The Sona Sharma series of books are perfect for children over 6, who are just learning to read and are comprehending that the world around them. There are different points of entry into the story for different children - from having a favourite toy that they talk to, having a new sibling or interactions with extended family like grandparents during moments of crisis. These are all things children grapple with and want to explore. To that add, a whole new array of culture and its customs, learning about new foods and new words, makes this book an exciting adventure.

There are also many different ways this book can be introduced to a reader. A parent or carer can read the book over many nights to the young readers, especially if siblings listen together. A teacher can read every day a chapter in class. A confident reader can read the story themselves and also figure out how to use the glossary at the back. The B&W illustrations by Jen Khatun are extremely helpful in understanding unfamiliar things.

SETTING & GEOGRPAHY

This book is set in Chennai, India, the author's home city. Using a globe and a map, find out more about Chennai.

- How old is the city?
- Does it have beaches?
- Does it have a river?
- Who are the famous people who lived there?
- What languages are spoken in Chennai?
- What are its famous buildings?

Look at some city landmarks and videos of the city. Here are some that might interest the readers.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-pcYyJc-X7k
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTmOIH79kI0
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NbKHX16vB3g
Discuss the videos – how people use public spaces, what languages are the name boards in? How do buses look like?

LITERATURE and LANGUAGE

1. **Proverbs and Sayings**

Activity 1: Sona's Grandpa *Thatha* quotes from an ancient poet called Avvaiyaar. What are those proverbs and what do they mean?
List the proverbs on a page and explain their meaning.

Activity 2: Sona's Grandma *Paatti*, often includes a made-up proverb when she talks. Can you spot those proverbs and list them down here? What do they mean?

Activity 3: Can you write your own proverbs to represent the ones listed below:

- Make Hay While the Sun Shines
- An apple a day keeps the doctor away
- A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.

2. **Songs and Poems**

Activity 1: Sona's Amma sings a lullaby to Sona in page 19. Can you set a tune to this and sing as a group?

Activity 2: Write a short poem calling to the moon. Start with the lines in the poem in the story and change some of the words and sentences to make it your own. Can you set a tune to this and sing as a group?

3. **New Words to Explore in the Story**

Activity 1: Read the new words listed in Page 110. Do you know how to pronounce them? Try them out.

Activity 2: Can you use the new words in a sentence? Can you find the sentence in which these new words were used in the book?

4. **Synonyms**

Sona is named after her Grandmother. But still her name is different. In Pages 58 and 69, Sona's grandparents tell her why her name and her grandmother's name are synonyms.

Activity 1: Can you explain what a synonym is? How are synonyms different from opposites.? Can you explain the difference?

Activity 2: Can you find five pairs of words that are synonymous to each other?

SOCIAL STUDIES AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

1. **Religions of India**

   Sona Sharma speaks Tamil and is a Hindu, again, just like the author Chitra Soundar. Find out about all the languages spoken in India, and the religions that originated in India

   Here is a link to the national census.
   https://censusindia.gov.in/Census_and_You/religion.aspx

   After reading this, discuss which religion is the majority religion of India. Also explore the religions that were born in India vs the ones that came from other parts of the world.

2. **Gods of Hinduism**

Sona's Grandpa *Thatha* prays to his favourite god. Have you seen photos of this god?

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krishna

Explore the stories about Krishna and the many festivals associated with this god.

3. **Animals in Religions**

Elephant is considered sacred in India. Do other religions and cultures have animals in their religious texts? How about Egyptian civilisation? What animals feature in Greek gods. Is donkey an important animal in the nativity tale?

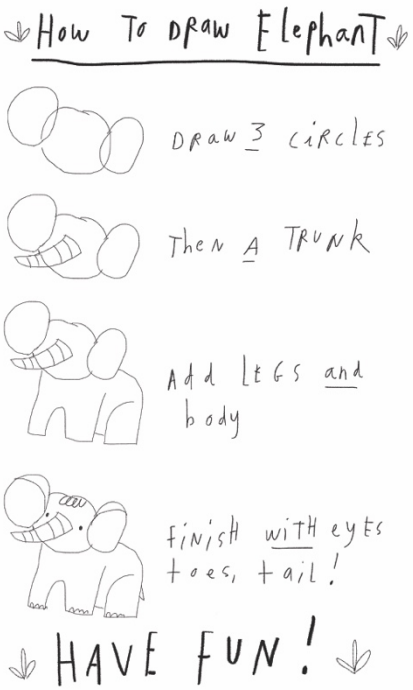
EXPLORING IDENTITIES

This story revolves around names – we find out why Sona was named Sona before she embarks on finding a name for her baby sister. We learn the four names given to the new baby and why. We also find out that Elephant, Sona's toy doesn't have a name.

