

# FHI NEWSLETTER

Enabling children & youth with 21st Century skills & competencies to be better prepared for life.



## Fly Higher



## AN ESSENTIAL SURVIVAL KIT

**Sharmishtha Hardas**

National Leader & Coordinator #BookJoywithFHI

**Fly Higher (FHI)**

Books play a quintessential role in every child's life by introducing them to a world of imagination, providing knowledge of the outside world, improving their reading, writing and speaking skills as well as boosting memory and intelligence. The importance of books in our life cannot be undermined for they not only help in broadening our horizons but also act as doorways of connecting us with the world around us. They function as survival kits, they influence us and leave an impact on us.

The FHI Book Joy initiative aims to foster skills among children through books which facilitate and enhance their overall development and have books as their life long companions.



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## THE BASTION OF KNOWLEDGE

By Volunteer Siddharth Dash, FHI Jaipur

*"There is no friend as loyal as a book."*  
– Ernest Hemingway

Books are and will always be indispensable parts of our lives. More so, in a child's growth. With 'Book-Joy', FHI's new initiative, we wish for children from underprivileged backgrounds to enjoy the magical worlds that books create and derive their numerous benefits, just like we did in our childhood.

My journey with books commenced with a fortunate stroke of serendipity.

A fickle-minded child whose attention could only be snatched by the shiniest hot-wheels cars and action figures set his eyes on a shiny, comically large book in a school fair. The cover had everything, cars, a brawny soldier wielding a rifle, planets. It was too alluring for him to resist. Surely, he would get to see more of that inside the book. Little did he know that a Dorling Kindersley Encyclopedia would shape his life, his interests, worldview, and personality. It set the wheels in motion for a life-long journey of acquiring knowledge and knowing things around him and his place in the universe.

People who exhibit higher intelligence often tend to inherit a reading habit or have it developed in their early years. Voracious readers view the world through a dramatically different lens showing a propensity for empathy and a higher emotional quotient. Reading forms the base of the most crucial life skills required for an all-encompassing world-view.

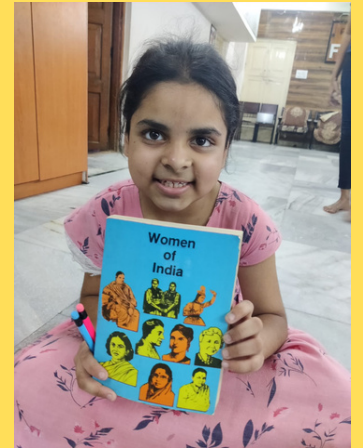
Encyclopedias gave me the knowledge to appreciate the details of the cars and action figures I was obsessed with as a child. From tiny details like the emblems on the action figures to the history behind cars, each rabbit hole I indulged myself in was more interesting than the last. Reading encyclopedias and novels alike, helped me stitch

ideas together from various fields enabling me to have a comprehensive understanding of things around me. Not to mention, the unmatched enlivening feeling that arises out of readers being transported to different realities, viewing lives through the eyes of characters in stories.

With the advent of the internet and increasing consumption of media and education on screens, books stand out as storage of comprehensive and specific information. The scope and the ease of access to information that the internet provides us might be vast in comparison to books, but to find the correct resources in the sheer volume of mostly unfiltered, unsourced information and distractions deem it a laborious if not a counterproductive effort. On the other hand, books allow for an intimate relationship with readers facilitating the internalization of the teachings and principles at their own pace. These characteristics empower readers in honing their research skills, helping them zero in on a subject they are trying to grasp.

The stories children are exposed to in books help strengthen their empathy and emotional intelligence towards others. With protagonists and various other personalities, children tend to form a bond of mentorship from whom they grasp their solutions and wisdom to various quandaries in their lives. These lessons often help them address real-world situations with more consideration and an open mind, all while being empathetic and respectful of others feelings and cultures. A reading culture among children also encourages questioning and open discussion further allowing exchange of knowledge.

The Book-Joy initiative aims to invigorate the formative years of underprivileged children by providing them access to books. Through this, FHI hopes to ingrain life skills in children, through various attributes that books help bring out in children, paving their runway for a successful flight.





## INTO THE BLISSFUL ABYSS – A VOYAGE WITH BOOKS

By Volunteer Jay Laddha, FHI Ahmedabad

***“I suspect the truth is that we are waiting, all of us, against insurmountable odds, for something extraordinary to happen to us.”***  
— Khaled Hosseini, *And the Mountains Echoed*

Picture a guy with shabby dressing sense, endeared in a fairly conservative family, largely middle-class upbringing, indifferent about most things except Bollywood and Cricket – that was me. As a very small child, I used to imagine I was, say, Batman and picture myself as the hero of a ceased story in a peculiar altruistic, narcissistic way. I was somewhat lonely, and I think from the very start, my literary pursuits were mixed up with the feeling of being somewhat isolated and undervalued.

