UNIT STRUCTURE

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10.1 LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you will be able to :

- describe the various ways of writing for children,
- discuss some of the famous children writers,
- write for children
- get to know about the changing trends in writing for children

10.2 INTRODUCTION

Writing for children is essentially an important segment of Creative Writing. Again, Creative Writing is that kind of writing which is done in a free and imaginative way. It can also be called an exercise on free composition on any subject. There are some people who can write anything on any subject very freely. This ability however depends on one's power of observation, imagination, innovation, presentation and, the last but not least, the power of one's expression. Again, in order to strengthen the power of expression one must have a good command over language as also a strong vocabulary.

Moreover, a person with creativity has that kind of talent which helps him or her discover a new situation and/or new facts in one's day-to-day life and present them before others in the simplest possible manner. With a keen power of observation, such people can easily create and write a short story, novel, poem or any other writing for children.

A person may be a very good writer for grown-up people, but he or she may not necessarily become a good writer for children. Writing for children is not an easy task. It is not a difficult task for a writer to write for adults as one can include everything from the life. But in case of children's literature, one cannot include each and everything that is known to the writer who himself or herself is a grown-up person. The most important requirement is that they must try to exclude things which are not expected by the children. One of the primary differences between writing for children and writing for adults is that the former involves both craft and responsibility. Here 'responsibility' means children's books should impact upon young minds with some morals and values and that must help shape their minds as well as their thinking process and outlook on the world.

The objective of this unit is to make the students learn the various ways of writing for children. Despite the influence of television and computers in modern times, bedtime continues to occupy an important place for both parents and children as far as story-telling is concerned. Parents as well as children enjoy reading and listening to these mind-boggling stories that have continued to influence society since time immemorial. But the most important thing about the children's writing is to understand the young mind. Writing for children not only means writing about what a child is doing and thinking, but also seeing the world through the eyes of the child.

Some of the best children's writers seem always to have retained the ability to reach the child within. Michael Woods, a psychologist who analyzed Enid Blyton through her books, wrote — "She was a child, she thought like a child and she wrote as a child…" Thus she was one who was writing about the child's world through adult eyes. That is why Paul Hodder-Williams, a publishing executive who had worked with Enid Blyton, noted, "She really loved children and understood instinctively what would interest them. It was with children that her gift of sympathy had its greatest flowering… That is why they have loved and will continue to love the best of the books, which she wrote for them and them alone..."

There is also another objective. Children need to be fed with the right kind of food for thought in order to help them grow up to become responsible and right-thinking citizens. This is more so in the modern times when children are equally exposed to all kinds of media and technology, as are adults. Gone are the days when children could be barred by both parents as well as cinema-hall gatekeepers from watching a film with an 'A' certificate.

10.3 CHILDREN'S WRITING

Children's writing is basically a writing that is intended mainly for children. The most popular form of children's writing is the story. Children's writing requires a higher degree of imaginative power in comparison to writings for adults. Children are said to be the most innocent creatures of God. Their fresh and imaginative thoughts can create strange and exquisite things. They are very inquisitive and that is why they have energetic brains and a strong imaginative power. Their thoughts can create magical landscapes. Their innocence often gets intensified when they dream in an imaginary world. Reading books can transport them to the land of fairies as well as imagination. Once a child discovers the taste of good stories, it can keep them constantly with books and reading. Therefore, the most successful way for making them feel about anything is through good reading. Children's writing is equally important for parents because a large majority of parents often enjoy reading to their children. Psychologists have confirmed that parents indulging in regular reading sessions for children see their offspring grow up as better and more successful human beings.

Ruskin Bond is one such writer of contemporary times who has drawn a totally different and unique literary landscape for children. He writes an extremely simple, dignified prose and such has been the impact that he is loved and revered in the same way by seniors as by the ten-year olds. Bond himself confesses that he writes for those who, like him, are his soul mates. To be a children's writer, one also has to be an avid reader. In this context, it is important to note Ruskin Bond's view: "I had read Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Hugh Walepole's

Fortitude and decided that I wanted to be like the writer-heroes of both books. Before that my father had brought me up on a diet of the children's classics as well as other forms of entertainment, and although I was only ten when he died, the seed had been sown and I had begun to dream. The ensuing lonely period with my mother and step-father only cemented my attachment to the world of books."

Some people have started saying that reading habits of children have changed and that children are increasingly moving away from books. This however is only partially correct. Bond, in his book *Scenes From a Writer's Life* says, "People say children don't read anymore. This may be true of the vast majority, but I know many boys and girls who enjoy reading; far more than I encountered when I was a schoolboy. In those days, there were comics and the radio and the cinema. I went to the cinema whenever I could, but that did not keep me from reading almost everything that came my way. And so it is today. Book readers are special people, and they will always turn to books as the ultimate pleasure. Those who don't read are unfortunate ones. There is nothing wrong with them; but they are missing out on one of life's compensations and rewards. A great book is a friend that never lets you down. You can return to it again and again and the joy first derived from it will still be there. I think it is fair to say that when I was a boy, reading was my true religion. It helped me to discover my soul."

