



WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Our culture is strong and no one book or idea or event can shake its foundations. But there are many stereotypes within our many cultures which we need to seriously look at, whether they be about people (especially women and marginalized communities) or animals. No one set of books can create stereotypes in the minds of children. But when books are compounded with mass culture images from television and cinema, in tandem with nuclear families with both parents working, and where schools are loaded with science and maths syllabi so that the basic understanding of life and relationships, and the larger issues of being human and being Indian are not properly explored in the classroom, then there is a grave danger of stereotypes being reinforced, or good and vital ideas being lost or dismissed.

SOME THINGS TO LOOK OUT FOR IN STORY AND LANGUAGE:

- Katha is looking for contemporary stories that are upbeat, ethical and fun, and that expand the child's worldview. We are not looking for stories and illustrations that are didactic or overly moral, that are preachy or that talk down to the child. As we know, all stories have a moral, and these are oftentimes stronger when they are not overt and stated.
- The story should accurately reflect the culture of the region the story is from, and a child's understanding of the culture and people should be enhanced by the book.
- The story can be in any language of India, but we do request that a rough translation be sent if the original story is not in Bangla, English, Hindi, Malayalam, Marathi or Tamil.
- Any genre is welcome. But you must have an idea for what age group you are writing for.
- Does the story bring forth some new idea that will excite the child and make her understanding of the world she lives in fuller?
- Does your story have a clear plot? Are there any hidden messages that go against the philosophy of Katha?
- The story should preferably have a strong Indian theme and deal with Indian children and their lives, predicaments and worldviews.
- If folklore is used, it must be fully acknowledged and annotated/referenced. The story should help culturelink linguistic cultures and accurately reflect the life, culture and worldview of the people whose folklore is the focus of the book.
- We like stories that respect animals and environments.
- Is the story believable and fresh? Is it clichéd? Do the characters grow in the story or are they static?
- Are the characters credible, tangible? Is their dialogue natural and understandable to children? Do they engage a child's imagination? In Katha we do not mind big words if they truly belong in the story, for we believe children like challenge. We don't like talking down to children.
- Is the language loaded in any way? Does it portray diversity as a good thing, if at all it touches on the topic?
- If it is a historical/political/contemporary story, is the time and location the story is set in, clear? Has adequate research been done?
- Is the vocabulary demeaning in any way to any group of people or individual? Fun, humour need not be at the expense of others, as we know.
- Is the story gender-sensitive? Has adequate research been done? Does anything ring a wrong note? If so, ask for expert opinion if the story demands such guidance.
- Does the book lead to a deeper understanding and appreciation of the characters in the story?
- Are traditional stories treated with the respect given to other cultures/religions' teaching stories or parables?
- Is there anything in the story that would hurt or embarrass any particular group of people?