both fiction and nonfiction. He is able to blend elements of one into the other with good effect. In this book, we are made aware not only about the precarious existence of the ten creatures he highlights, but also about the man-made reasons behind this unfortunate situation. His light touch ensures that this book will be read by all ages from 8 up.

Young Reader

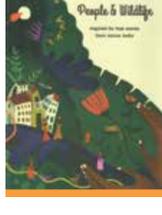


A Dozen and a 1/2 Stories

Publisher: Rupa Publications
Published in 2019

Author Arthy Muthanna Singh and Mamta Nainy
Illustrator Mistunee Chowdhury

History never had it so good as the present time and this collection is a testament to that. The bonus is that this book of stories from history come with several hints of mystery. Easy to read and often eliciting a chuckle, historical information relating to subjects such as unexpected finds in rock shelters, the fate of Shah Jahan's peacock throne, or Rabindranath Tagore's missing Nobel medal, are presented with precision and panache.



People & Wildlife

Publisher: Kalpavriksh
Published in 2018

Author Various Authors
Illustrator Nayantara Surendranath

These are true stories of forest life and nature. The writers are all nature lovers who have worked in conservation but none of them have an activist tone to them! The stories are gentle, the characters thoughtful and the situations are genuine. Every reader, young and old will respond to these stories in the same spirit. A must have for every library and surely interesting questions and discussions will come up.



Young Adult



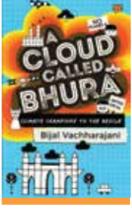
A Week Along the Ganga

Publisher: Eklavya
Published in 2018

Author Bharati Jagannathan
Photographs Bharati Jagannathan, Harish Dhawan and Medha Grover
Designer & Illustrator Ishita Debnath Biswas

A motley group of travellers, family and friends, sets out for a week's trek along the Ganga river. As the journey progresses, many truths are revealed in a gentle but firm manner. These two strands – the enduring yet fragile aspect of both nature and of human relationship are handled sensitively by the author. It is an affectionate and realistic picture of life as many of us know it. Look for the ending!

Young Adult



A Cloud Called Bhura

Publisher: Talking Cub by Speaking Tiger
Published in 2019

Author Bijal Vachharajani
Illustrator Aindri C.

Truly a book for our polluted times. Research, imagination, and a whole lot of love has gone into this effort to shake readers out of their apathy to the deteriorating state of the environment. The fiction is serious and engaging, with a tension all its own, while facts are posted at regular intervals. Like the real Greta Thunberg, the children in this book send adults a resounding call to account.



All of Me

Publisher: HarperCollins Children's Books
Published in 2019

Author Venita Coelho
Illustrator HarperCollins Publishers India

How do you weave together history, adventure, multiple personalities, and the Kohinoor diamond without being dense and difficult? By being Venita Coelho and spinning a 273-page yarn that leaves you with the promise of a sequel! There's just one word that describes this book: unputdownable.

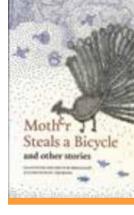


Karma Fights a Monster

Publisher: Duckbill Books
Published in 2019

Author Evan Purcell

Despite a lackluster front cover, Evan Purcell's slim paperback adventure story has all the ingredients of a juicy fantasy story, thanks to a wonderfully conjured up central character, 12-year-old Karma Tendin the monster hunter, and equally engaging partners in friendship and crime. The pace is racy to the very last line of the story, and the writing quite simply superb. You will want more and guess what, you will get it!



Mother Steals a Bicycle

Publisher: Tara Books
Published in 2018

Author Salai Selvam, Shrutu Buddhavarapu
Illustrator Tejubehan

In this collection, Amma's tales flow one into the next seamlessly – you too may fall asleep in the middle of one of them and get another one as a bonus when you wake up! The narrator's voice is earnest, and the stories paint a vivid picture of Amma's childhood. The drawings are exquisite and have a dream-like quality where one is not sure where fable ends and truth begins.

Young Adult

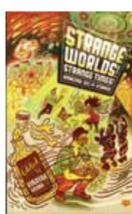


Saving the Dalai Lama's Crane

Publisher: Kalpavriksh
Published in 2018

Author Neeraj Vogholikar
Illustrator Niloufer Wadia

This is certainly a feel-good book but fortunately does not hit you on the head with a do-good message. A simple story, told from the perspective of Tenzin, a young monk, it has a good mix of adventure, encounters with the powers-that-be and beautiful descriptions of nature and animal life in Arunachal Pradesh. The illustrations are tasteful and add to the ambience of the place.



Strange Worlds! Strange Times!

Publisher: Talking Cub by Speaking Tiger
Published in 2018

Author Various Authors
Introduction, illustration & editing Vinayak Varma

A perfect introduction to science fiction for young readers, this collection ranges from JC Bose to modern writers including Jerry Pinto and Manjula Padmanabhan. With stories that challenge and fascinate, the book weaves alternative worlds and possible futures through satire, humour and though provoking situations.