Children's writing covers a wide range of categories. These include long and short stories, novels, essays, poems, rhymes, songs, plays, riddles, and of course fables and folktales. Among them again, stories and novels stand out especially if the author can spin an element of adventure and suspense keeping in view the highly inquisitive and imaginative nature of the young readers and listeners.

Fables, folk tales and other stories passed down from one generation to the other particularly through the word of mouth have always remained the backbone of the traditional repository of children's literature. While *Aesop's Fables*, *Jataka Tales* and the *Panchatantra* have remained global classics, closer home we have some wonderful

collection of such stories that have been documented and compiled in written form. Five such books that have withstood the test of time in the Assamese language are *Burhi Aair Sadhu* and *Kokadeuta Aru Natilora*, both by Lakshminath Bezbaroa, *Moina* by Harinarayan Baruah, *Latumoni* by Benudhar Sharma and *Siyali Palegoi Ratanpur* by Navakanta Barua.

In each community across the world, people have their own distinctive folktales and stories. These folktales not only have an entertainment value, but also help pass down history and mythology related to that community through word of mouth. Moreover, apart from functioning as unwritten history of a particular group of people, these also make the younger generation aware of their heritage and culture, which are required to be preserved and propagated.

Among folklore again, there are songs that directly appeal to and concern children. These play an important role in enriching children literature too. If we look at the folktales of Assam, we find a large number of lullabies and songs composed specially for children, which continue to shape and inspire generations.

Stories written for children can be subdivided into two distinct groups – (a) stories written to provide a moral and they are very educative in tone, and (b) stories written for igniting the imaginative bent of mind in children.

The best examples of educative stories with a moral are found in the Panchatantra. Each of the stories contained in the Panchatantra has a valuable lesson to teach. Originally written in Sanskrit by a famous scholar named Vishnu Sharma of the ancient times, the charming stories of the Panchatantra have been translated into a large number of languages across the globe. The Panchatantra in fact has been accepted as the 'most-liked literary work' after the Bible over the centuries. Its stories have become a part of human life all over the world. These stories can be subdivided into five categories. Each category aims at teaching a broadly useful art necessary for a successful practical life. These five principles are:

1. Creating bad blood between two combined enemies.
2. Acquiring true and faithful friends.
3. Acquiring wisdom and using it tactfully.
4. Acting with determination when it is necessary.
5. Precautions for dealing with unforeseen problems.

Thus, these five broad principles, if observed carefully and intelligently, can immensely ensure safety, prosperity, true friends, thoughtful wisdom and success at every step in life. As for these stories, the Vishnu Sharma had said:

"Whoever reads or hears them,
And translates them in his life;
Shall acquire masterly wisdom,
And beat even angels in strife."

In the modern times, however, it is the adventure element that has made children's literature more popular all over the world. If we consider children's literature in English as an indicator, then modern-day children's literature definitely took off with *The Life And Adventures Of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) written by English novelist and journalist Daniel Defoe (1660-1731). This novel, which was based on the real-life story of a man called Alexander Selkirk, who spent many years in a lonely island, continues to thrill readers – young and old – all over. This was soon followed by *Gulliver's Travels* (1726), a gripping adventure story written by Jonathan Swift (1667-1745), which was originally intended to be a work of satire. Over two and a half century later, *Gulliver's Travels* is still read by children for its delightfully funny adventure element, while adults too relish on it for its irony and wit.

Soon came *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), written by British writer Lewis Carroll (1832-1898), who under his real name Charles Lutwidge Dodgson was a distinguished geometrician and photographer. This in fact is one of the earliest modern adventure stories with a girl child as the central character, one reason that also generated a lot of interest

among girls for the fact that boys normally dominate most other adventure stories.

Alice in Wonderland was followed closely by *The Three Musketeers* (1844) written by the famous French novelist Alexendre Dumas (1802-1870), and then by a series of books by Mark Twain (1835-1910), an American who took up several jobs – printer, soldier, lecturer, gold speculator, miner and journalist, until he landed up as a successful writer. Real name Samuel Langhorne Clemens, some of his books for children that are as popular today as they were when they were first published include *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1876), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889).

Around the same time appeared Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894), a Scottish writer who lived in several countries in Europe before shifting to the United States and then to Samoa, whose two adventure books for children – *Treasure Island* (1883) and *Kidnapped* (1886) – continue to be admired by millions of children even today.

