Twenty eight young authors from Isha Home School were put through the paces as they wrote, edited and selected stories to be compiled into a book called Homegrown Tales

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A binaya Damodaran holds the book close to her heart as cameras flash and the audience applaud. Today is special for the 13-year-old. The year-long grueling sessions of writing, brainstorming and editing have finally paid off. From a voracious reader of short stories and memoirs she has turned into an author herself. “It feels good to see my name in bold, black letters in the book. It feels good to be a writer,” she says.

She is one of the 28 young authors of the Isha Home School who have brought out an anthology of short stories called Homegrown Tales, published by www.quillclubwriters.com.

The publishing house provides a platform for school children across the country to publish their works. The kids launched their book through a play. A confused traveller lands up in an unknown land full of weird characters including a creepy witch, a hyper pandit, a flautist and a bandit. “Where Am I? Who Am I?” he keeps asking. The confusion is resolved when the characters tell him that he is a reader who has wandered into their magical world. The young authors themselves acted in the play.

Homegrown Tales has short stories that handle mature themes such as love, family life and war; but they are told with childlike sensitivity. For instance a story called ‘Over A Cup of Coffee’ by 15-year-old Rutuja Shinde, follows a conversation between two strangers. Party hopper Dushyant is attracted to Sakshi, a no-nonsense young woman. Sakshi is weary of his flamboyant ways and convinced him that life is not just about partying and alcohol. Later we get to know that she sees her brother in Dushyant, a brother who she lost to alcohol and drugs.

The 28 authors were chosen from 200 students between the ages of eight and eighteen, through three rounds of selections. They had to pitch their ideas in a way that would appeal to all the 28 since each of them was a stakeholder in it. Convincing the little ones was the hardest task, recalls Varun Siddharth, a 15-year-old. “They would dismiss the story in a second if they did not get it! It was really a challenging task to convince them,” he smiles.

Aditi Viswanathan, an 11-year-old says 14 of her stories were rejected. “We had to run the idea through the teachers, quillclubwriters team members and our friends. There were disagreements, discussions and debates. It was heart-wrenching to see our favourite ideas being vetoed.”

Initially the children edited each other’s copy and then it was passed on to the teachers. The final draft was brought out by the professionals of quillwriters’ team.

“As we inched towards the editing phase, we realised writing can be excruciatingly painful and laborious. ‘Chop chop chop’…our teachers and the quillwriters team kept telling each time we gave the copy. The final draft looked nothing like our first!” says Aditi.

But, they have realised that writing needs not just a creative mind, but also perseverance, hard work and patience. “Next time we see a book, we will think about the rejections, rewrites and rounds of editing that went into it,” says 13-year-old Sidharth Menon.

After the launch, the children, teachers and dignitaries interact with each other over lunch. It is followed by a musical performance, by the school’s in house band Fizzy Solo in the open lawns. The children run around, enjoy their sundaes and groove to the music. For a minute they have forgotten about rough drafts, bad edits and meandering plot lines. They are basking in the fame; enjoying all the attention. They shall relish this. Until their next book.