

# Sangita's Singing Teaching/Learning Notes

Prepared by the author Libby Hathorn

The Australian National Curriculum has three strands, **Language, Literature and Literacy**. These notes reflect some of the planned outcomes and build towards achievement in English as outlined in the curriculum in Receptive Modes, namely *listening reading and viewing* and Productive Modes namely *speaking, writing and creating*.

## Inspiration for the Story

*Sangita's Singing* was written by Libby Hathorn after a visit to Kathmandu where she ran workshops in poetry making and writing for teachers and met some of the school students as well. Visiting their hostel where students from the countryside lived, she reflected on the change it would be for a girl to come from a village where her house is so different –the roof is thatched, the oven is an open fire, and there is no running water. There might be a lot of love in the house but the desire for education means many children have to live in hostels to get to a school that will nurture them.

And just walking round Kathmandu near the shrines and temples the bells and the chanting, and the gongs, the air made a kind of music once you could get clear of the motorbike noises!

So *Sangita's Singing* was borne out of this visit and Libby invented the idea that Sangita comes from a musical family and the grand mother has introduced songs for nearly everything they do. And that it will be music and her singing that helps Sangita make a big change.



**Sangita's Song of Kathmandu- a song of triumph!**

**Story Outline. The introduction/the conflict/the climax and resolution**

## **Leaving the village and her family**

Sangita has to leave her mother and father her sister and brother and her beloved grandmother. Her little sister Indira believes that it is Sangita who sings up the sun and that the sun might not come up when Sangita goes. Her parents encourage her and her grandmother tells her that when she comes back she will be able to read from the red book that a backpacker has left in their house. The magic of being able to read is compelling! The day she is leaving Sangita tells her little sister Indira that she must sing up the sun now.

## **Change is hard and there is a bully to face!**

Sangita make the change to the city and to hostel life and while it is frightening just to make the bus journey to do this, and face a bed without her sister and brother and a bathroom with running water, it is terrifying to be singled out by the bully Yamu. Being lonely for her family and coping with a bully makes Sangita's life there hard but she does well at school and when the teacher hears her voice, he puts her in the special choir. But it is there with the visit of some Australians and a little girl called Harriet that Sangita feels lets the school down. When asked to sing alone by her beloved teacher, Yamu the bully makes faces and puts her off and she cannot utter a sound. The teacher is cross with Sangita. She is ashamed and feels she can never sing again and though she tries, Sangita has lost her voice. How she longs to go home!

## **Giving friendship and comfort**

But then one lonely afternoon at the hostel she hears someone crying and when she goes to investigate Sangita finds the bully Yamu who tells her that her mother is ill and she must leave the school. Always a kind girl, Sangita hugs Yamu and asks her if she'd like to hear one of her grandmother's songs and Yamu nods. Sangita sings and her voice grows bright and clear and Yamu is comforted. But better still her friends and the house mother are at the door listening and now everyone knows that Sangita's voice has returned.

## **Making the change successfully**

Not only does she compose a song of Kathmandu, deciding that she likes being there after all, but when she gets home she hears her little sister sing the familiar songs. When her grandmother reaches down the precious red book and yes she can read, it is then the family learn to their amusement that it is only a bus timetable! Then tucked in the back of the book, her grandmother finds a backpacker's story about the wonders of the Nepali mountains and villages, and Sangita reads it to all the family...

# **Author Explains Working with Artist**

## **Selecting and briefing the artist**

Two Nepali art students were first selected to do the 32 page book illustrations. Nepali art student Bandana Tulachen was the artist finally chosen to illustrate *Sangita's Singing* for her sensitive drawings. At first she was only going to do borders that ran across the base of each page showing Nepali mountains and villages and then a scene for busy Kathmandu. But then things changed. I had 'skyped' with two artists who live in Kathmandu and at first I'd explained to both the artists what I was trying to achieve with characters and setting and story. And the borders that Bandana would produce.

When the first artist could not commit to the book over several months, Bandana volunteered to take on the whole book. I'd seen her mountain scene of the Himalayas, her spread on village life in its fine detail and another of the busyness and energy of the Kathmandu cityscape – all finely drawn. (These are not in the body of the book any more but have now been absorbed into the book as endpapers rather than interrupt the illustrations.)