It is difficult even to speculate when I first started reading literature apart from scholastic academia. Yet, I reckon my first experience of reading anything describable as decent or serious was when I had found a tiny book of around 50 pages titled ‘Skill with People’ by Les Giblin in my father’s old library collection. It was a relatively good book, considering I pounced upon a couple of Chetan Bhagat novels after that. Howsoever, impressed with my new-founded curiosity, my school friend, Ashish, suggested that I read the book ‘Be Happy Attitudes’ by Dr. Robert Schuller from the school library. At the time, the book made a deep impression upon me, and the lapse of time has hardly served to weaken the effect. I knew I liked experimenting with words and making analogies with unpleasant facts, and I felt that this created a sort of hidden world in which I could get my own back for my ignorance in everyday life.

Nonetheless, the books gradually became my armor through and against the world and an antidote to my predicament. Rather than me being just a visceral reader, they marked – and became – masks of my time. *The Kite Runner* helped me survive a bad friendship during college. The classic 1984 got me through the pessimistic internship days. Robert Greene’s *Mastery* infused courage and revived my ambitions. While Sherlock Holmes’ novels unveiled an incredible world of mystery, Gurcharan Das’ solid trilogy enriched me with knowledge and confidence. When I speak of these books, I speak of them as colloquial friends, and I think about how they influenced me when I think about them.

Reading meant different things at different times. Sometimes it was just a leisurely activity; at other times, it inculcated a sense of wonder, introspection, and reflection. *Brave New World* terrified me with the idea of utopia, whereas PG Wodehouse engulfed me in surreptitious laughter. While Shantaram and *Maximum City* familiarized me with the closed universe of the mafia, Friedman’s *The World is flat* opened my imagination to the ideas of innovation and globalization. I felt the responsibility on Michael Corleone’s shoulders, embraced *The White Tiger*’s aloofness, and tried to understand the emotional turmoil of Waller Bridge’s fleabag. I dabbled with Jonathan Livingston while traveling to my maternal home and gluttonized *Who moved my cheese* at a client’s place. I devoured Agatha Christie’s realms and sought respite in Dan Brown’s world-saving thrillers. These (& other) books rendered a sort of certainty – the same old smell and discernible order to

the chaos in the outside world. But when life gets rough in the big city, these vicarious narratives become a sanctuary. In the face of crisis and misery, they felt like a private restoration of time – a space of solace and recuperation, like the coolness of dew on the hanging leaf; a path to invisible purpose and a quest for unknown redemption.

Most importantly, reading books gave me the courage to reflect on complicated aspects of my life. It allowed me to escape the immediacy of trending culture, unrequited noise, fleeting community and furtively evoke an expression of hope, peace, and singularity. It became a relaxing activity to declutter thoughts and connect the dots. Transcending the ephemerality of expanding cosmos, I found a sense of calm in sharing time and space with books. Because the brutal truth is: Some of us like to get lost so that we can reclaim the joy of finding ourselves.

Of late years, I have been asked many times – Isn’t it boring to read books? – this got me into thinking. But the answer isn’t easy. It’s not supposed to be. I have realized reading is more a function of curiosity, and the real question we should be asking in return is: Are you curious enough?... Books have extended me the endurance to be self-seeking and also the privilege to be rueful. Even today, I feel like a tourist when I open a new book. Maybe I’ll unearth more in the coming years. After all, in my head, I’m still the hero who outgrew his history, waiting for the resurrection.



## TURN THE PAGES OF YOUR IMAGINATION

By Volunteer Sneha Pai, FHI Bangalore

***"Fantasy is a necessary ingredient in living, it's a way of looking at life through the wrong end of a telescope."***

~ Dr. Seuss

My fondest memory of reading, as a kid, has been taking brief pauses in between sentences of my favorite novels, repeatedly reading some of my favorite lines, visually painting a picture of the author's description, imagining the possibilities outlined in those sheer paragraphs of text, dreamily stepping into a fantasy world for few seconds, followed by nudging myself back to reality. I associate books primarily as those amazing weapons that possess the power to give wings to my imagination. Imagination can do wonders to one's thinking and is an essential ingredient in creative thinking. We all need a bit of it in our lives to explore our true potentials.

### How reading is good for imagination?

Reading fosters imagination, and the more we indulge in this practice, the better we can expand our knowledge and perspective. Reading books is believed to stimulate the right part of the brain which subsequently is responsible for triggering and exercising our creative side.

In kids, cultivating the habit of reading a book early contributes to raising a confident speaker, writer, and enthusiastic learner.

Books also offer kids the much-required mental stimulation, boost their creativity, provide inspiration, and help in developing memories and imagination in the young minds.

