



Susheela's Kolum at Chirag School

Story telling session on the occasion of 'International Literacy Day'

There are few sights more encouraging to the heart of an educationist than that of a child thoroughly enchanted by a book. When we first heard about **Pratham Books Champs** we absolutely adored the idea. What better way to celebrate 'World Literacy Day' than by reading books along with thousands of children across the country we thought. Chirag School, located in village Simayal in Nainital district-



Story telling session in progress

Uttarakhand, has a well stocked library where the books are carefully handpicked to entertain and educate. The school's pedagogy revolves around narratives as we try and instil curiosity about the world in the children through stories and pictures. Our enthusiasm about PB Champs was dampened, however, when we realized that 8th September coincided with the second Saturday of the month, which is a designated holiday for the children. Nobody likes a revoked holiday, none more so than young children! Did we really want to brave the wrath of the little ones when they found out that they would have to wake up early and spend half of their day in classrooms when they could have been sleeping in late and playing in the sun? However, after much deliberation we decided to bite the bullet and keep the school open on Saturday. Susheela's Kolam (the book that was selected this year) was a lovely account of a little girl who lives in Tamil Nadu and loves to draw Kolams. The story was beautifully illustrated with colourful pictures and even though the story was set far away from Kumaon we felt that the children would be able to relate to Susheela and through her learn something more about another part of the country.

On 8th morning, children walked in brimming with excitement, eager to know why they were in school without their normal textbooks. We kicked off the programme with a music lesson where the children sang a slightly off key rendition of 'The Lion Sings Tonight' and some of them even managed to get impromptu guitar lessons. The assembly then broke up into smaller groups so that the children could listen to 'Susheela's Kolam' in Hindi (for the younger children) and English (for the older children). The book served as a lead into further



Helping others read



reading of stories from different parts of the country and the world. The children read folk tales from Kashmir, Turkey, Rajasthan, West Bengal, Uttarakhand and Gujarat to each other and learnt a little more about the world. However, the thing that was for us most remarkable and heartening was to see the older children encourage the younger ones to read better and speak up.



Not quite Kolams: Pre-schoolers try their hand at making patterns with coloured Styrofoam cutouts

In Kumaon Aipan (another name for Rangoli in this part of the country) is traditionally made outside homes on special occasions and festivals. Susheela's story inspired the children at Chirag School to try their hand at making Kolams. The Kolams drawn on the last page (Pages 10 & 11) of the book depicts how these patterns can be made anytime, anywhere. All one needs are a few dots and a little imagination to come with intricate patterns. Next year we hope we can execute this event on a larger scale and incorporate more opportunities for exchange of ideas and foster creativity.

8th September is celebrated as International Literacy Day each year. Special thanks to Pratham Books, a not-for-profit publisher, that envisions a country 'where every child wants to read, is able to read, and has something good to read' for organizing reading sessions across the country.