

### Flowers—Nature’s Wonderful Gift

Sharika Muthu\*

When we go for a walk around the neighbourhood, or visit a garden or park, we are enthralled by the sheer beauty of flowers around us. While most of us love flowers, not many can identify more than a dozen varieties. Further, in these hectic times, not many adults bother to find out, even though the information is just a click away. A curious child may ask an adult the name of a flower, but if the adults (parents and teachers) do not know the names, the child’s vocabulary does not increase.

The ‘language experience’ approach which combines the personal appeal of the learner’s interest with carefully sequenced vocabulary development brings together two important features of language learning. To kindle a love for flowers (and by extension, to the environment) among young learners, teachers and elders need to make

a little effort. All they need to do is to learn the names of a few flowers especially those that children see in their daily lives—and share them enthusiastically with young learners. Here are the descriptions of some common flowers along with their pictures.

#### **Bougainvillea**

Mainly cultivated as an ornamental vine, the plant bears small elegant flowers in thick clusters. It is also called the ‘paper flower’ due to its thin, papery flowers. The shrub grows in warm and temperate regions. A hardy, drought-resistant plant, bougainvillea thrives in the hot and dry Indian climate. It is typically grown along garden walls and streets, though it can also be cultivated in a large pot. However, its ‘flowers’—purple, white, pink, magenta and orange—are not flowers! Botanically, these are called

---

\* Freelance Writer, Editor, Trinity Towers, DLF City Phase V, Gurgaon

‘bracts’. The flowers are tiny white blossoms that are surrounded by the brightly-coloured bracts.

### **Chrysanthemum**

Mostly found in yellow, white, and purple colours, these pretty flowers grow in the winter months in India. Although most species originated from Asia, countless varieties have been cultivated from the original wild one. The flowers occur in various forms, and can look like small thick buttons or large showy blooms. The name ‘chrysanthemum’ comes from the Greek word ‘chryso’ which means ‘gold’—as the original flowers were golden-yellow.

### **Dahlia**

Did you know that the dahlia is a composite flowerhead, meaning that it is not a single flower, each petal is a flower! In India, these thick, ball-like flowers thrive in the cooler months and can be seen in large numbers in private gardens and public parks. Dahlias are a great favourite at flower shows. These highly attractive blooms can be found in many bright hues such as yellow, pink, purple, red, and lavender, and even white ones with maroon streaks.

### **Hibiscus**

Known for their large, showy flowers with curved petals and long stamens, the hibiscus flower is known as ‘*gudahal ka phool*’, ‘*javaakusum*’ or ‘*japaapushp*’ in India. The 5-petalled red hibiscus is the national flower of

Malaysia. The plants, with a thick foliage of serrated leaves, grow into dense shrubs and small trees. Thriving in warm tropical regions, this flower is found commonly in India, where hibiscus oil is also used as a hair oil. Hibiscus tea is very popular in many parts of the world, and is known for its vitamin C content. There are more than 200 species of hibiscus in the world. The flowers, though most commonly red, are also found in white, pale pink and orange colours.

### **Jasmine**

Widely grown for its fragrance, jasmine is famous for its strong, sweet scent. The small, delicate blossoms grow in white clusters on short shrubs and bushes. In India, thousands of garlands made of fragrant white jasmine flowers are sold daily outside places of worship and also worn by women in their hair. A rare yellow jasmine is found at high altitudes in the Himalayas, and is known as a tonic for the heart. Many Indian girls are commonly given one of the many Hindi names of the flower - *Juhi*, *Chameli*, *Bela*, or *Yasmeen*. The soothing fragrance of jasmine is one of the most popular fragrances used in Indian incense sticks.

### **Lotus**

India’s national flower, the lotus is also known as ‘sacred lotus’ because it is Goddess Lakshmi’s seat. Another name for Lakshmi is ‘*Padmaa*’ which is the Sanskrit word for lotus. A large, graceful aquatic flower, lotuses are traditionally pink. The lotus is considered extremely sacred in Buddhism, as a symbol of

enlightenment and spiritual purity. The tiny, tasty fruit of the lotus can be eaten raw like any other fruit. The stem—known as '*kamalkakadi*'—is prepared as a delicacy in many parts of India. The lotus is sometimes confused with a water lily, which is a similar-looking aquatic flower. The so-called 'blue lotus' is a type of water lily.

### **Marigold**

Who would not be familiar with marigolds—one of the most popular and common flowers in the world. Known as '*genda*' in India, here the flower is traditionally used in religious rituals. Foreign guests and very important people are welcomed with marigold garlands. The name 'marigold' is derived from "Mary's gold. The earliest use of marigolds is said to have been by the Aztec people who attributed magical and medicinal properties to these flowers. Marigolds are found in golden, orange, yellow, and deep saffron colours, and sometimes with dark maroon highlights.

### **Plumeria**

Most species of plumeria are in the form of shrubs or small trees. Their blossoms grow in large clusters on ends of branches, and typically consist of five petals. The flowers, known in India as '*champa*' give out their scent at night. Although the flowers are typically white, some uncommon species bear pink or yellow flowers. The flower is also called '*frangipani*'. Some plumeria plants can grow up to 30 feet tall!

### **Rose**

This elegant flower comes in a variety of colours, from white and yellow to pink and red. Found all over the world, all varieties of roses are considered edible. Each rose colour has a different meaning, with yellow standing for friendship and red for love. There are numerous references to roses in literature, especially in medieval English poetry. The small Indian rose, deep pink in colour, is used to make '*gulkand*' - a kind of sweet jam, as well as a perfume.

### **Snapdragon**

These extremely attractive flowers grow in clusters on tall stems that get almost hidden by the blooms. It is widely used as an ornamental plant in gardens and also as a decorative cut flower kept in vases. The species has been grown since the fifteenth century. These flowers can be found in half a dozen colours including white, yellow, pink, red, orange, and purple. Snapdragons are also known as 'lion's mouth'.

Teachers could encourage learners to identify the flowers in their vicinity, relate them to seasons, and perhaps even grow some of these in a corner of the classroom or on a window ledge. Projects that involve creating bookmarks with pressed flowers, or block prints of floral patterns, can contribute to observation, identification, and an appreciation of nature.