### **Storyboard**

I agreed Bandana could try to take on the illustration of the whole book. I sent copious notes of what I'd like to see on each double page and Bandana responded with a storyboard of large sketches for each page which we further discussed. She then sent me several versions of the character Sangita and the way the Nepali child might dress so I could choose my character and her clothing from a range.

With internet not always available and scanning not possible, the first sketches were put on the floor at the Mitrataa headquarters in Kathmandu and photographed but it was enough to have something to go by. And gradually Bandana began to work towards finished art but not too far, as I needed to okay each step.

### **Evolving illustrations**

With her finished art I could see Bandana had talent and a marvellous sense of colour but not yet the continuity that a picture book required. She had her characters 'looking to camera' rather than looking at each other while they were talking, so we discussed that and other picture book skills needed to raise the level of her art to picture book standard; and Bandana was eager to learn. In the first instances, some of her renditions of inside homes were not true to village life. She needed to understand readers did not want to see a Western kitchen but the kind of kitchen a Nepali mother would have:- the stove made out of stone, with its open fire and heavy pots so close to the floor. And the delight of the dried corn and bright red chillies hanging on the walls outside every village house, let alone the buffalo and the hens and roosters wandering around.

### **Back to look at villages**

So on another of my trips to Nepal about a year later, the artist Bandana, and Director of Mitrataa, Bec Ordish and I travelled together to a village near Kathmandu and took photos

of typical houses and animals and the way of life there. We discussed what we thought children would find interesting to see illustrated. Of course in finishing this picture Bandana added a lot of her own inspiration but it was good to actually walk the walk with this young artist as this was her very first book.

Then the decision was made by me to make it a picture book size that is 32 pages, even though the text was quite long. I'd written a book *Zahara's Rose (IP Kidz)* the same length based on The Hanging Gardens of Babylon and the illustrating of that had worked very well with the longer text. So I decided that Bandana should illustrate each of the pages and that some of her illustrations e.g. the waterfall and the dream sequences, should extend over two pages.



**Artist Bandana Tulachen**



**Typical village home**



**Early sketch. Arrival in Kathmandu**





Finished artwork

## Reading and Understanding Worksheets

### Questions for Specific Pages

The story tells of Sangita's transition from village life to a city school and to hostel living with other girls and not her family, in the big city of Kathmandu. Here, she has to face her homesickness and the bully Yamu as she finds her own strengths.

**Read the story** and focus on both the story, and the way in which the artist has illustrated the story, from cover to cover.

Look at the **endpapers** which are of the wonderful mountain of Nepal, and Sangita's village at the beginning; whilst at the end the wonderful mountains of Nepal again, but then the busy cityscape of Kathmandu which Sangita at last accepted. Think about why the author/publisher Libby Hathorn might have decided to use the artwork in this way.

Now **return to the text** and see if you can answer these questions by reading more closely.

**Page 3**

Indira believed her big sister Sangita could sing up the sun. What did Indira ask her sister to do as they walked to the water spout to fetch water?

---

---

**Page 5**

What did Sangita tell her little sister she would have to do each morning once Sangita went away to school in the big city?

---

---

Was Indira happy to do this, How do you know?

---

---

**page7**

Sangita's home was hung with \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

What else can you see outside their house?

---

---

**Page 8.**

Why did Indira and Tika howl when it was time to say goodbye to Sangita?

---

---

What did their grandmother tell them Sangita would be able to do when she came back from the school?

---

---

**Page 10**

What words (adjectives) did the author use to describe the city of Kathmandu

---

---

**Page 11**

Sangita's mother said she was a lucky girl to be going to school in the city. But Sangita did not feel lucky at all. Why was this?

---

---

---

**Page 12**

What did Sangita tell her mother that little sister Indira should do before her mother left to go back home to their village.

---

**Page 13**

Who was friendly with Sangita? \_\_\_\_\_

Who was not friendly with Sangita? \_\_\_\_\_

**Page 14 and 15**

The artist has done a double page spread showing all the things Sangita is missing from her home in the village. List what you see in Sangita's dreams.

