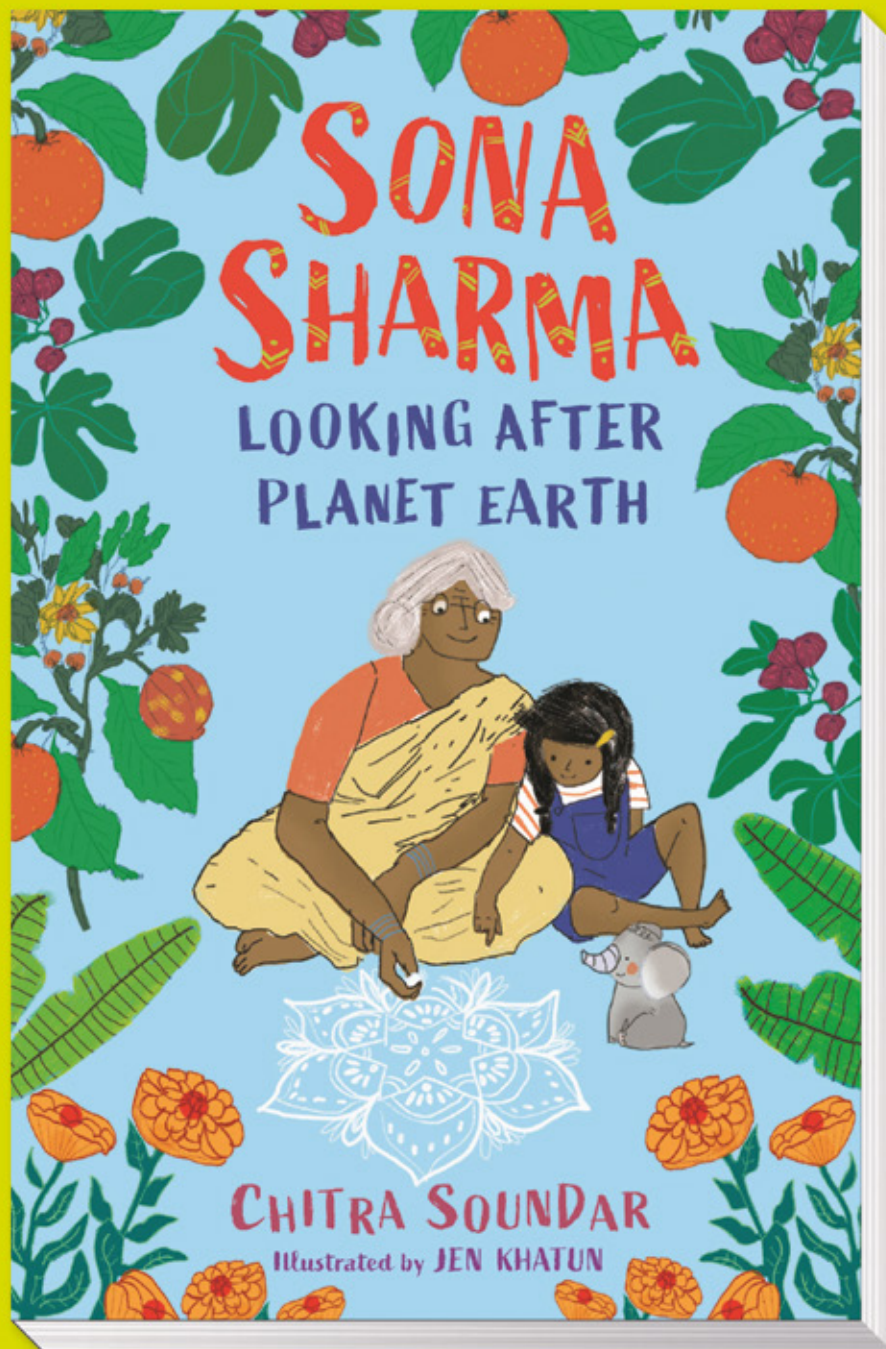
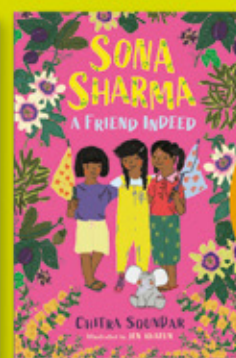