But the greatest writer for children in modern times, undoubtedly, is Enid Blyton (1897-1968), a British writer, who has left behind over 700 books and 10,000 stories, a record that no other author can dare to challenge. A housewife as she was, her stories about elves and goblins and well cared-for middle-class children have been often interpreted as her way of rewriting the memories of her own childhood made unhappy by a broken family. While her most popular series have been about the Famous Five and subsequently Noddy (made doubly popular by television), Enid Blyton was known for the tremendous speed at which she wrote. Such is her impact among children that Enid Blyton has always remained at the top of the popularity chart except for Asterix comics, which however is read by both children as well as adults. It is said that there is a strong moral absoluteness about Enid Blyton's books: "right and wrong has to be learned; happiness earned."

The arrival of Harry Potter however has threatened to change the profile of the young reader. Joanne Kathleen Rowling (born 1965) has redefined

adventure by bringing back magic, ghosts and fantasy, thus giving a new taste to the young reader who was so long fed mostly on the Enid Blyton diet. While Rowling has been acclaimed as the author of some of the fastest-selling books, her 'Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire' sold an unprecedented three million copies in the first 48 hours of release on July 8, 2000. She has won several awards including the Hugo Award, the Bram Stoker Award and the Whitebread Award for Best Children's Book, apart from being named an Officer of the British Empire.

In India on the other hand there hardly is any children's writer who is as popular as Enid Blyton or others. India, however, saw the emergence of Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936), a British writer and poet, during the pre-independence period, who set a new trend by writing books mostly with Indian settings. Winner of the Nobel Prize in literature in 1907, his most celebrated novel for children is *The Jungle Book* (1894). During the post-independence era however it is Ruskin Bond (born 1934), author of numerous books for children, who has subsequently also broken the age barrier and has become equally popular among adults and young readers.

One Indian author who needs special mention however is the Guwahati-based Arup Kumar Dutta (born 1946), whose novels for children, numbering at least 17, have not only proved best-sellers within the country but have also found readers abroad. The most important children's writer of India after Ruskin Bond who writes in English, Dutta's books been translated into various languages like German, Russian, Japanese, Hungarian, Czech, Italian, Japanese Braille – and even into Assamese – and have won him several awards. No doubt Khushwant Singh had once described him as "India's own Enid Blyton." The uniqueness of Dutta's books is that while he tells a wonderful adventure story, he also weaves local culture, tradition and heritage into it, thus taking the reader through an excursion too. Some of his most popular books for children are *The Kaziranga Trail, Trouble at Kolongijan, The Blind Witness* and *A Prince's Tale.*

The Indian languages too have a rich heritage of children literature. While Upendra Kishore Roy Choudhury (1863-1915) played a pioneering role in converting to the printed word folk tales prevalent in Bengal, he also founded *Sandesh*, a children's magazine in Bengali that was subsequently run by his son Sukumar Roy (1887-1923) and grandson and world-famous filmmaker Satyajit Ray (1921-1992). Upendra Kishore also wrote a number of books including Chotoder Ramayan (1894), Chotoder Mahabharat (1909) and Mahabharater Galpa (1909). His son Sukumar Roy created wonderful adaptations of several English nursery rhymes, while Satyajit Ray created two immortal characters Feluda, a sleuth, and Professor Shonku, a scientist, apart from writing several other adventure stories.

In Assam, while Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Jyotiprasad Agarwala, Harinarayan Barua and Benudhar Sharma laid the foundation of children's literature in the Assamese language after the arrival of the printing press, those who carried it forward include Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, Navakanta Baruah, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Gagan Chandra Adhikari and Barendra Barkataki among others. Jyotiprasad Agarwala composed as many as 12 poems that dealt with the dreams and fantasies of the young mind. He also wrote 'Jyoti Ramayana' which is a unique Ramayana for children told entirely in verse in 18 chapters, apart from a play called 'Ghora Dangoriya.'

LET US KNOW



Books can help a child cope with turmoil: This happened during the late 1980s when militancy was at its peak in Punjab. A little boy from Khanna district wrote a letter to a member of the Association of Writers and Illustrators for Children saying, "You have made my evenings great." The beleaguered child was referring to the relief the books gave him in times of turmoil and lawlessness. This small incident unsuspectingly highlights the positive role books can play in neutralizing the effects of all-pervasive violence in a child's life.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 1



1. Do you think that reading habits of children have changed?

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2. Name some categories of children's writing.

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3. What is the real name of the writer of Lewis Carroll?

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4. Who was Alexander Selkirk?

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10.4 SOME FAMOUS CHILDREN WRITERS IN ASSAMESE

Let us have a look at some of those children writers who have done Assam proud with their literary acumen.

1. **Lakshminath Bezbaruah** (1868-1938), one of the leading lights

of modern Assamese literature, did the pioneering task of collecting and compiling a large number of folk tales and other stories that were till then passed down from one generation to the other through the word of mouth in Assam. These immortal collections are *Burhi Aair Sadhu*, *Kokadeuta Aru Natilora* and *Junuka*.