---

---

---

What things would you miss most if you had to leave home?

---

On a separate piece of paper, draw a dream picture of those things

**Page 17**



How did the author describe the way the teacher was dressed.

---

---

What impression did that give you of the teacher?

---

How has the artist shown you that Yamu does not like Sangita? Talk about the expression on Yamu's face.

---

---

### **Page 18**

Did Sangita like the teacher? How do you know?

---

---

### **Page 20**

Yamu teased Sangita. She told her she smelt of buffalo dung and did mean things to her.

Why do you think Yamu was a bully to Sangita?

---

---

What do you think Sangita should have done about Yamu bullying her in this way?

---

---

### **Page 21**

How do we know Sangita enjoyed the Australian girl Harriet's company? What did they do together? What did they say they would do when Harriet went back to Australia?

---

---

---

### **Page 23**

What did the teacher ask Sangita and Bina to do on stage that was unusual?

---

---

What happened to Sangita?

---

---

**Page 24**

How did she feel about herself?

---

---

**Page 24 and 25**

Sangita is dreaming of home again. Name the things the artist has shown you she is dreaming of...

---

---

Why do you think she is dreaming of home?

---

---

**Page 26**

Why was Sangita surprised when she approached the girl who was crying?

---

---

**Page 27**

How did Sangita describe her grandmother's special song to Yamu?

---

---

Do you believe a song could make the sun rise? Why or why not?

---

---

**Page 29**

What was in the Song of Kathmandu that Sangita made up when she decided she liked being at the school in Kathmandu?

---

---

How does the artist show it?

---

---

Did singing the song make Sangita feel happy? How do you know?

---

---

**Page 30**

What did Sangita read to her family from the red book?

---

---

Why did they all laugh?

---

---

Is it a happy ending for this story? Why do you think this way?

---

---

Draw your own illustration of a part of this story you like best.

## Fine tuning by the Author

In the first paragraph in chapter 3 **page 10**, the author uses a number of exclamation marks (!) about Sangita's first impression arriving in Kathmandu. Look at the first paragraph and say why the author might have chosen to use exclamations here.

---

---

---

What is the adjective she then uses twice to change the mood of Sangita's arrival in Kathmandu?

---

On **page 11**, the author uses the phrase 'lucky girl' spoken by two adults to Sangita. Why do you think the adults might have said this to Sangita?

---

---

What was the real feeling Sangita had about her new home at the hostel?

---

---

## For Group Discussion

The **back cover** has words like *belonging, befriending, fearing, forgiving, liking, sharing, loving learning, remembering, reading, singing*. Why do you think the author may have listed these words?

How did **Sangita's character** develop and change from a shy and frightened girl to a more confident girl. What helped change her?

What about the **character of Yamu**. Do you think she would change from being a bully after Sangita was so sympathetic and friendly to her? Why do you think this?

Yamu is a bully in this story. Have you ever been bullied? How did you feel? What's a good thing to do if someone bullies you?

If you look at both **front and back cover** together you will see Indira on the back cover and Sangita on the front cover and they are joined by bands of colour and musical notes. Why do you think the artist done has the cover this way?

There is a **back story** about Sangita's little sister Indira. Though Indira is not mentioned much we know something changes for Indira too, when Sangita leaves. What is it?

Do you think this story about children could be set in any country in the world? Why or why not?

---

---

The book is published by Pax Press. *Pax* is the Latin word for **peace**. Why do you think the publisher might have chosen such a name for her press?

---

---

What **conflict or problem** was resolved in this story for Sangita?

---

---

## Creative writing

Imagine you are a backpacker travelling to the highest, mountain in the world, Mt Everest in Nepal. Write a story about a night you spend in Sangita's village home. You might like to look at pictures or travel brochures of the mountain villages of Nepal before you begin writing and jot down descriptive words. What did you see, hear, taste, and listen to on your night in the mountain village.

There are six songs mentioned in the story. Write the words for either a *Song of the City* or a *Song of the Countryside* and to make up a Bollywood style dance to go with it. You might like to work in a group and perform it for the class.



