

Looking Around – A New Set of Textual Material in Environmental Studies for Class III

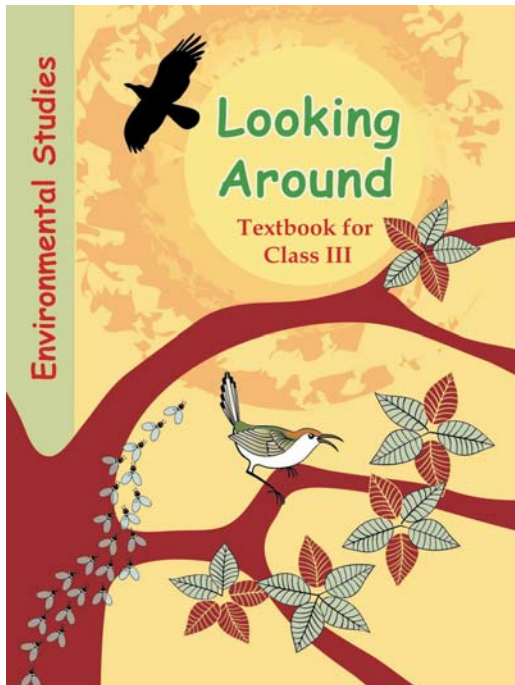
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When we think of General Science and Social Studies in primary classes, we clearly have in mind some 'body of knowledge' and also 'typical ways of acquiring' that knowledge. Such an approach naturally tends to think of topics that have traditionally served as the basis of their own disciplines. In the last few decades, it has been increasingly seen that children learn holistically rather than in a compartmentalised manner,



i.e., concepts of science, geography, history, etc. through a disciplinary approach. It has also been proved that children not only learn through interaction with the environment, but also through talking, discussing, and interacting with other people, both adults and children. With an appropriate question or suggestion, the child's understanding can be extended far beyond the point which she could have reached alone. The new EVS syllabus and textual material is developed within this 'social constructivist' perspective of learning. The EVS syllabus consciously begins with key questions rather than key concepts. This is to trigger the child's thinking in new directions and provide a scaffolding to her learning process. With this aspect in view, the NCF-2005 recommends that Environmental Studies be taught as an integrated course for the entire primary stage instead of two distinct parts, i.e., Science and Social Studies.

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Some salient features of the new EVS textual material are:

- A thematic approach has been followed and the syllabus is woven around six key themes—namely, family and friends, food, water, shelter, travel, and things we make and do which move gradually from self to immediate surroundings and further expand to the wider environment. The format of the syllabus is suggestive rather than a prescriptive one.
- The new textbook-cum-activity book of Environmental Studies includes learning opportunities for children, general and specific hints for teachers/parents and scope for children using the textbook as a ‘worksheet’.
- There is a conscious effort to discourage rote learning and hence descriptions and definitions are totally avoided. To engage the child joyfully, a variety of formats of the lessons such as narratives, stories, poems, puzzles, jigsaw, comic scripts, and nature visits amongst others have been used in the textbook.
- The active participation of children in a joyful manner is important in constructing knowledge. Thus the nature of the activities in the textbook is so varied that children get opportunities to explore, observe, browse, categorise, speak, question, write, manipulate and process information, amongst others.
- Activities and exercises have been inbuilt in the lessons instead of being pushed to the end. The objective of the activities and questions in the book is not only to evaluate the child’s knowledge but to provide an opportunity to the child to express himself/herself.
- Children are encouraged to tap sources other than textbooks and teachers, such as family, community, newspapers, books, and local environment. This aspect stresses on the fact that these are not the only sources of information.

This method of learning would provide the scope for expanding the boundaries of learning and also give the opportunities to children to expand her/his learning beyond the point which she/he reaches alone.

- The activities given in the book are suggestive and therefore provide opportunity to every teacher to modify textual material according to the local context and needs of the children.
- Opportunities are given to children to work individually, in small groups or in larger groups. A variety of group activities are included that would promote peer learning and improve social interactions and also facilitate children in consolidating what they have observed and learnt.
- Illustrations in the textbook are a combination of the judicious use of black and white and multicolour

visuals. They are also bigger in size to develop observation skills, and will also provide joy and challenge to the children in their learning process. The visuals reflect the ethos of the written material and complement the writing style fully.

- Attempts have also been made to find suitable ways to sensitise the child to the wide differences that exist within our society such as physical abilities, economic background, gender, class, caste, and people with special needs. Such social issues are handled in a sensitive manner in text books.
- In order that every child can make informed choices, an attempt has been made to relate the child's local knowledge to school knowledge. Lessons are developed around simple and commonly spoken language of children.