A TALE OF TREES

Trees found their place on earth millions of years before humans did. They are much older than us, and an integral part of our lives. They clean the air by absorbing harmful gases and giving us oxygen.

Trees even gave us palm leaf manuscripts and bamboo pens before the invention of paper. Even paper today is made from trees!

Our ancestors knew their importance and the artists and sculptors painted and recorded our relationship with trees from the most ancient of times. As far back as 4500 years ago!

1: This is a seal from the ancient Indus Valley Civilisation. Can you figure out what tree is depicted here?

You will find your answer in the next page.

For now let us go to the Harappa Gallery of the National Museum, and look for this seal.

2: The Peepal tree has lived in India for centuries. The Indus seal you saw a while ago has the same Peepal Tree.

We know it is a Peepal tree because of the particular shape of the leaf: it is heart-shaped!

In the Harappa Gallery, how many Peepal designs can you spot on the objects? Can you try reproducing some design here?

Homework: Plant a Peepal sapling in a pot and watch it grow.
Let us now go to the **Miniature Paintings Gallery**, and learn about flora and fauna in Indian Miniatures. Follow the gallery labels to find Miniature Paintings Gallery.

3: In Hindu Mythology the Parijata tree emerged from the “Ocean of Milk” when it was being churned by the Gods and Demons in order to obtain the drink of immortality “Amrita”. It is now often associated with the coral tree, seen with long stalks of bright red flowers.

This painting depicts Krishna installing a Parijata tree with his wife Satyabhama. Find this in the painting gallery to have a better look.

The Parijata is believed to be a wish-fulfilling tree. Don’t you wish you had a wish fulfilling tree of your own?

Here is our NM Wishing Tree. Draw one of your own, with things you wish for!
4: We all await summers for one and one reason only – MANGOES! But have you ever seen the tree that gives this delicious fruit?

Mango trees have been common in India from a very long time, and there are almost 500 varieties grown all over the country.

Can you find this painting in the gallery? The Sufi saint Nizamuddin and his disciple Amir Khusrau are resting under a mango tree. But something is wrong!!

Can you find out what is wrong with the tree and draw a correct one here?

*Did you know, Nizamuddin is not just the name of an area in Delhi? He was a Sufi Saint who lived in the Delhi of 13th century CE. Amir Khusrau was his sincere disciple and also a Sufi poet. You can still visit their tombs in the Nizamuddin Dargah.
The Mughals were great patrons of Miniature Painting in India. One of their kings called Jahangir introduced fancy borders in their paintings called Hashiyas. These included floral patterns, animals, birds and even humans. They were drawn using natural colours and sometimes even gold!

Homework: Here is a space for you to design your own floral Hashiya. Paste a photograph at the centre and you can also use it as a photo-frame. You can take inspiration from the paintings in this gallery.

Can you find this painting of Jahangir with the elaborate Hashiya?

He is looking at a painting of Madonna.

Many times, the decoration on the borders were not natural flora but were imagined by the artist.
6: It is easy to identify the Banana tree, with large leaves and pale green trunk. The leaves of a banana tree are used for many occasions.

Did you know the bananas have high food value and are a popular fruit throughout the world?

Find this painting in the gallery. How many Banana trees can you find in this painting?

7: The Kadamba tree is mentioned in many legends that tell us about Krishna’s life in Vrindavan. He plays the flute and dances with the Gopis where Kadamba grows by the banks of Yamuna. Its flowers are fragrant and the wood is soft and easy to carve.

Do you know, sometimes Krishna was also depicted as a Kadamba tree in Picchwais. Here is a similar example from South India.

That is Krishna right at the centre!

How many paintings of Krishna can you find in this gallery where this Kadamba tree is drawn?

*Picchwai is a technique of painting on cloth practiced by the Nathadwara cult of Krishna worship in Rajasthan.*
8: Here is another painting from our gallery that shows the *Vasakasaja Nayika*, the girl who awaits her beloved on a decorated bed.

Do you notice every animal and bird depicted here are in pairs?

Find this painting in the gallery and spot at least 10 pairs of birds and animals in it. You can also spot some animal families with their little ones!

Write down their names here:

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Homework: Try making your own colour from Amaltas flowers.

9: The Amaltas is one of the most beautiful trees in India. It has bright sprays of flowers and blooms during the summer. The bark can be used as a dye while the leaves are used for medicinal purposes.

Here is a painting with Amaltas trees.

Do you recall seeing them in your city?
You can replicate the design in the box below and fill in the landscape with trees you saw in the paintings.
Tell Us How You Found This Activity Book

It was Informative  Yes  No
I had fun  Yes  No
I want to do more activities  Yes  No
I know more about Indian Miniature Paintings now  Yes  No

Text and Activity: Reva Dayal, Playtime at NM Volunteer for Department of Education, National Museum
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