

Children's authors pitch in during the pandemic

From J.K. Rowling and Neil Gaiman to Elisabetta Dami and Cressida Cowell, popular children's authors are connecting with fans through free books, online readings and fun activities

The recent COVID-19 pandemic has brought the entire world to a grinding halt and confined people to their homes. In these dark times, popular children's authors are spreading some cheer among their young fans through online readings, free books and fun activities. Here's what they are doing:

Harry Potter at Home

Having recovered from a suspected bout of COVID-19 after two weeks of illness, author J.K. Rowling has made an online comeback to comfort her fans. Rowling launched a new section titled 'Harry Potter at Home' on the Wizarding World website. To help children overcome boredom during the lockdown, it features a plethora of exciting activities and giveaways, including a free audiobook of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone," the first in the seven-part series about the boy wizard. Publishers Bloomsbury and Scholastic have also offered articles, puzzles and videos. What's more, Rowling has

Author J.K. Rowling.
PHOTO AFP



Author Neil Gaiman.
PHOTO THE NEW YORK TIMES

also been showing off her baking skills and sharing adorable pictures of her dogs on social media!

Free stories from Gaiman

Author Neil Gaiman too has come to the rescue of his young readers. On his official website (neilgaiman.com), the bestselling author has uploaded some of his short stories and comics that can be read for free. The most notable among his offerings is his Hugo-award winning short story "A Study in Emerald", which is an adaptation of Sherlock Holmes. There is also a video of Gaiman reading his popular children's books "The Graveyard Book" and "Coraline."

WHAT'S IN STORE

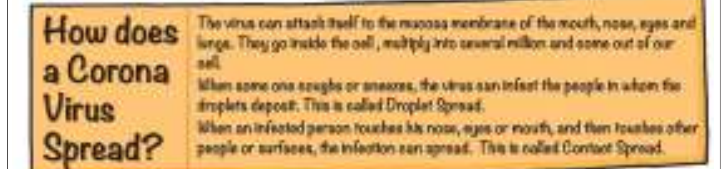
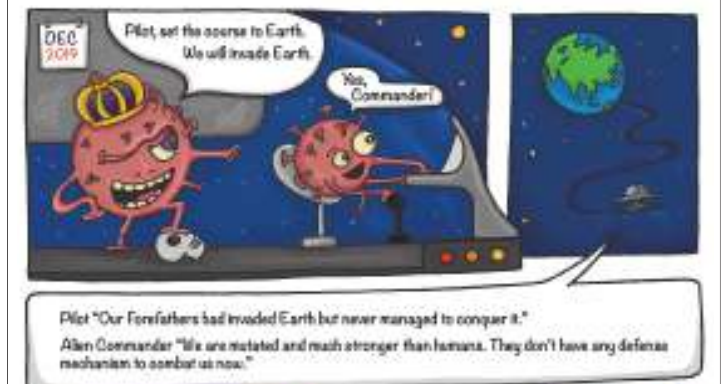
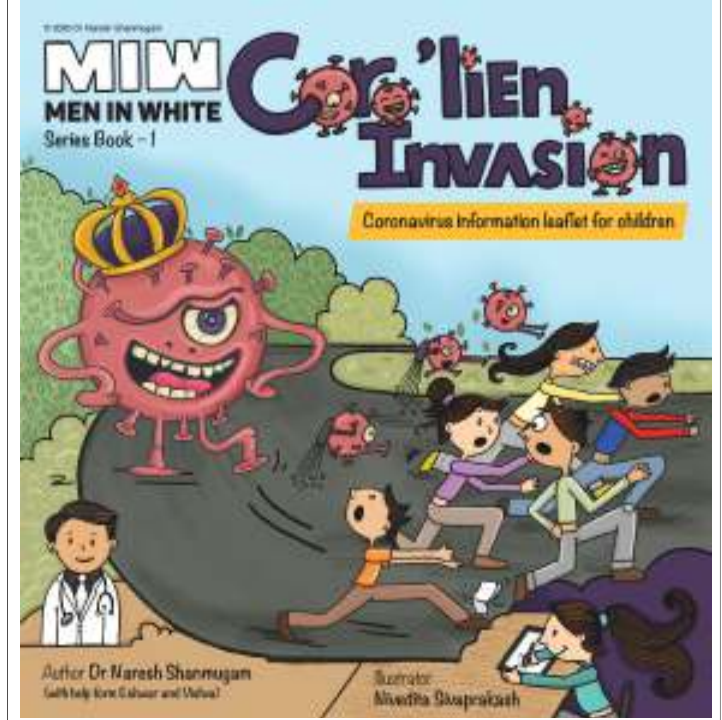
- You can access free audiobook of "Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone", puzzles and word search activities in the new 'Harry Potter at Home' section on wizardingworld.com.
- Read free short stories and comics on Neil Gaiman's website - neilgaiman.com. The author has also posted his writer's notes, essays and tidbits about his life and work.
- Children's author Ann Harth has published her books online so that they can be read for free.
- Moe Willems offers drawing tutorials on the Kennedy Center website.