2. **Jyotiprasad Agarwalla** (1903-1951), another noteworthy figure of modern Assamese culture and literature, was not just the pioneer film-maker in Assam. He also contributed immensely to enrich Assamese children's literature. He composed as many as 12 poems that dealt with the dreams and fantasies of the young mind, and wrote 'Jyoti Ramayana' – a unique Ramayana entirely in verse in 18 chapters, apart from a play called 'Ghora Dangoriya.'

3. **Nirmalprabha Bordoloi** (1933-2004), leading Assamese poet and scholar, has four collections of stories, five volumes of poems, two plays in verse and eight plays apart from five other books which include one about her own childhood. She was awarded President's award for her 'Chil Chil Chila Bagi Chil Mila' in 1958.

4. **Bhabendra Nath Saikia** (1932-2003), well-known filmmaker, short story writer and journalist, gave a new direction to children writing in Assam through 'Sofura', a monthly magazine that he launched in 1982. While he indulged a wide variety of children's literature ranging from short stories to plays and poems, some of his works are available in the form of books, namely Asha Karo Tomalok Bhale Asa, Moromor Deuta, Morom, and Shanta-Shista Hrista-Pusta Maha-Dusta, the last being a play serialized by All India Radio, Guwahati.

5. **Navakanta Barua** (1926-2005), poet and novelist, was also a great children's writer in the Assamese language. Most of his prose-works for children were originally written under the pen

name Ekhud Kokaideu. 'Siyali Palegoi Ratanpur' (1956), which has a lot of Sukumar Roy influence, fetched him a national award in 1958. His other famous and popular works include 'Akhoror Jakhala', 'Bha-t U-kare Bhu' and 'Makhanor Kukura Powali, while some of his important verse-works include 'Kereluar Rel', 'Moi Tuniye Tuntunalo' and 'Omala Gharar Puthi.'



LET US KNOW

The creator of famous 'Noddy' series, Enid Blyton's other books are *Cottage* (1943), *The Island of Adventure* (1944), *First Term at Malory Towers* (1946), *The Secret Seven* (1948), *The Rockingdown Mystery* (1949) and *Noddy* (1950) and so on. *Noddy* is now a popular cartoon serial for the children all over the world.

Ruskin Bond, India's best-known and most loved writer of children's books has to his credit *The Room on the Roof* (1957), for which he got Rhys Memorial prize, *The Adventures of Rusty*, *Rusty and the Leopard*, *Rusty Runs Away*, *Rusty Comes Home*, *Angry River*, *The Hidden Pool*, *Hanuman to the Rescue*, *The Road to Bazaar* and so on.

Arup Kumar Dutta, often described as 'India's own Enid Blyton' for his wonderful contribution to the field of children's literature got Shankar's Award instituted to mark the International Year of the Child in 1979 for *The Kaziranga Trail*, while *The Lure of Zangri-La* won him NCERT's 'Most Outstanding Book of The Year' award in 1988. His other remarkable works are *Trouble at Kolongijan*, *The Blind Witness*, *Smack, Revenge, Save the Pool, Oh Deer, A Story About Tea, The Counterfeit Treasure, The Crystal Cave, A Prince's Tale* and *Footprints in the Sand*.

The following are two famous and popular Assamese lullabies, which are called *nichukani geets* or *dhai-naams* meant for toddlers and growing children. *Dhai* means a nurse and *naam* or *geet* means a song. Such lullabies are available in several collections, the most

important being “Bara Mahar Tera Geet” compiled by Dr Praphulladatta Goswami.)

O’ flower, O’ flower

O’ flower, O’ flower,

Why don’t you bloom?

The cow nips my shoots,

Why should I bloom?

O’ cow, O’ cow,

Why do you nip the shoots?

The cowherd does not give me grass,

Why shouldn’t I nip?

O’ cowherd, O’ cowherd,

Why don’t you keep the cows?

The cook does not give food,

Why should I keep the cows?

O’ cook, O’ cook,

Why don’t you cook food?

The woodcutter doesn’t chop woods,

Why should I cook food?

O’ woodcutter, O’ woodcutter,

Why don’t you chop woods?

I have already chopped a banyan tree,

But why doesn’t it dry?

O’ banyan tree, O’ banyan tree,

Why don’t you dry?

The clouds keep raining,

How do I dry?

O’ cloud, O’ cloud,

Why do you rain?

The frog keeps croaking,

Why shouldn’t I rain?

O’ frog, O’ frog,

Why do you croak?

It’s the custom of my forefathers,

Why should I give it up?

O' Sister Moon

O' sister moon,

Give me a needle.

Why do you want a needle?

