

## The Katha Chest

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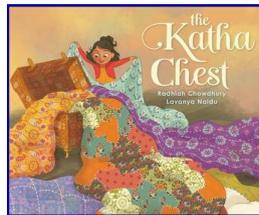
Publisher: Allen & Unwin

ISBN 9781760524326 SCIS: 1999316

\$24.99

Six-year-old Asiya loves to go to Nanu's house. Best among all of Nanu's treasures is the big old chest filled with quilts that tell the stories of the women in Asiya's family.

A beautifully woven tale about the bonds of love, culture and memory.



Teacher Notes have been based on those supplied by the publisher. A full version is available on our website.

### Themes:

- Culture
- Bonds of Love
- Memories
- Family

### Discussion Questions and Activities:

#### *Before Reading:*

- [Pointing to the chest in the illustration on the cover] What is a chest and what sort of things might people store in them? [Students may mention pirates and treasure which will enable you to talk about chests as objects in which valuable things are stored.]
- What sort of treasure do you think the young girl here has found in the chest? [Students with South Asian heritage may understand the concept of kathas so it would be wonderful if they could be encouraged to explain it to the class. However, if students don't know or are shy, explain that kathas are light quilts made from the cotton of old saris or special dresses worn by women in countries such as India and Bangladesh.]
- How do you think finding the kathas in the chest makes the girl feel?
- Why do you think she feels this way?
- Do you want to discover more about kathas in the story?
- Open the book and read the first three double-page spreads but stop before going any further and point to the medal that Asiya is holding. Ask students if they can think of sad times when people might receive a medal and discuss the idea that Boro Khala's husband could have gone to war. Turn the page slowly and encourage students to explain in their own words what they think might be happening in each of the panels. Point out that the images of guns and flags point to fighting in a war but try to keep the focus on the story of Boro Khala looking after her family while her husband was away. Point out that the sari that Boro Khala is wearing in each panel is now the katha that Asiya found in the chest in the previous spread.
- Now turn the page and read the next double-page spread, stopping to talk about why Mejo Khala's fingers might always be stained with bright colours. Turn the page and let students explore her transformation from a child who loves drawing in the first panel to a woman who creates beautiful paintings and prints, stopping to talk about her time as a student activist. Before turning the page point out that the sari that Mejo Khala is wearing now is the katha Asiya was exploring in the previous double-page-spread.
- Continue to Shejo Khala's story and talk about what the four panels tell us about her. Discuss her love of both reading and her little daughter in the first two panels but you may need to explain to young students the significance of the third panel where her daughter's ghost is rising from her deathbed. Ask students if they can tell who the children around Shejo Khala might be in the final panel if they are not her children. Before turning the page point out that the sari Shejo Khala is wearing is the same as the katha in the previous spread.
- Continue in this fashion until the end of the book.
- Return to the opening spread and study Nanu's house. Ask students if the house provides any clues about which country Nanu and Asiya are living in as the story opens. [Hint: both the exterior and interior of the house is very Australian.] Discuss how families migrate to Australia from other parts of the world and how this has made Australia a rich and varied culture. Ask students where their family has come from and some of the traditions – like kathas – they treasure. Encourage a class discussion around the different clothes, food and religious festivals that students have experienced.