Read the world

The World Health Organization is helping young readers through its #ReadtheWorld initiative launched on April 2, International Children's Book Day. As part of the initiative, popular children's authors including Elisabetta Dami, creator of Geronimo Stilton and Cressida Cowell, author of "How to Train Your Dragon", read extracts of their books to millions of children and young people currently living in isolation amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

Heard of Coro'liens?

Well, here is an easy way to learn about the novel coronavirus.



LEISURE CORNER

Catch the podcasting bug

Feeling bored at home? It's time to pick up a new hobby. This week, we look at podcasting...

Staying at home during the coronavirus lockdown can certainly get boring. So if you are looking for a way to keep yourself busy as well as stay connected with your friends, podcasting could be the perfect choice. Podcasting can also help you express yourself and pick up new skills.

What it is podcasting?

A podcast is an audio programme in the form of a series of episodes focussed on a particular topic or theme. Podcasts can be streamed or downloaded on a browser or an application. Listeners can subscribe to it and listen to the episodes whenever they like.

How it works?

Don't fret, podcasting is not rocket science. Free audio software such as Audacity have made podcasting easy to do from the comfort of your home. Choose any topic on which you would like to talk. It could be anything from the daily news, sports, hobbies to even audio drama productions. You can also invite your friends as guests on your podcasts remotely.

Did you know after recently recovering from COVID-19, Prince Charles too is picking up podcasting? So keep those recorders rolling!

Useful tips:

- ** Stick to a conversational format
- ** Download copyright free music or create your own jingles
- ** Link the podcast to your social media page and blog

QUEST

Up close with the world of Science

From learning about black holes come down to Earth to find out why dogs pant...

Black holes

Do black holes swallow stars and planets? Why are they invisible to us?

A black hole is not a hole or opening in space, nor is it a voracious whirlpool sucking in planetary bodies for miles around. A black hole

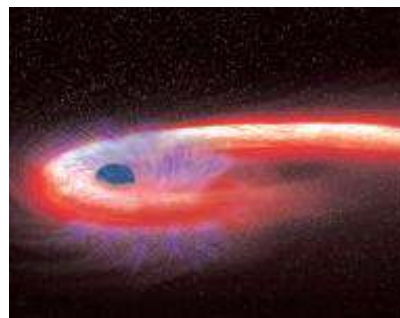


PHOTO: NASA via AP

is a great mass compressed into a tiny space. If Earth were compressed to half its size without reduction in its mass, the gravity at its surface would increase fourfold. A black hole, once a gigantic star, has been compressed to a pinpoint so its gravitational pull is massive. If a star comes too close, the gravitational pull of the black hole draws it into its own body. If light approaches it, the gravitational force prevents it from leaving. As the light is not reflected away, we cannot see the black hole, it remains invisible to us. The term 'black hole' was coined by the physicist John Wheeler in 1967.

Have you observed dogs closely?

Ever seen a dog pant? Wondered whether it is a sign of friendliness? Well, here's the answer. Dogs pant to keep cool. They can't cool off by sweating like we humans do. We have sweat glands all over the body, so we sweat all over. As the sweat evaporates, it takes away some heat from the body, lowering its temperature in the process. Dogs have sweat glands in their paws, and in some other areas not covered by fur. So they cannot produce enough sweat to create a cooling mechanism for the body. Their cooling system is activated by panting. Panting is rapid, shallow breathing with mouth open and tongue hanging out. This facilitates evaporation of moisture from the tongue, mouth and upper part of the respiratory tract. Whether it is sweat or moisture that is evaporating, the end result is the same — a drop in temperature of the body. Inhalation of cool air and exhalation of heat-laden air in the process of panting, also contributes to the lowering of the temperature of the dog's body. (Content provided by Amrita Bharati)



India's first Olympic medal in badminton

REMEMBER THIS?

Here, we will sharpen our sports quotient by taking a look at one iconic moment from sporting history. Let's take a look at Saina Nehwal's bronze medal winning performance from 2012 London Olympics...

You might know India as a force to reckon with in badminton now, but it wasn't always the case. We've had top players before, but we had to wait until 2012 to get our first medal in the competition at the Olympics. The credit for that goes to Saina Nehwal.

Ranked fifth back then, Saina qualified for the 2012 London Olympics and sailed through to the knock-out stages with straight games victories over Switzerland's Sabrina Jaquet and Belgium's Lianne Tan. Wins against Chinese-born



Saina Nehwal (second from right in left) seen comforting China's Wang Xin after their bronze medal play-off match and celebrating on the podium (right). PHOTOS: AFP, AP

Dutch Yao Jie and Denmark's Tine Baun put Saina within a victory of the summit clash. Saina, however, lost her semi-finals against top seed Wang Yihan of China, who finished with a silver medal.

In the bronze medal play-off against China's Wang Xin, Saina Nehwal was trailing after she lost the opening game 18-21. Luck, however, was on her side as Wang Xin was forced to retire after twisting her knee while going for an acrobatic smash in the second game. Saina thus finished with a bronze medal.

DID YOU KNOW?

Even though India had top quality players to boast about earlier as well, Saina Nehwal's bronze was the country's first badminton medal at the Olympics.

India has won two medals in badminton at the Olympics so far, one bronze and one silver. Both these medals were won by women.

After Saina's bronze in 2012, P V Sindhu went one better at the 2016 Rio Olympics, finishing with a silver medal.