To sew a bag.

Why do you want a bag?

To keep money in.

Why do you want money?

To buy an elephant.

Why do you want an elephant?

To ride on it.

What happens then?

You are a great man.

Riding on an elephant Paniram goes home,

Passers-by look at him again and again.

10.5 HOW TO WRITE

Writing for children requires specialized skills. When a writer gets mastered, it brings extreme satisfaction to both the writer and the reader. Childhood is a time of innocence as well as of enchantment. This is also a formation period when every new and worthwhile value can be imbibed in a child's mind. A writer must be always very conscious of this aspect.

(a) Looking at life through the child's eye:

To begin to explore the child's worldview, one should try to spend time with children and carefully listen to them and what they have to say. One must try to remember how one felt and thought as a child. Reading old diaries, stories and schoolwork can be a helpful guide, if one still has them.

At the same time, one must be also very conscious of noticing life through the eyes of a child. For example, the story of a child should

begin without any long description. This is because a child has very little patience in comparison to that of a grown up reader. The attention span of children is very less compared to that of adults. Thus the story should begin in a direct manner.

Example:

(The following story is taken from *Burhi Aair Sadhu,* a collection of traditional folk tales compiled by Lakshminath Bezbaroa.)

The Son-in-law

One day a man invited his son-in-law for bihu. His father-in-law told him to come alone. It was late afternoon. After proceeding for a while the man found that his shadow was also following him. Annoyed at this, he shouted at the shadow and said, "Hello! Why are you following me? What do you want? Why don't you go away?" But when he found that the shadow would not obey him he asked him again, "Why are you mum? Do you want this chelleng chador?" Thus he removed the chelleng chador that he was wearing, and threw it at the shadow. A few steps later, he found that the shadow was still following him. This time he thought the shadow wanted his shirt. Thus he removed his shirt and gave it to the shadow. This way, he gave away all his clothes one by one, and was finally left with no cloth at all.

This man also had a problem of night blindness. Thus, as the sun went down he was unable to see clearly. It became difficult for him to find his way to his father-in-law's house. Then, all of a sudden he saw a cow on the road. This cow belonged to his father-in-law, and was on its way home. He caught hold of it by its tail and followed it. This way he soon reached his father-in-law's house. But having no clothes on, he was ashamed of himself, and thus hid under a banana tree in the backyard, wondering what to do.

The father-in-law waited for long for the son-in-law to arrive, and finally gave up hope. Later at night, after everyone in the family had their meal, the lady of the house washed the dishes and threw

away the dishwater towards the banana tree. It fell on the man, who cried out in dismay. A shocked mother-in-law, after discovering him there, gave him clothes, bathed him and brought him into the house.

She gave him food to eat, which included rice and curries and also some homemade liquid gur. But unable to see things clearly, he did not take a risk and refused to eat the gur. The mother-in-law however insisted, and on taking a sip, he found it so tasty that he wiped the entire gur off. His mother-in-law told him they had a good stock of gur that was being kept above the bamboo ceiling of the room. The man liked the gur so much that he kept thinking of it. So, after everyone fell asleep he gathered a long stick and thrust it against the ceiling, piercing a hole in the earthen jar containing the liquid gur. The gur started dripping down, and he positioned himself in such a manner so that it kept falling directly on his mouth. But, despite his best efforts, a lot of gur also fell on his body. He started looking for something to wipe the gur, and found a heap of cotton in the room. He rolled his body on the cotton to get rid of the sticky gur. But what exactly happened was that instead of the gur getting removed, the cotton started sticking to his body.

Fearing what would happen next morning, he slipped out and hid himself among a herd of goats that were tied in a shed, waiting for daybreak. Around that time came two thieves who were out to steal goats. The one whose fur comes off easily is always the best goat, one thief told the other. They started pulling the fur of the goats and finally found one whose fur came off quite easily. This was the best goat, they thought, and hurriedly carried it away by tying its limbs to a long pole. On their way, the thieves had to cross a stream. As they crossed the stream by paddling through knee-deep water, the water touched the bottom of the human goat, who cried out:

Raise me, thieves, a little higher,

My buttocks are getting wet in the water.

The thieves thought the goat was a ghost. So they dropped him

then and there and ran away. As he fell into the water, the cotton started to come off and the sticky gur got washed away. By that time the sun rose and his father-in-law, who had begun a search for his son-in-law, found him sitting by the stream. He took him home, fed him well, gave him new clothes and then sent him off to his own house.

Bihu is the Assamese New Year festival of which feasting is a major activity. **Cheleng chador** is a traditional Assamese clothe used by respectable males. **Gur** in Assamese means molasses.

(Translated from the original Assamese by Dr Tapati Baruah Kashyap)

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 2



1. Do you find the story fit for children literature?

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2. Does the beginning of the story satisfy the young readers?

