When Students Spun Tales

As many as 28 school students took their first step into the magical world of words by penning a story collection, which was launched under the title 'Homegrown Tales'. Anushree Madhavan writes about the novel initiative.

Seventeen-year-old Ashmita Kumar along with 27 schoolmates became mini-celebrity of sorts in her alma mater recently when Homegrown Tales, a compendium of 28 stories spun by children between eight and 18, was launched under the aegis of the Quill Club Writers, which conducted a nearly year-long workshop for them. All the young authors went through processes of brainstorming, reworking, editing and proofreading, and publishing their book.

“We had sessions where we discussed our ideas and even a ten-year-old would mercilessly trash the idea of a senior,” said Ashmita Kumar, of Ishu Home School, who has also gotten into King’s College, London, for a writing programme, thanks to her experience in getting published.

While for some of them this was a first time in story writing, others have written pieces for magazines and journals for youngsters.

The young authors worked in coordination with the heads of Quill Club Writers, Ruchira Mittal and Hemant Kumar, and their English teachers. Some of them came across writer’s block but overcame it in their unique way. Some would sing, some would shut themselves till they got the flow in the story and others would just stop and continue later. “Looked at it like a math problem and started looking for solution. At one point I knew which way I should go,” said Srijamita Jaganathan.

During the course of the program, not only did the youngsters rack their brains to bring out a masterpiece, but also learnt many things. “We learnt to respect others’ ideas too and never once did we belittle our juniors. We understood that they had the same capabilities like we did,” said Ashmita.

Author and poet Anumalachi Subramanian, who was present for the launch said, “While growing up, most youngsters feel that they are spoken to rather than being heard. I have experienced the same. As a 15-year-old I feared I would be voted out. But this is a process of acknowledgement and the voices of all of whom deserve to be heard.”

Homegrown Tales is for all ages. The anthology spans across genres from fantasy to realistic fiction. The task in hand for the young writers was to write something that they had experienced personally as it would be easier for them to relate to.

Some of the stories have so much thought in them that one can only imagine the effort the author would have taken. For example, 12-year-old Nischal Gopinath Naik’s, ‘The General’s Decision’ takes you through the Kargil War. It talks about a particular general and what he does in the war. Flipping each page only made one think that it was either a fresh-hand experience that he had heard or he must have done quite an amount of research to know about the war.

Realistic fiction seemed to be the favourite for many. While there is Chetna Aamud’s ‘Blind Lights’, which is about a young superstar, there is also K. Mal explicitly’s ‘These Are The Very Noises, a love story of a colonel. A story that brings smile to your lips is ‘Green Cheer’ by nine-year-old Bharti Patil Kumar. This class III girl is a nature lover and that is reflected in her story where the protagonist plants trees in his locality to bring about a revolution.

Ask her about her love for nature and she tells us another story of a move by Delhi Subir K. that influenced her into writing this piece. “The film is about a Jaguar and how they try to save their home, the forest, from the concrete jungle that was being built on their land. I want to write more such pieces on saving forests,” said the young girl.

While some stories make you smile and some are weaved in a predictable manner, there are few like ‘A Cupboard Full of Coats and It’s Lonely At The Top’ will make you ponder.