

## Indian Palm Leaf Manuscripts

TEACHER: *Look closely at the picture. Can you tell what this woman is holding?*

STUDENTS: *A book*

*This is a special kind of book that was invented many years ago. In ancient times, people in India and other parts of Southeast Asia, made books like this out of palm leaves. Palms are a type of tree that have very long, straight leaves. People discovered that if you dried the leaves, you could use them for writing, just like paper. Their books were called "manuscripts." The word manuscript means that the book was written by hand and not by a printer or computer.*

*(Draw the general shape of a palm leaf on the board.)*

*This is the shape of a palm leaf. Why do you think people in ancient times decided to write on palm leaves instead of other kinds of leaves?*

*Because they have more room for writing; they are flat, big, straight, etc.*

*Palm leaves are good for writing because of their long, straight shape. They are also pretty strong when they are dried, so they won't easily crack and crumble like other dried leaves. In India and other countries in Southeast Asia, palm trees grow in many places. So, long ago it was easy to get the leaves people needed for writing. Once they gathered the palm leaves, they would split them into two pieces down the middle of the leaf. Then the leaves were flattened, trimmed, dried, sanded smooth, and oiled. In ancient times, people used a needle-like tool to do the writing. The needle scratched into the surface of the leaf, but the writing was nearly invisible. When they finished writing a page in the book, they would rub soot (a dark powder) onto the leaf. Then, they would take a cloth and wipe it away. The soot would only remain where the words had been carved. It was like having a secret message revealed right before their eyes! Writing on palm leaves sounds very cool, but would probably be a lot of work. Why didn't people just go to the store and buy paper like we do today?*

*It wasn't invented; it was too expensive; etc.*

*Writing paper, like we use today, hadn't been invented yet in South Asia. For many years, people didn't write things down. Instead, they told stories, and shared important ideas only by talking to each other. When people in India started to develop an alphabet, they began to write words and record them on the palm leaves. Look closely at the paper in the picture. Is it made from palm leaves?*

*No*

*It's not made from palm leaves. It is made from modern writing paper. As soon as other kinds of paper were invented, people stopped making palm leaf manuscripts, and used the new paper instead. The book in the picture looks different than the books we are use to reading, because the pages are long and thin like the palm leaves, and held together using string and holes, like the old manuscripts of ancient India. Why do you think people stopped using palm leaves for writing, and switched to modern writing paper?*

**They liked the new paper better; it was smoother; it was bigger; etc.**

*People in ancient India successfully made many manuscripts with the palm leaves. But, the palm leaves were still rough, and difficult to write on. They were also hard to make into books. Palm leaves are much thicker and don't have the space to fit many words on each page. Old palm leaf manuscripts were big, heavy and difficult to carry around and read.*

*Look closely at the writing in the picture. Can you read what it says?*

**No**

*The writing is difficult for most of us to read, because it uses different letters. The writing in the picture is not in English. Many people in India write and speak English, but they also write and speak in other languages too. This book was written in a language called Sanskrit. How are the letters different from the letters we use in English?*

**They have different shapes; they are all connected with a line; etc.**

*The Sanskrit letters are different in many ways, but still the letters are written using lines and loops, just like the English alphabet. Historians believe that some languages in India, like Tamil, have letters that are extra loopy to make it easier to write on the dried palm leaves. Letters with straight lines were hard to make and often tore the palm leaves, so curved lines were better.*

*Raise your hand if you would like to learn how to read or write in another language. Put your thumbs up if you already know how.*

*(Give kids a chance to raise their hands/give thumbs up. If you have the time, you could make a list on the board of all of the languages your kids already know, or would like to learn.)*

*Thanks to the invention of paper, people all over the world can easily read and write in whichever language they choose.*

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**Kindergarten Standards:**

## **NYS Common Core Kindergarten Social Studies Standards**

- K.2.b Cultures include traditions, beliefs, and shared values and ideas generally accepted by a particular group of people.
- K.2.c Children, families, and communities from different cultures all share some common characteristics, but also have specific differences which make them unique.
- K.9.a Children, families, and communities of today can be compared with those in the past.
- K.10.a People use folktales, legends, oral histories, and music to teach values, ideas, traditions, and important events from the past.

## **Kindergarten ELA Power NYSCCLS (ICSD Power Standards in Bold)**

### *Reading Standards for Informational Text: Kindergarten*

- **Integration and Knowledge of Ideas**
  - 7. With prompting and support, describe the relationship between illustrations and the text in which they appear (e.g., what person, place, thing, or idea in the text an illustration depicts).**

### *Speaking and Listening Standards: Kindergarten*

- **Comprehension and Collaboration**
  - 1. Participate in collaborative conversations with diverse partners about *kindergarten topics and texts* with peers and adults in small and larger groups.**
    - a. Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions (e.g., listening to others and taking turns speaking about the topics and texts under discussion).**
    - b. Continue a conversation through multiple exchanges.**
    - c. Seek to understand and communicate with individuals from different cultural backgrounds.**
  - 2. Confirm understanding of a text read aloud or information presented orally or through other media by asking and answering questions about key details and requesting clarification if something is not understood.**
  - 3. Ask and answer questions in order to seek help, get information, or clarify something that is not understood.**
- **Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas**
  - 6. Speak audibly and express thoughts, feelings, and ideas clearly.**

### *Language Standards: Kindergarten*

- **Vocabulary Acquisition and Use**
  - 6. Use words and phrases acquired through conversations, reading and being read to, and responding to texts.**