## Behind the Scenes

Further insight into the process of writing and publishing for extension students.

### Author technique

Author Libby Hathorn always needs **inspiration** or a trigger to write her stories. See above for her inspiration in the opening notes.

First of all when affected by something she makes notes or writes a **short poem** that encapsulated the **feelings** about this story. In this case it was about change in a child's life and coping with that change; and affected by the bells and chanting of Kathmandu, it was about singing too and the way in which **singing songs** tells our stories too

She usually chooses a dramatic part of the story and writes that first. For example, she might write the scene where Yamu the bully tries to make life difficult for Sangita. When the story has been with her for some time and she writes down fragments, she then makes a plan for a beginning and middle and an end. Sometimes that plan can **change** as the character takes on her own voice.

To Libby, writing a story text for a picture book is much like writing a poem or song. The words she chooses carefully have to suit the characters and show off the settings, lots of **adjectives and adverbs** adding colour. And there has to be surprise at the end like a good poem usually has. In this case it was that the red book was only a bus timetable!

Libby also wanted to show something of the life of a child in Nepal right now and how children all round the world in some ways have to go through similar things as they grow and change. She is hoping to find a Nepali composer and perhaps a student who will specially compose *The Song of Kathmandu* that Sangita sings at the end of the book. Also some of the grandmother's songs like the Waterfall Song.

### Illustrator Technique

Bandana had to travel the artistic road from art student to a fully fledged illustrator to achieve credibility for her artwork for this book and over the two years it took her technique and style really developed. Luckily her innate sense of colour was good to begin with and she really portrays the feeling of both mountains and the mountain villages and the cityscapes of busy Kathmandu.

In the early stages, with her finished art I could see Bandana had talent and a marvellous sense of colour but not yet the continuity that a picture book required. She had her



characters ‘looking to camera’ rather than looking at each other while they were talking, so we discussed that and other picture book skills needed to raise the level of her art to picture book standard; and Bandana was eager to learn. In the first instances, some of her renditions of inside homes were not true to village life. She needed to understand readers did not want to see a Western style kitchen but truly the kind of kitchen a Nepali mother would have in a village:- the stove made out of stone, with its open fire and heavy pots so close to the floor. And the delight of the dried corn and bright red chillies hanging on the walls outside every village house, let alone the buffalo and the hens and roosters wandering around.

Walking round a village with her and taking many photos helped the artist immeasurably.

## The Publisher’s and the Designer’s Roles

The publisher has to take the ‘raw materials’ that is the text and the artwork and make these marry and become an appealing book for its **intended readers**. The publisher has already made certain **artistic decision** with the writer and artist. The text has been **edited** and re-edited so that awkward phrases or spelling errors or punctuation errors are all corrected and the text with its artwork is **print ready**. The publisher has to ‘foot the bill’ for the production of the book and as it is an expensive process, each step has to be checked and re-checked and a good team drawn around the publisher so the book gets the best possible treatment.

When all the artwork was delivered to me as publisher I then had to get professional scans of the work and turn those scans over to a designer who would know how to translate all those illustrations- many more than 32- into a 32 page book.

Alicia Freile of Tango Media took on the job and made a first version of ‘pages’ for me to see. She softened the edges of some of Bandana’s drawings so the colour faded away rather than had straight edges which made it look softer and more attractive. She knew the divisions of the text I’d chosen and what I suggested for each page, but called on her own design skills to sometimes divide up the drawings or change their size to fit on the pages and give the feeling of continuity that is so important.

She prepared the book to be print ready before turning over the designed book to the publisher in Kathmandu.

## Copyright and Imprint Page

On the imprint page which gives all the details of the book, there is a copyright sign. Find out what is meant by copyright and explain it by using some books and preparing a slide presentation about it.

### **Sangita's Singing Imprint Page**

**Text** ©Libby Hathorn 2012

**Illustrations** © Bandana Tulachen 2012

The right of Libby Hathorn to be identified as the author of this book has been asserted by her in accordance with The Copyright Amendment (Moral Rights) 2000.