DISCUSSION GUIDE



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SONA SHARMA

LOOKING AFTER PLANET EARTH

CHITRA SUNDAR Illustrated by JEN KHATUN

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR WALKER BOOKS

ABOUT THE BOOK

This charming follow-up to the first Sona Sharma book is a lovingly portrayed testament to the power of kindness, selflessness, and small acts of good, all steeped in the warmth and colour of Indian tradition. Worried by the impact of climate change that she learns about in school, Sona is determined to do her bit to help look after Planet Earth. But when good intentions lead to over-zealous actions, how will the family respond to all of Sona's new rules and plans? With the annual kolam competition approaching, can Sona make amends, and bring her family even closer together in the process?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chitra Soundar was born and brought up in India, where traditions, festivals and mythology are a way of life. She now lives in South-East London, and regularly visits schools, bookshops and libraries to tell stories and teach creative writing. She is a member of the international Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jen Khatun's work is inspired by the natural world, the books on her shelves and the hidden magical moments found in everyday life. She says, "Being of Bangladeshi heritage meant that Chitra's story reminded me of the close bonds, traditions and memories of my family life. As a grown-up, I cherish every profound life-teaching my family gifted me; they have made me who I am today."

GENERAL INTRODUCTION:

With its clear environmental themes, *Sona Sharma: Looking After Planet Earth* fits perfectly into topic-based exploration of climate change, geography and environmentalism. The book sits as a timely reminder of the impact small changes can have, while furthermore offering huge scope and opportunity for exploring other cultures and traditions, and the wider impact of climate change on different parts of the world. Care should be taken when discussing climate change, given the rise in climate-change-related anxiety; however, the topic is a vital one, and should not be shied away from.

It may be that you or members of your group have first-hand experience of some of the culture and traditions depicted in the book. This is an opportunity to celebrate, and before discussing the book you may like to prepare some activities, resources or even some of the foods mentioned in the story.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Getting started:

Check familiarity with the first book in the series. *Who has read it? Who remembers what happens? Does it feature the same characters?* Ask what group members think of this second book. *Who would like to tell the group something they liked about it? Why? How would anyone describe the book?*

1. Messages

"Start small, start now." – p.13

"Do more, do it now!" – p.60

Is the book trying to tell the reader anything? What are the key messages in it? See who can remember these two calls to action in the book. What do they mean? Why do they matter?

2. Climate change

"Sona loved Planet Earth so she listened carefully. She didn't want to miss a thing." – p.10

Why is Sona worried about Planet Earth? What steps is she taking to help? Why does she try to get other people involved? Look again at the list Sona makes on p.33. What do group members think of this? Could you make a list together, of something each of you could do to help look after Planet Earth? Or even better, something you could take home and share with families, to get more people involved?

3. Good intentions

"'About your actions,' said Appa. 'We never blame the person. We only want them to correct their actions.'" – p.31

What happens when Sona gets home from school and tries to help? Is she doing the right thing? If not, why not? Introduce the idea of "good intentions". What does this mean? Is it possible to do the wrong thing for the right reasons? Has anyone ever done the wrong thing, but based on good intentions?

4. The President

"Then she got out of the car, turned on her heels and went inside, without saying goodbye or goodnight." – p.61

Why is the President called the President? What does this name tell you about Sona's grandmother? How does Sona feel about her grandmother? How does the President's attitude change across the book? What causes this change?

5. Elephant

"Elephant thought the President was being super rude." – p.55

Who is Elephant? Is he really whispering to Sona all the time? If not, whose voice is it? What does anyone think the things that Elephant "says" or "thinks" mean? Can anyone think of other stories they've heard with characters like Elephant, that only one person talks to or hears?

6. Learning about cultures

"During lunch break, Renu, Joy and Sona pored over the dictionary in the library." – p.76

Ask the group for any words they can remember learning from this book. (There's a glossary on p.124 to help.) Who knows what some of these words mean? Can anyone describe them? Or has anyone experienced any of them? If possible, this would be a great opportunity to explore these ideas in more detail, particularly if you can provide some of the food, or can show the group a mridangam that they could try to play.

7. Kolams

"She is creating a kolam. She uses rice flour to draw designs of all sorts of things, like flowers, pots and mangoes." – p.16

Why is the kolam competition important? How does Sona find ways to make a difference without breaking tradition? What do you think of the kolam designs in the book – how would anyone describe them? Prepare some materials in advance, and give the group a chance to make their own kolams using the most traditional materials you're able to source. You could even run your own competition in your setting!

8. Squirrel

"Rama gently stroked the squirrel's back with three fingers as he thanked him." – p.32

Read the story that Thatha tells to the family on p.32. What does anyone think the story means? What is important about it? Can anyone think of any other stories that have a similar moral or message? Could anyone write their own story about how important all contributions are, no matter how small?



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