



Discussion Guide for *Saraswati's Way*

by Monika Schröder

Reviews and Recognition

"This rare combination of math and culture is a boon for discussions and makes this stand out."

Kirkus Reviews

"With skillfully integrated cultural details (further explained in an appended glossary and author's note) and a fully realized child's story, Schröder presents a view, sobering and inspiring, of remarkably resilient young people surviving poverty without losing themselves."

Booklist

"Akash is an appealing hero for this urban survival story, driving the tale through dangerous situations and unlikely comrades to a happy conclusion."

Horn Book

CCBC Choice 2010 (Univ. of WI)

NCSS Notable Social Studies Tradebook for Young People

A Bank Street College - Best Children's Book of the Year

2010 SCBWI Crystal Kite Award for Asia/India/Middle East

About the Book

12-year old Akash from the northern India state of Rajasthan, loves math. In order to develop his gift for numbers Akash wants to go to a good school in the city. But Akash's family is poor and doesn't understand his longing for learning. He prays to the Hindu gods Ganesh and Saraswati for help. When circumstances become so dire that his dream seems forever unattainable he runs away and jumps on a train. He ends up in the New Delhi train station, where he joins a gang of street kids who scavenge trains for food and earn a few rupees selling empty water bottles until he finds the support of a kind bookstall owner to realize his dream.

Saraswati's Way

Frances Foster Books/Farrar Straus Giroux

ISBN: 978-0-374-36411-3

ages 10 and up

Monika Schröder
Children's Author

Discussion Questions

At the beginning of the novel we learn about Akash's village, school and family. Of course, many elements of the setting are different from yours, but how is your world similar to his?

Discuss the meanings of the different rituals Akash's family follows after Bapu's death described in chapters 6 to 9. What do they tell us about Hindus' attitude toward death?

Have you ever wanted something so badly that you would have done anything to get it? What was it that you wanted? How does your wish compare to Akash's?

Akash's family owes the landowner money and can't pay back their debt after the bad harvest. What do you think happened to his family after he ran away from the mine?

Why did Akash not try to convince Anant to run away from the quarry with him? Was this the right decision?

Akash shows a lot of courage in the story. What do you think is his most courageous act? Why?

Akash prays to the Hindu gods, Ganesh and Saraswati. How is his form of worship different from your own? How is it similar?

In Chapter 21, Akash explains the "vertically and crosswise" rule of Vedic math to Rohit. Can you find the product of two numbers by using this rule? Why does Ramesh, the book stall owner, decide to help Akash?

The boys at the train station ask Akash to come to see a movie with them, but he does not want to join them. Read the end of chapter 27 (p.133). Why does Akash think that he "couldn't" be with them?

Akash decides to deal drugs like Rohit. What happens to Akash while he sells the packages? How does he feel?

In chapter 42 the sadhu says to Akash, "You can't hurry the gods." What does he mean?

How does the title "Saraswati's Way" relate to the story?



Imagine a sequel to the book. What might happen when Akash finally goes to school? How might his friendship with Manish develop?

Extension Activities:

Similes/Metaphors:

Many of the similes or metaphors in the novel use images that are unique to the setting in India, like the one on page 19, "her words shot through the fabric like a camel's spit." Collect three other similes or metaphors from the novel and re-write them using images from your own culture.

Learn more about Child labour in India

Read the author's note at the end of the book. Find out more about the problem of child labor in India. Why do so many children in India under 14 have to work? What could be done to solve the problem? Create a poster or brochure with the facts and suggestions for solutions.

Organise A Fundraiser

There are several non-governmental organizations helping street kids like Akash. Here are a few examples:

<http://www.salaambalaktrust.com/>

<http://www.deepalaya.org/>

<http://www.bba.org.in/indexmain.php>

Go to the websites of and learn more about their work. Organize a fundraiser to help them help children.



About the Author

Monika Schröder grew up in Germany and has worked as an elementary school teacher and librarian in American international schools in Egypt, Oman, Chile, and India. She now lives in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina with her husband and their dog, Frank.

Also by Monika Schröder:

The Dog in the Wood, Front Street, ©2009.

My Brother's Shadow, Frances Foster Books/ Farrar Straus Giroux, ©2011

This guide was prepared by Monika Schröder.



Recommended Books about India and Child Labor:

Jani, Mahendra and Vandana: *What will You See Inside a Hindu Temple?*

2005. Skylight Paths Publishing.

Kalman, Bobbie: *India : The Culture*

2010. Crabtree

Khadija, Ijaz: *Recipe and Craft Guide to India*

2011. Mitchell Lane

Khadija, Ijaz: *Meet Our New Student from India*

2010. Mitchell Lane

Macmillan M. Dianne: *Diwali: Hindu Festival of Lights*

2008. Enslow Elementary

Menon, Sujatha: *Celebrating Holi : A Hindu Celebration of Spring*

2009. Wayland

Newman P. Shirley: *Child Slavery in Modern Times*

2000. Scholastic

Patel, Sanjay: *The Little Book of Hindu Deities* 2006. Plume

Sanger, Wilson Amy: *Chaat and Sweets*

2008. Tricycle Press

Schomp, Virginia: *Ancient India: Myths of the World*

2010. Marshall Cavendish

Stearman, Kaye: *Child Labor: Face the Facts*

2004. Heinemann Library

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