

**A VILLAGE IS A BUSY PLACE!**

illustration: **ROHIMA CHITRAKAR**

text: **V. GEETHA**

This fold-open activity book by young artist Rohima Chitrakar features Patua scroll painting - to show the everyday lives of the Santhal people, one of the largest indigenous tribes of India and Nepal. Patua scroll-art is a living tradition from Bengal in eastern India, where performance, storytelling and art meet. The story is recited or sung as the narrator holds up a painted scroll pointing to the image that goes with words.

As *A Village is a Busy Place* unfolds, panel by panel, we follow the Santhals in their day-to-day activities: cooking, fishing, hunting, music-making and much more. We also see how these activities change in keeping with the two main seasons, summer and the monsoon months. Each panel contains a description of the scene, complete with questions and clues – to direct children’s attention to various visual details and inculcate an appreciation for art.

We have noticed that this book works well both when children read it on their own, and when they read it with their peers. In the latter instance, they enjoy looking for clues together, often making a game out of who finds what detail first, sometimes even disagreeing whether one animal is indeed the animal mentioned.

Here is a set of activities, asking children to do a variety of tasks. An educator can take them through this list carefully and explain what needs to be done.

1. This single painting can hold more than the one narrative mentioned in the text. You can create alternative narratives with the child by noticing different details or following different characters through the page and see where the scroll takes you.

For example: Choose any one non-human creature and make up a story about a day in their life in the village. The white cat in the first panel, for instance, looks like he's just hatched a plan to steal some fish. Would he do that at all times of the year? Or do other things?

2. Throughout the painting, there are baskets of food interspersed throughout the village. Ask the child to guess what these might hold. How would they taste? Sweet, salty, sour?

3. Pay attention to the different activities men and women in the village are involved in. What do they do together? What do they do separately?

4. Open the whole scroll up and look for items that the child may see in their own daily lives. (Pots, train, bike?) How many can they find?

5. Point out some special features of this painting to the child. The people in these paintings are shown in side profile. The animals are front-facing. Bright colours and bold black outlines have been used to paint these figures. There is very little space left between people and things, yet the sporadic use of white in food and animals creates a balance in the painting.

After showing these features, ask the child to create a single painting, with different panels, in the style of the Patua painters. Subject: one day at school.