Twice Upon a Time

Publisher: Puffin Books by Penguin Random House India
Published in 2019

Author Payal Kapadia
Illustrator Sandhya Prabhat

This quirky story turns the princess trope upside down, while recognising that girls are smart and feisty but may like pink dresses and shiny things too! The exciting adventure takes the reader along on a roller coaster ride, leaving us dizzy and happy at the end.



Year of the Weeds

Publisher: Duckbill Books
Published in 2018

Author Siddhartha Sarma

An honest and insightful teenage novel about growing up in an adivasi community, being a part of its culture as well as its ominously threatened future. The young hero is in over his head in events he just about understands, where the peaceful world of the Gonds clashes with the greed of the commercial world outside.

Jury Speaks

Mini Shrinivasan

Mini Shrinivasan is an educationist, teacher educator and children's writer based in Pune. Her books have won the Sahitya Akademi's Bal Sahitya Puraskar and the Hindu Young World Goodbooks Award. She enjoys children, travelling and reading, and tries to draw and paint, with varying degrees of success.

“For me, the authenticity in the voice is the most important element. Whether it is a realistic story, a fantasy, or non-fiction, if the writer is writing from a personal passion, personal felt emotion or experience, that shines through. Otherwise the book becomes either preachy, or forced in some way. The other thing I am very passionate about is good language, pleasing cadences and rhythms, certainly in poems but even in prose, so that the book delights the ear when read aloud.

And finally, illustrations that are artistic and add to the story rather than just decorate it.

Sandhya Rao

Sandhya Rao worked for many years in mainstream print media as an editor and writer before she seamlessly slipped into the world of children's publishing. She is the author of several books and has translated Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Långstrump into Hindi. Based in Chennai, she works freelance and enjoys the challenge of new discoveries. She believes that when we share food and stories, we give ourselves a better chance.

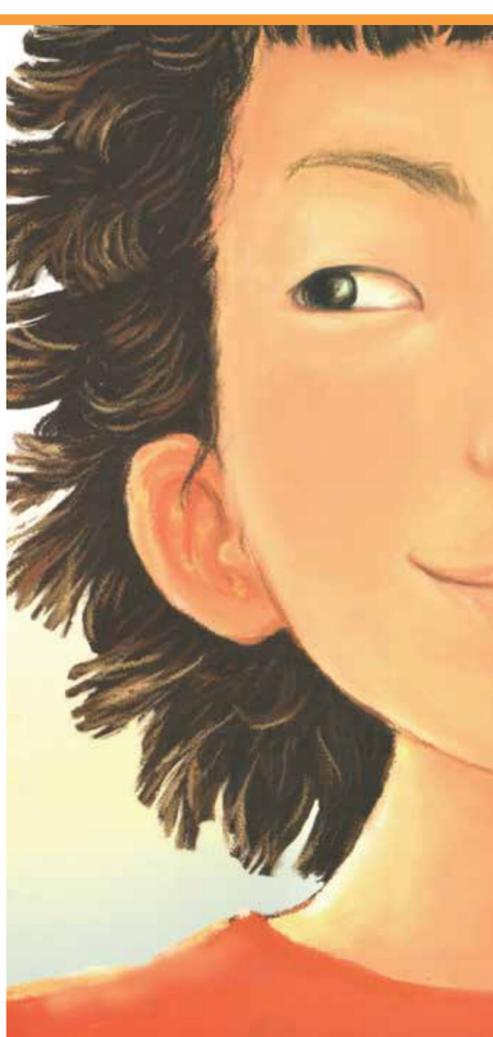
“It's not so much what I look for but what I find in it: people, events, ideas and emotions, real or imagined, that are true to the world created by the writer (along with the illustrator, sometimes) and that touch and transform the reader in some way.

Jury Speaks

Usha Mukunda

Usha Mukunda is a passionate advocate of conversations around books with children and young adults. She has been happily engaged in such interactions for 35 years. She is also deeply interested in learning about, and sharing the nuances of good literature for children. Usha is a well known children's librarian who has set up and run many school libraries. She is founding faculty of Parag's Library Educators Course. Her greatest wish is to enable discernment of good books in herself, and in readers wherever they may abide.

“A fresh idea treated with sensitivity and integrity, in language that invites readers Art work and illustrations that fill the reader with wonder and delight An effortless ability to be one with the reader - a child, young adult or the young-at-heart, through a journey made up of both fun and reflection. Opening windows for the reader to look at the inner world as well as the outer world. A book that endures and is treasured. For nonfiction, I would add: Clarity, accuracy, currency. An appealing approach to draw readers in to think and want to know more.





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Parag Initiative of Tata Trusts is driven by a belief in the transformative power of reading, working to ensure that children across India can appreciate and enjoy reading, especially in diverse languages. Parag's three pronged model for sourcing, publishing and disseminating children's literature has catalysed the children's literature, reading and literacy ecosystem towards encouraging joyful reading among children and youth.



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