Discussion Guide: After reading the book at least until Chapter 3, initiate a discussion about the readers' names.

1. Who named them?
2. What is the meaning of their name?
3. Why were they given this name?
4. Who else in their family have this name?
5. Who else in this world have this name?

6. Is this name in stories, books and movies? Which ones are they familiar with? Are they anything like the characters in stories and books?
7. If in the class there are two readers with the same name, how are their stories different? Are they different as people too?



Activity 1: Based on the answer to 1 and 3 in the above discussion guide, draw a comic strip telling the story of the reader's name.

Download comic strip templates from here.
https://www.papertraildesign.com/comic-strip-template-pages/

Activity 2: Here is an ICE activity to do – Using the comic strip drawn by hand, draw one digitally. Here is some help.
https://www.canva.com/create/comic-strips/

Activity 3: Learn to draw Elephant here.
http://chitrasoundar.com/kids/?p=909

Activity 4: Elephant in Sona's story doesn't have a name. Her bed has a name – Melrose. But not Elephant. Can you help out Sona by finding a name for Elephant?

HOW TO FIND A NAME: Open a baby name book and find five names per group of readers. Now discuss why you like this name. Pick one that a majority of you like.

Activity 5: After each group has decided on a name, write a letter to Elephant addressing him with that new name. See below for example.

Dear Fantos,

My friends and I found a name for you. We decided to call you Fantos. Do you like this name? We gave you this name because we think you're fantastic.

Exploring Customs and Traditions Across Cultures

1. **The Naming Ceremony**: In this book, we read about Sona's baby sister's naming ceremony. From preparing for the child to arrive, getting the cradle ready to putting up a pandal (not a tent) and the actual ceremony, there are so many things to observe, discuss and compare.

As a pre-activity discussion, ask the children if they know of naming ceremonies. Discuss and re-read the relevant chapter again. Invite the children to find out from their families – how they marked the occasion of naming. Ask them to bring a photo or an object related to their naming ceremony.

Discussion Guide:

1. Ask each group of readers (or amongst the entire class) to discuss amongst themselves how their naming was celebrated.
2. Ask them to note what was similar and what was different.
3. Ask them to share the object or photo they have brought and talk about it.

Activity 1: Photocopy and stick pictures from the book – related to the ceremony on to a chart. Add photos that the readers have brought around the Sona images. Label the different objects and maybe a few lines of what the readers talked about.

Activity 2: Research customs and traditions of all cultures that are represented in the class. Here are some helpful links

- http://www.cultureready.org/blog/baby-naming-around-world
- https://www.familyeducation.com/10-fascinating-baby-name-traditions-from-around-the-world
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naming_ceremony

Activity 3: Find pictures of objects, ceremonies, songs etc and create a display board.

2. **Traditional Beliefs** – In page 14, Sona's family are discussing whether the baby will be a boy or a girl and they talk about different things they believe in. In Page 51, Sona's Paatti folds her legs saying, "Aw, that's bad luck."

Discussion Guide:

1. Do you have such beliefs in your family? Ask your parents and grandparents.
2. Do you know why people believe in such things? Do you believe in good luck charms, bad luck signs and friendship bracelets?

Here are some examples of bad luck symbols – a black cat, number 13, toasting with an empty glass

Here are some links to researching traditional beliefs from different cultures.

https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/travel-an d-adventure/2018/08/25-unique-traditions-around-world

https://www.babbel.com/en/magazine/the-weirdest-superstitions-from-13-countries

Activity 1: Write a spooky story about a bad luck charm.
Activity 2: Create a display board of good luck symbols.

3. **Foods from other cultures**: When we go out to eat – there are different types of restaurants we can eat in or order from.