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3. Do you find the story an interesting one?

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4. Do you feel that the story will continue to give young readers pleasure at the end?

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5. Do you feel that the story is more character oriented?

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(b) Thinking rationally:

In order to write effectively for children one needs a good awareness of the way children think and speak, and the way they live today. If one has regular contact with children – perhaps as a parent, grandparent or a teacher – this will be an easy exercise. Otherwise, one will need to find some other way of learning about today's children. Another way of understanding children is regularly reading the children's pages in newspapers and magazines as well as children's magazines. Some children come up with really wonderful ideas through their contributions to these pages and magazines.

(c) The story is the indispensable element:

The story should begin in a simple way. The best opening line has always been – "Once upon a time…." The simple and appealing style should come from the core of one's heart. Children do not like long descriptions. Sentences should be short and words should not be high-sounding ones. And the story should always end with a happy and satisfactory note.

The following opening paragraphs of a story called 'Tunnel' in Ruskin

Bond's book 'The Road To The Bazaar' typify the effects of simple and dignified language —

> *"It was almost noon, and the jungle was very still, very silent. Heat waves shimmered along the railway embankment where it cut a path through the tall evergreen trees. The railway lines were two straight black serpents disappearing into the tunnel in the hillside. Suraj stood near the cutting, waiting for the midday train. It wasn't a station, and he wasn't catching a train. He was waiting so that he could watch the team-engine come roaring out of the tunnel."*

Bond tells a simple story about Suraj, a village boy who wants to discover for himself how it looks when a steam-engine emerges from a tunnel, as also how it feels to walk through the tunnel itself. The author adds mystery of the night and the jungle, as well as the loneliness of the watchman who guards the tunnel, and adds some suspense by introducing a leopard into the boy's adventure. But the reader, young or old, cannot simple stop before reading the story, running into eight pages, in one go.

(d) Being small and powerless:

Children are the most innocent creatures of God. They can trust anything on any topic, so the writer's duty is to project those values, which are really helpful for their growth and development of personality. The Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990) clearly mentions four distinct categories of child rights that must be ensured by the society. And one of the categories is Right to Development. This Right to Development includes ensuring a situation that is congenial for proper and healthy development of a child's personality, talent, as well physical and mental faculties. Since reading is one activity that a child normally does alone, he or she becomes intimate with the book or the reading material and trusts it like anything. Thus, the writer cannot afford to commit a breach of this trust.

(e) Relating to the right age group:

Before writing for the children one has to decide which age group one

relates to best. Children are as varied in their tastes and interests as adults, so the writer must try to provide them new interests. As Margaret Nash, author of several children books said, “Plots have to move much faster for children than adults and each chapter should include some particular interest as well as some form and progression.” A six or eight-year old child’s concerns are different from a ten-year-old child. For a younger age group, stories are simple, positive themes and happy experiences with life’s lessons. On the other hand, older children are ready to explore more complex and adventurous themes — like relationships, fear of failure, competing for success and heroic and courageous deeds. So the themes and purpose of writing should be definitely written for.

As for adventurous stories, the writer must unfold the story with suspense and curiosity. The following extracts from Arup Kumar Dutta’s *The Kaziranga Trail* make it clear —

Mr Neog was the District Forest Officer in charge of wildlife. He was surprised to see the three boys, soaked to their skin, troop into his office, leaving a trail of rain water. He knew them well.

“Neog mama (uncle), they have killed a rhino.”

The boys spoke all at once. Mr Neog’s features became hard.

“One at a time, please. Dhanai, give me the facts.”

The boy told him what they had seen in the sanctuary.

“The horn is missing,” concluded Dhanai. “It is the work of poachers, no doubt.”

“Bad business,” muttered Mr Neog, as he opened a locker and handed them a towel. “Dry yourself first. Then have some tea and biscuits.”

“But, Neog mama, they have killed a rhino. You must catch them fast.”

“We will, Bubul, don’t you worry. We will get them. Let the storm abate and we will go into action immedieately afterwards.”

An office boy brought them hot tea and biscuits. As they were eating, Phukan, the head forest ranger came in. Mr Neog has sent for him.

"These boys have found a dead rhino, Phukan. The horn is missing. The poachers have struck again."

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Dhanai lay on the cot in his room, unable to sleep. His mind kept going back to the day's developments. The man with the missing toe was their only clue. How to find him?

It was a bright, moonlit night. Dhanai's eyes were fixed on the window frame as his brain struggled with the problem.

Suddenly a shadow moved across, blotting out much of the moonlight. Dhanai caught a glimpse of a shiny object as he swung himself away from the bed and rolled frantically to the farthest corner.

He heard a hiss and a thud as something was flung at the bed where he had been seconds ago. With a chuckle, the shadow moved away.