Published by Pax Press, 2012

(A division of Hathorn Enterprises Pty Ltd)

Printed in Nepal

Designed by Tango Media

The proceeds from the sale of this book will go the Mitrataa Foundation, Nepal.

The work is copyright. Apart from any use as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968* no part may be reproduced, copied, scanned stored in a retrieval system, recorded or transmitted in any form or by an means without prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-9873825-0-4

Author website [www.libbyhathorn.com](http://www.libbyhathorn.com)

Blog [www.libby-hathorn.blogspot.com](http://www.libby-hathorn.blogspot.com)

## Front and Back Covers

**The blurb** on the back cover gives an outline of the story and tries to invite the reader into the story. Can you write a new blurb for the book in four lines and try to interest the reader in the story. You could ask questions such as this blurb does or sue exclamations to make it more dramatic.

*Sangita loves to sing. But when she leaves her small village for school in the big city of Kathmandu, fear makes her lose her sweet voice. Will she ever make friends in this strange place with the bully Yamu close by? Will she learn to read? And will she ever sing again? Sangita longs for the mountains of home but a visit from an Australian*

*girl and an unexpected event magically restores her voice. And at family from the treasured red book. Home she can at last read to all the family.*

What is show on the **front cover**? Do you think there should be more? Look at the **title page** and see what extra thing is noted on this page.

---

## Author and Artist Biographies

### **Author.**

**Libby Hathorn** is an acclaimed Australian children's writer with many awards for her books. A keen educator she believes in the power of poetry to open hearts and minds.

### **Artist**

**Bandana Tulachen** is a Nepali art student who worked for two years on the illustrations. Sangita's Singing is her first book.

## Longer Author Biography

**Libby Hathorn** is an award winning writer of some 50 books. Her stories have been published both in English and in translation round the world. Her young adult novel *Thunderwith* was made a movie by Hallmark Hall of Fame and she wrote the text for *Way Home* which won the Kate Greenaway Award in the UK. She was awarded a Centenary Medal in 2003. Libby is a keen educator, lectures in creative writing and poetry. Devoted to poetry she has designed poetry trails and programs for both museum and school. She is an Australia Day Ambassador each year, and in 2012 was a National Ambassador for the National Year of Reading in Australia. Her latest works are: the novel *Fire Song*, picture book *A Boy Like Me: a story about peace* and *The ABC Book of Australian Poetry: a Treasury of Poems for Young People* (ABC /Harper Collins)

## Writing/illustrating Extension Project for Interested Students.

Try writing and illustrating a short book for younger children. You could model it on Sangita's Singing about some younger children at school and what happens to them. The text would be much shorter. The **title** is very important in drawing attention to what the book is all about. For example *A No-Good Day* would be a story about a disaster while *Indira to the Rescue* feels more like an adventure. It could be as dramatic as a snake sliding into the classroom!

Think about two or three strong characters in your story with the lead character setting things in action. Make up the characters based on some of the qualities of people you either know, have read about or seen in a movie or on television. What do they look like? E.g. *Sangita wears her hair in plaits, loves her family.* What habits do they have? E.g. *Sangita likes to sing*

Plan your short story about these characters with a **beginning**, a conflict or problem to be solved, a **middle** where the characters set out to solve the problem; a **climax** where things change, and an **ending** where things turn out all right for the main character. Remember it is for younger children so better to be a happy ending for this age group.

The story should have either 16 planned pages (for the very young) or 32 pages. A typical picture storybook number. The title page and the imprint page already take up two pages.

Work alone if you are confident about the artwork or in pairs if you want to divide the roles, one writing and one illustrating. When you have finished the book and assembled it in pages, plan your cover and make up a **blurb for the back cover** that gives an outline of the story; and each write a **biography** as well, that would explain your background and the background of the book.

You could scan each page and make jpegs of the story pages so that you could show it as slides online; or produce it as a paper book.

Read and show the book to its intended audience to see their reaction to your story. You could invite them to act it out.

Copyright Libby Hathorn 2013

Free to be downloaded and used for educational purpose only at no cost.

Acknowledgment would be appreciated.