Discussion Guide:

1. Have you eaten a pizza or a taco or a curry? Which country is this food from? How is it different to your own traditional food?
2. In Sona's story, the following foods are mentioned. Are these vegetarian or vegan? Do they contain meat? Which ones are easy to make? Can you try them at home or in class?
    a. Poori
    b. Vada
    c. Burfi
    d. Badam milk and Caramel milk
    e. Payasam

Activity 1: Find out how to make these foods. Write down the recipes on a display chart.

Activity 2: Do a display board of the photos of the foods above.

Activity 3: Ask your parent to order these foods the next time you visit a restaurant or do a takeaway.

Activity 4: Tell your class about your eating experience using a photo or video essay of the food, the eating and after.

Activity 5: Create a photo essay about and tell the class about your favourite food.

Exploring History

1. **The Amazing Women**: In this book, Sona and her friends find names for the baby from library books. In Page 61, Sona lists the names. Can you find out more about them and why they are amazing women?

2. **Avvaiyaar**: In the story, Thatha uses sayings by Avvaiyaar. Can you find out more about who this saint and poet is? How old was she? What did she write? Can you find stories about this saint?

3. **Gandhi**: In page 95, Amma mentions Gandhi. Who is Gandhi? What do people call him? Why is he an important person in India?

   Activity 1: Can you create a display board of all the historical characters you've been introduced to in this book?
   Activity 2: Divide the class into teams. Each team gets to research one historical hero. Create a quiz about this person to quiz the class about.
   Activity 3: Who are the other amazing women you know from British or history of your own heritage? Can you find out more about one person and share with the class?

SCIENCE IS THE SECRET TO EVERYTHING

Look up at the sky! In the story in Page 21, Amma tells Sona that new stars are born every day. Here is a little reading to do as a class before you discuss the following:

https://www.nasa.gov/feature/goddard/2019/where-are-new-stars-born-nasa-s-webb-telescope-will-investigate

https://astronomy.com/magazine/news/2020/07/how-stars-are-born-and-die

Discussion Guide:

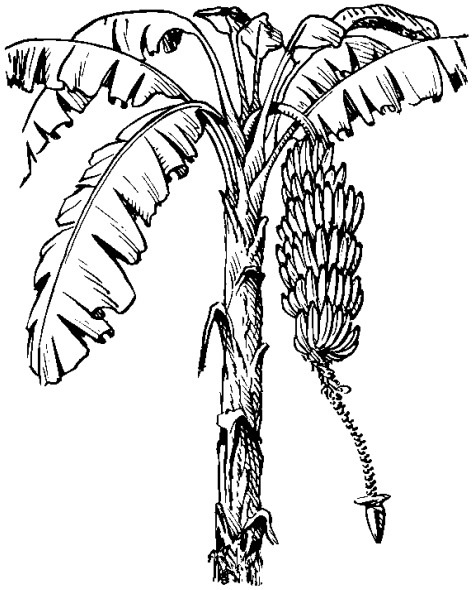
1. Are new stars born every day? How often are they born? What are stars made of?
2. Do stars die and disappear? How long does that take?
3. How old is sun, the star of our solar system? What is sun made of?

Activity 1: Draw and colour the painting of the milky way showing stars.

Activity 2: Stay up one night when the sky is clear. Can you spot stars? If not, why not?

Activity 3: Divide the class into groups. Each group will create a quiz about stars and then each group will quiz the rest of the class.

It's Bananas! In the story in Page 85, Paatti talks about how a banana plant grows after being chopped up. Find out more about the banana plant. http://www.fao.org/economic/est/est-commodities/bananas/bananafacts/en/#.YEyBrWT7S3I



courtessy of www.fruit.realisticcoloringpages.com

Discussion Guide:

1. Where does it grow? What conditions does it need to grow?
2. What are its uses?
3. Can you grow bananas in the UK? Where do we import our bananas from?

Activity 1: Visit a supermarket and find out where the bananas were brought from.

Activity 2: Find the place on the map and calculate how long it would have taken by plane or ship to bring them to the UK.

Activity 3: Draw a banana plant. Here is a little help.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-eqMQ14RdS0

Activity 4: Who are the top producers of banana in the world? Can you rank them by production?