



illustration: **DULARI DEVI**
text: **GITA WOLF**

Following My Paint Brush is the story of Dulari Devi, a domestic helper who went on to become an artist in the Mithila style of folk painting from Bihar, eastern India. Dulari is from a community of fisherfolk whose occupation is river-fishing. Used to a life of hard and relentless labour, she discovered painting while working as a domestic helper in an artist's house.

The Mithila tradition of folk art originates from the women living in rural communities in the state of Bihar. The practice in its original form—using traditional designs and shamanic symbols painted on the walls and floors of village homes—continues to flourish even today, especially during festivals and weddings. Dulari Devi trained under another great Mithila artist Mahasundari Devi, whose house she worked in. Dulari's art has since gained prominence in her own right and now she is a full-time artist. Her art is innovative in the ways it embraced and reinvented the traditional form to tell heartwarming stories of her own community.

Here are some questions and ideas to explore the book more deeply.

Talk about the art

- Look up other examples of Mithila or Madhubani art. You can look at *Hope is a Girl Selling Fruit* and *Waterlife* for more examples of this style.
- The third page is filled with pots and pans arranged around the page. Look at how the different patterns are used to decorate and colour them. Careful patterning is a very important part of the Mithila tradition.
- In traditional Mithila art, there are two major ways of filling in objects. One is called kachhni where patterns such as wavy lines and straight lines and dots are used to fill in the subject. The other is called bharni style where the objects are coloured in. You can see this difference in the painting where Dulari Devi learns to paint for the first time and paints fish from her childhood. See how the woman on the left has intricate patterns on her clothes in the kachhni style and how the woman on the right has coloured in clothes in the bharni style. Now, look through the other paintings in the book and see if you can tell the difference.
- Traditionally, Mithila uses five major colours; red, yellow, green, black and orange. Look for any other colours that Dulari Devi may have used.

Talk about the story

- Look at what activities the little girls and boys are doing in the book. Are they doing the same things? Or are they sometimes doing different things?
- Why is the woman crying in the third painting?
- Look at the fourth painting of children playing. Can you recognise what game they're playing? If not, make up the rules of the brand new game you imagine them to be playing!
- Did you notice any sign that Dulari Devi was thinking about being an artist while she was still a child?
- Can you identify the moment when Dulari Devi starts to create things that are in her mind with her own hand?
- "I am not just a 'cleaner woman'. I am an artist." Discuss why being an artist is so much more important for her than being a 'cleaner woman'?

Activities

- Dulari Devi found joy in the little things. She loved to watch children play, to create pictures in her mind, drawing fishes, arranging pots in order. Make a list of small things that make you happy. (Hint: A nice long bath? NO bath? Getting to sleep for 10 more minutes in the morning?)
- Draw the outlines of the 5 most commonly used utensils at home, (Hint: Cup? Plate? Pan?) Now, look at any page and how Dulari Devi has used patterns and colours to fill in details. Fill in the utensils you have drawn with patterns of your own.
- Almost all the pages have either a bird or fish hidden in the details. Can you find them? Count the number of fishes, snakes and birds in this book.