



**This International Mother Language Day celebrate linguistic diversity with multilingual stories for children.**

February 21, 2017 is International Mother Language Day, a worldwide annual observance to promote [awareness](#) of linguistic and [cultural diversity](#) and [multilingualism](#).

The day also marks the close of [StoryWeaver](#)'s 'Freedom to Read' initiative which was launched on International Literacy Day (September 8, 2016). Through the 'Freedom to Read' We pledged to add stories in new languages to the platform for children to read and enjoy in a language they were fluent in.

As a [report](#) on mother tongue literacy from UNESCO reaffirmed "children should be taught in a language they understand, yet as much as 40% of the global population does not have access to education in a language they speak or understand".

At Pratham Books StoryWeaver, we believe that all children should have access to joyful reading material in a language they are fluent in. Through the Freedom to Read campaign, StoryWeaver has added stories in 13 new languages to the platform in the last 6 months. These languages represent the linguistic diversity of the world: from tribal languages to endangered languages to the mainstream.

StoryWeaver has seen a river of stories languages including Saurashtra, Sinhalese, Romanian, Alemmanisch, Norwegian, Thai and Indonesian.. Not-for-profits like The Rosetta Foundation and Translators Without Borders have helped us further our campaign mission. The support of eminent linguists like Dr. Ganesh Devy, scholars such as Professor Sukantha Chaudhry and book champions like Sujata Noronha, Jaya Bhattacharjee have been instrumental in helping identify languages in need of joyful stories for children.

Suzanne Singh, Chairperson Pratham Books says "Stories form an important part of a child's growth and development. They introduce new words and ideas into a child's world and expand the boundaries of their minds. The 'Freedom to Read' campaign was our effort to make many more stories available in languages that are underserved and underrepresented in the mainstream".

**Some of the languages Jèrriais** is a [Norman language](#) spoken in [Jersey](#), one of the [Channel Islands](#) off the coast of [France](#). It has been in decline over the past century as [English](#) has increasingly become the language of education, commerce and administration. Anthony Scott Warren, one of the few Jèrriais teachers left in the region takes language classes for state run primary schools. He discovered StoryWeaver through the All Children Reading Website, and requested that we add this ‘threatened’ language to StoryWeaver.

“I am planning to use the stories in my lessons, which are generally for beginners. I’ll be making laminated flipbooks to take to the classrooms. We will also add the stories to our new LearnJèrriais website and think the stories will fit in well with a Story and Rhyme Time feature at the Jersey Library.”

Anthony Scott Warren hope that the work he and his team of teachers will impact close to 1000 children over the next 5 year years, and help preserve their mother tongue for future generations.

### **Taking stories all over the world**

[www.ireadarabic.com](http://www.ireadarabic.com) is the first-ever online reading platform to advance Arabic literacy in schools and offers children a comprehensive library of over 300 popular books that are delivered in animated and cartoon flipbook format with ‘Read to me’ functions to develop listening skills, pronunciation and increase vocabulary. Stories translated to Arabic on StoryWeaver are then migrated to the platform thanks to StoryWeaver’s content being open source and open format. The platform caters to children between the ages of 5-10 and currently 40,000 students are using the platform across 150 schools.

### **Asia Foundation (This is from a previous note. Wendy has said she will share more information with me in a couple of days)**

The Asia Foundation’s Books for Asia program is selecting and adapting content from StoryWeaver’s collection of children’s books for local language e-book initiatives. In Cambodia and Mongolia, content is being localized and made available to school children via a digital library program called *Let’s Read!* and Cambodia's Ministry of Education’s online education portal. In Thailand, stories have been translated as a part of the *My Community Reader* initiative that utilizes a suite of integrated smartphone apps – a translation tool and free story reader app - to increase content in ethnic minority languages. We are in the beginning stages of adapting content in Bangladesh, as well. In each of these cases, we will be contributing the the story translations back to StoryWeaver, thereby increasing the pool of mother tongue content available to children in developing Asia.

### **Individual crusaders**

Many of our language requests have been from community members keen to translate stories to their mother tongue for their own children and other young family members.

Gnanaharsha Beligatamulla was searching the internet for stories to read to his child when he stumbled across StoryWeaver. “I really enjoyed reading the stories and the platform inspired me to want to translate stories to Sinhalese for my daughter. If other parents can use the stories too that would be wonderful!”

Pavithra Solai Jawahar wrote to us after the launch of our Freedom to Read campaign asking us to add Saurashtra to StoryWeaver. “Saurashtra is a language spoken by a group that migrated from Gujarat two centuries ago to cities like Madurai, Chennai and Tanjore. The script for this language is no longer in use and while it does follow the Devanagiri system, many native speakers cannot read Hindi. The only languages available to write Saurashtram are English and Tamil.” Pavithra has since translated stories, created a book of rhymes and even printed the books for her niece!

### **StoryWeaver in 150 ZP Schools (working title)**

Pragat Shikshan Sanstha works with 150 Zilla Parishad in the Phaltan district of Maharashtra where they have set up community libraries. The libraries are currently within schools premises and are operational during school hours but open to outside children too. The schools work in two shifts so they are open through the day. Volunteers from the community are appointed as coordinators for each library where they facilitate reading, conduct storytelling sessions and activities around the stories. All these libraries have one tablet and a small projector attached to it through which stories are projected. PSS regularly use StoryWeaver to download stories, put them on pendrives and pass it around to the 150 schools. The teachers project the stories via the tablet and the projector and conduct storytelling sessions. Marathi stories are in great demand. **Over 10000 children are impacted through this project.**

### **StoryWeaver in Bengal**

Professor Sukantha Chaudhry, an eminent scholar and respected translator has been an ardent supporter of the Freedom to Read campaign. “I was so taken with the concept of StoryWeaver that I experimented in downloading and sharing some of the stories to children in rural state schools. The students were from underserved backgrounds and often first generation learners.” Professor Chaudhry visited a few schools in South Dinajpur district and in Birbhum district. “The response is overwhelming -- the children love the stories, in the utterly novel on screen digital format (which they are often seeing for the first time in their lives) and respond articulately with great enthusiasm. Their teachers indicated that it was certainly helping them hone their reading skills and, more importantly, acquire a love of reading.” Professor Chaudhry is working on a plan to make such offline reading

sessions a regular practice in schools across the state of West Bengal through active teachers' networks.

## **StoryWeaver**

StoryWeaver is an open source, digital platform of multilingual children's stories from Pratham Books. Launched on September 2015, on StoryWeaver users can read, create, translate, download and share stories for free! By creating a collaborative framework where the creators and consumers of children's content could interact with one another, StoryWeaver attempted to address the scarcity of multilingual, joyful reading material for children.

StoryWeaver was launched in 2015 with 800 stories in 24 languages. Today, the platform offers over 2800 stories in 61 languages of the world.