Dhanai rushed to the window and looked out. He could see no one around. Whoever was at the window had vanished without a trace.

The boy lit the kerosene lamp on his study table. His heart missed a beat when he saw the knife. It was buried to the hilt in the soft clay of the floor at the foot of his bed. So the person had not aimed the knife at him. It was impossible to miss at this short distance. Dhanai picked up the knife.

It was a small clasp-knife, with a curved handle. A folded piece of paper was tied with a string round the clasp. He pulled the paper out, unfolded it, and began to read, "You are warned. Do not poke your nose into affairs which do not concern you. Forget about the man with the missing toe. We shall not warn you again. If you do not heed our advice, we shall cut your throat." The note was unsigned.

(f) Playing around with ideas:

When writing for very young children, one needs to use simple, basic concepts and familiar situations. As their social skills develop, humour plays a much larger part and other varieties also. Children are by

nature happy creatures and they like funny situations. Moreover, the desire to solve puzzles is an innate feature of the human mind and children are very curious to know the end or result of the story. Another noticeable thing is that children are very sharp-eyed and they can detect any flaw on the story very quickly. They can relate anything on any subject very easily.

(g) Entertaining and educating the reader:

All children's literature including comics and magazines are targeted for some particular age groups. The writer must communicate convincingly with the intended readership. Moreover the writer must have some experience of working with children.

Educating children through newspapers is today a common practice with almost every newspaper dedicating exclusive pages for children. But what is of concern is that most of the time there is an attempt to impose some morals and thereby provide lessons to the young people. This happens more with those pieces that are written by adults. The children writer should be instead try to provide them with accurate information about modern technology, history, geography, science, and so on, and allow the children to express themselves.

(h) Characterization:

The writer of children literature must bear in mind the fact that characters will be hackneyed and dull in the absence of a depth of their personality. Therefore it is essential that one must take utmost care in building the characters. One must also know everything about them and so that the young reader can clearly visualize them. The characters of the story are always the most important elements. The writer should write from the point of view of the characters and should not impose his or her views. And the story should be character-orientated, so that the young reader can make a rapport with the characters.

Some authors on the other hand create a particular character with the intention of building up a close rapport with the young reader. This not

only helps the reader identifying himself or herself with the character(s), but also helps look at things from the perspective of the young reader.

One such popular character in India is Rusty. An interesting character of Ruskin Bond, Rusty is a little bit autobiographical and it is like Charles Dickens's character David in his novel *David Copperfield*. Ruskin Bond through Rusty identifies his own childhood adventures, troubles, pleasure and the entire small, appealing anecdotes. So, his books like *The Adventures of Rusty, Rusty Runs Away*, *Rusty Comes Home* are very interesting books on the character of Rusty.

(i) Humanizing animal characters:

To make the children's imagination soar high, stories can humanize animal characters. The innocent children can believe how a tiger can talk to a bird. Thus children like animal characters with human traits. *Aesop's Fables*, *Panchatantra*, the *Jataka Tales* and *Burhi Aair Sadhu* – all abound in stories where monkeys and foxes and crows and sparrows, all kinds of animals and birds not only come alive, but also mimic human wisdom and folly alike.

(j) Writing picture books:

Enid Blyton's *Noddy* (1950) is an interesting children character whose popularity skyrocketed after it was converted into an animated film for television. But Noddy is equally popular as a picture-book character, with children all over the world enjoying them and often identifying themselves with Noddy and his mates. These kinds of picture books perform a variety of functions. They can tell the entire story without any text at all. They can also provide an educational element and complement the story. A young child can make out from the pictures the story and what is happening through out. And thus the illustrations should complement the story line and should help to bring the characters alive.

Numerous comic books and comic strips including the most famous Phantom comics by Lee Falk and Sy Barry, was kind of a staple diet

for several generations in the 1950s to the 1970s. The adventure element in them, particularly in Phantom, coupled with the focus on justice and the need to curb crimes did have a deep and indelible impact on millions of young minds across the globe. And the secret behind the success was that the main author – Lee Falk – had made it a point to always first read out every storyline to a group of children that comprised of his own children, as well as children of the neighbourhood where he lived. Many a times, the children would compel him to change the stories and the incidents therein.

(k) Specialized writings:

One specialized area that is very important for shaping young minds is biographical writings. Children must be given to read as many biographies about great and successful people as possible, with special emphasis on how they were during their childhood. Such stories are bound to leave a deep impression on the young reader's mind, which in turn will help create good character and subsequently make them useful and purposeful citizens. It is also important to tell stories about how a large number of successful people had actually coped with various challenges in life, including during their childhood.

Such stories may not be just about great leaders like Mahatma Gandhi and Nehru, but also about scientists, social entrepreneurs, sportspersons, writers, artists and so on.