It is the power of imagination that allows children to put themselves in the shoes of their characters and imagine what they must exactly be going through. And if you observe carefully, this trait is what could help children to read their own emotions and alongside the emotions of their characters. This behavior promotes empathy and building connections with people which further enhances their emotional quotient preparing them better for adulthood.

And if we have to wonder why imagination is necessary, imagination encourages creativity and innovative thinking. Without imagination, there would be no new ideas or inventions. And reading plays a key role in building imagination. In the book "Why Reading Books Still Matters: The Power of Literature in Digital Times", researchers Martha C. Pennington and Robert P Waxler state "If imagination and magical thinking connected to reason spur discovery, innovation, and new understandings, it can be maintained that literature has a key role in both developing and engaging imaginative and magical thinking".

### Book Joy with FHI

Literacy is the foundation of education and a life full of learning. In addition to enhancing imagination, reading holds many other benefits providing vast opportunities to the young ones as they step higher. Unfortunately, not all children have easy access to this beautiful world of imagination through books. The #BookJoywithFHI initiative was started exactly for this purpose – to introduce children from underprivileged backgrounds to the magical world of books.

We at FHI believe we can make a difference in the future of many children around us through the power of reading and imagination. Through this initiative, FHI wishes that every child is able to experience the joy of reading and step into the wonderful world of books just like how You and I did as a child.

And if I have to share how important books are for me, even on the busiest days, I try and spend at least 10-minutes trying to read or sometimes even re-read a favorite book of mine to be transported into a new world, dream, get inspired, and just maybe try to get to know myself and the world around me better.



### **Make a Donation:**

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Donations are eligible for tax benefits under Section 80G(5) (vi) of the Income Tax Act, 1961

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## **BOOK LOVERS & DONORS TO THE INITIATIVE #BOOKJOYWITHFHI**



Growing up, Pollyanna was one of my favorite books. A story of an orphan girl who moves in with her strict aunt in New England. Despite a difficult start, Pollyanna's exuberance and positivity affect everyone who meets her, and she spreads joy and love wherever she goes. But when tragedy strikes, Pollyanna finds her optimistic attitude tested, and she must learn to find happiness again. She then devises a "glad game," wherein she would try to find the silver lining in any situation, no matter how dire. Soon, Pollyanna is spreading her glad game to everyone, transforming it into a joyous place to live. And this story made me grow into an eternal optimist. So, when I heard about FHI Book Joy initiative from my sister, I wanted to be a part of this initiative and contribute to this campaign. Good books are food for the soul. I hope all the kids receiving books through the FHI initiative get an opportunity to read to their hearts' content, enjoy the pleasures books have to offer, and continue growing by leaps and bounds. And thank you, FHI, for letting me be a part of this journey.

***Saswati Baruah***



In his book, *The Ocean at the End of the Lane*, Neil Gaiman says, "I lived in books more than I lived anywhere else." That is something I definitely relate to. So, I was pleasantly surprised when I first saw the Book Joy initiative that FHI had undertaken. As someone whose earliest memories of childhood are mostly about books and reading and listening to stories and telling stories, I knew I wanted to make a contribution, no matter how small. As a part of FHI, I have seen the faces of children light up when they find something that gives them joy, when they learn something that they are genuinely interested in. Who is to say that their innocent faces won't light up when they have a book in their hands, bright with magical pictures or filled with the most wondrous stories? To put a book in a child's hand, is to set them on the path of a lifetime of adventures. There is no limit to imagination and books will only act as the fuel for them to dream. So, in these trying times, when the world looks like a difficult place to exist in, I'd rather spread joy with something I myself find so much joy in. I'm so thankful that FHI gives me the opportunity to do so.

***Sweta Singhal***



Joining FHI as a volunteer was probably the best decision I made during my UG life. Although COVID put a temporary pause to the monthly offline events, FHI has since come up with various ways to stay in touch with the fellow volunteers and the kids alike. Thanks to the advancement of our digital world, it is possible to interact within the FHI community, albeit virtually. From the success of FHI Mentorship Program to the latest launch of the FHI Book Joy initiative, which basically involves providing new books to economically disadvantaged children; there's really no stopping. When Vishal Sir shared the news in our WhatsApp group, I couldn't help but immediately click the link and make a small donation, whatever my unemployed self could afford at the moment. Books have been an integral part of my life, up until adulthood. Although I don't read as much as I'd like to now, I had been the most avid reader throughout school and immensely proud of my huge collection. Books bring forth a whole new world to the unsuspecting reader, a world seemingly better than ours, a magical escape from the comfort of our room. Being able to introduce young kids to the unmatched joy of reading, radiates some of that joy onto my soul. FHI acts as the medium, through which I receive more than I can ever give. A fulfilling cycle of sorts.

***Chandamita Bora***