(l) Rhymes and poems:

It is natural that young children can memorize things more easily when these come in rhymes. Most stories in most languages that children learn from folklore are indeed in the rhyme format. Based on this truth, modern-day children's writers too have depended heavily on this format. In Assamese language, for instance, most writers including Lakshminath Bezbaroa, Nirmalprabha Bordoloi, Navakanta Barua, Bhabendra Nath Saikia, Hiren Bhattacharyya, Keshab Mahanta, Gagan Chandra Adhikari and Barendra Barkataki have used rhymes as a popular technique to communicate with children.

Creating rhymes looks easy, but is a difficult art. The writer must have a large and powerful vocabulary so that he or she not only has a wide choice of words, but also a good stock of words that rhyme. The writer must also have a fair idea of the rhyming scheme, so that the young reader can catch hold of the music, metre and rhythm that flows through the poem.

(m) Approach:

There are two approaches a writer can adopt when writing for children. One way is to write about the thoughts, actions and feelings of a child in the first person adult narrative. A good number of writers also write in the third person narrative.

The second approach is a bit tougher and it is like writing from the point of view of a child, with the child itself telling the story in the first person. For this method, the writer should spend more time with children and try to recollect their experiences as child and so that they can be able to understand their view of the world.

CHECK YOUR PROGRESS 3



1. Have you identified the group for which you wish to write?

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2. Is your vocabulary appropriate?

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3. Is your story told from a child's perspective?

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4. Does your story reflect modern attitudes and lifestyle?

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5. Will your story appeal to today's child?

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6. Do your child characters solve the problem themselves?

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7. Are you talking to children about emerging issues like child rights, environment and human development?

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10.6 CHANGING TRENDS

As already mentioned, in recent times, Harry Potter is attracting more and more children than the other classical writers. Damn Peha is a popular character amongst Assamese children who have grown up with Sofura. Very often Damn Peha is believed to have surpassed various characters of Burhi Aair Sadhu in terms of popularity. So also Bhabendra Nath Saikia and his play Shanta-Shista Hrista-Pusta Maha-Dusta, is a popular radio play. Achin Momaideu is also another important and interesting character amongst the children of Assam. Harry Potter is more read than Enid Blyton now.

With the fast changing times, children's tastes are also changing fast. Given this situation, authors are also increasingly trying to infuse more positive attitudes in children's literature. Modern intelligent children are also very conscious of their values.

Writers are already beginning to tell children about various emerging issues like child rights, environment, global warming, conservation of wildlife and nature, information technology, scientific discoveries, human development and so on. Those interested in writing for children should closely observe the contents of good quality children pages in newspapers, like the weekly children's supplement in The Hindu, in order to keep track of new and changing trends.

10.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit you have learnt about travel writing as a literary genre and also about travel writers and travel writing. We have also provided you an idea about some of the Assamese travel writers and also an idea about how to be a travel writer. Some examples of travel writing have also been given. Travel writing is a broad category of writing concerned with various aspects of travel. The travel books served various purposes. They not only provide information about the place but also give an

insight into the history as well as the culture of the people. The Americans Paul Theroux and William Least Heat-Moon, Welsh author Jan Morris and Englishman Eric Newby all made their livings writing travelogues. Assamese literature is also rich in travel writing. Travel writing is both specialized as well as creative. To be a travel writer — you have to travel a lot and write a lot. Few tips have also been given as how to become a successful travel writer.



10.8 FURTHER READINGS

1. *Creative Writing*, by Adela Ramet, Better Yourself Books, Mumbai, 2001.
2. *Scenes From A Writer's Life*, by Ruskin Bond, Penguin, 1997.
3. *Writing Right To Sell*, by Carl H Giles, A S Barnes & Company, New York, 1970.
4. *Creativity, The Force Within*, by Rachael MacBean, Pauline Publications, Mumbai, 2001.
5. *The Power Of Your Mind's Eye*, by K. M. Phadke & Varkha Chulani, Pauline Publications, Mumbai, 1999.
6. *A Child's Language And The Teacher*, by Krishna Kumar, National Book Trust, New Delhi, 2000.
7. *Preface to Navakanta Barua: Sishu Sahitya Samagra*, Anwesha, Guwahati, 2003.
8. *Ten Tips on Writing for Children*, by Poornima Narayan, on the web.
9. *Understanding the Young Reader*, by Liz Johnson, on the web.



10.9 POSSIBLE QUESTIONS

1. "A great book is a great friend that never lets you down". Comment.

2. Discuss the two divisions of children's writing with examples.
3. How has the adventure element made children's literature popular?
4. Discuss some famous writers of children's literature of the world, India and Assam.
5. Elaborate on the skills required to become a good writer of children's stories.
6. How can a children's writer combine entertainment and education in their works?
7. Comment on the changing trends in children's literature.

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