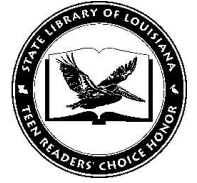




State Library
of Louisiana



Educator Discussion Guide

YOU BRING THE DISTANT NEAR

By Mitali Perkins

Cover Art by Elizabeth H. Clark

Louisiana Teen Readers' Choice Nominee 2019-2020

Grade 9-12

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ABOUT THE BOOK

Even as we go through the same or similar experiences as someone we dearly love, we may not experience them the same way, and understanding, while so important, is hard won. This is the case with these generations of Das women—each of them immigrants to some degree, each of them close family, and each of them trying to build the best life they can without hurting anyone. But can it be done? Rane, the matriarch of the group, wants a better life for her family after Partition and personal loss. She wants to preserve her daughters' Bengali heritage and help them all thrive now that they are back together, but life in their new country of the United States is not easy. Sonia and Tara are sisters trying to find their path in life. Sonia, dark and intelligent, clashes with expectations and finds her world in words. Tara, beautiful and talented, is a peacemaker who can charm one and all; but will her traditional parents accept her vocational and relationship choices? Fast forward in time and you meet the third generation of Das family members. The dark, lovely, talented Chantal who grows up close to home but never feels a completely accepted anywhere. And then there is the petite, adorable, strong willed Anna who is raised in the land of her forbearers of India even though she is a United States citizen. Will already having family in the states help her adjust more easily than they did? Finally, when 9/11 occurs, it is the eldest member and the youngest who conflict over what it means to be Indian, American, or at home. How does one follow one's dreams and beliefs while remaining true to who they really are and who gets to decide?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mitali Perkins, née Bose, is much like these lovely ladies that she pinned into the pages of *You Bring the Distant Near*. Born Bengali in Kolkata, India, she moved pillar to post during her life. Her parents, her sisters and she moved from Africa, Europe, all around and finally to the States. All the time she used her friendly nature and books to navigate her constantly changing world. She studied at Stanford and U.C. Berkeley in the social justice arenas. Later she taught in schools from junior high to college and began writing. She is married to a minister with whom she has twin boys and had a frequent passport necessary marriage with until they settled down in San Francisco, CA. Today, at fifty-five, she enjoys her life additionally filled with pets, hiking, and blogging.

BOOK AWARDS

Nominee for the National Book Award

Nominee for Audie Award for Young Adult

Nominee for LTRC award

A 2017 National Book Award Longlist Title with six starred reviews

A School Library Journal's Best Books of 2017

A New York City Public Library's Notable 50 Best Books for Teens

South Asia Book Award Winner

Northern California Book Award Master List,

Publishers Weekly Best Books of the Year,

Shelf Awareness Best Books of the Year,

Horn Book Magazine Fanfare List,

Texas TAYSHAS High School Reading List

PREREADING ACTIVITIES

Subject walk

Around the classroom walls place posters with important subjects and themes from the book: One per poster with only necessary elaboration. Partner your students as needed (2-4 is best) to walk from poster to poster taking a couple minutes (use timer) to discuss and write down on the poster any one thing they know about the subject on the wall before time is up and they move to the next poster. They may only write down new information so as the process goes on, you may need to extend time.

Use these poster boards in a discussion when the full circuit has been made. Your students may not know anything about some subjects, use this as an opportunity for students to take those subjects and create a short essay concerning those subjects. These may be shared in class in subsequent classes.

A starter list of subjects and themes from the book are below the Prereading Activities.

Give students the setting

Research ideas about the time period and location. This works well because students can find a portion that interests them. In order to fully appreciate a story, background information can be helpful since many stories are founded on situations that may be alien to some of your students. Present the list of subjects and themes to your class and allow them to select a subject that interests them as much as you can. Giving them a choice of first, second, and third choice will help. Ensure that at least 2 or 3 students will be covering each subject. When assignments are made, allow them time to research independently, be it in-class, in library, or at home. Follow this up with having the students present their findings by subject/theme. Each student may bring a different perspective on the subject to the presentation and this will add flavor to the subsequent discussion.

Subjects and Themes found in *You Bring the Distant Near* for use with these activities:

Identity (Hindustani/Bengali, coming of age, mixed race, American, etc.), loss of a family member to Bengali/widow-hood, Partition, 9/11, immigration, generational relationships, war, racism, colorism, body positivity, environmentalism, multicultural friendships, 1970's culture, etc.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Sonia want to be invisible? To whom does she want to be invisible?
2. Tara says that reading is Sonia's escape, and Sonia talks about her need to write. What is Sonia using reading and writing for? How do these pursuits help her in the future?
3. Why does Tara hide her love of acting from her family? What expectations is she *struggling* with? What unexpected source of help does she receive?
4. On the ride to their new apartment in Flushing, Queens, we get a taste of Ranee's racist attitudes. How does this present itself and affect her relationships with her children and community?
5. Why is Tara made to continue harmonium lessons when Sonia is not?
6. Arranged marriages are a lingering part of Indian culture. How is this handled throughout the book?
7. In what ways are Tara and Sonia different from each other? How does this help them help each other, especially with their mother?
8. How does the Das family remitting money to family in India affect the family in the United States? Consider their relationships and efforts to prosper in their new home.
9. What do Tara's words, "You'll make her dangerous instead," mean? What is she talking about?
10. What are the unexpected repercussions of diary destruction day? How does it change the lives of the whole Das family? How does it change Ranee's attitudes?
11. Feminine power is a theme throughout this book, with very different ideas espoused. How do the various Das family women define and live out this ideal?
12. In what unexpected ways does the death of Mr. Das affect the family? What traditions are set aside, kept, or altered?
13. Sonia and Lou have very different views of the French Revolution and faith. What are these differences, and how do they bring these two together?
14. Tara finds surprising acceptance during her first trip back to India. What forms does this take and how does it change her life?
15. What happens that makes Ranee change her mind about Sonia's marriage and ultimately accept her choices?
16. Describe the relationship between Chantal's two grandmothers?
17. How do the Queens of the match game that Chantal and Grandma Rose play represent the Chantal's internal struggle with her social reality?
18. What opinions does Chantal battle, and what is the result for her and for her Grandmas?
19. Like most Grandmothers, Didu Ranee brags on her granddaughters. How does she describe them to each other and how does this affect their relationship?
20. Anna has a difficult adjustment to life and school in America. Give us some examples and tell us why they were problematic.
21. How does the locker room situation expose different ideas concerning the female form?
22. What does Martin's Porche represent to Chantal vs. Martin? What does the accident reveal?
23. What is Ranee's reaction to 9/11? How does this affect Chantal and Anna?
24. Anna finds many of her Didu's changes to be vexing and challenging. What does this reveal about Anna and her identity? What is the importance of the hyphen?
25. How does Ranee's relationship with her neighbor in the final chapter exemplify Ranee's lifetime of change?

*Additional questions can be found from MacMillan at <https://images.macmillan.com/folio-assets/activity-guides/9780374304904AG.pdf>.

CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

Art:

- Take a digital field trip to the Louvre: <https://www.louvre.fr/en/visites-en-ligne> . With applicable technical resources, you might take a VR field trip to the Louvre: <https://www.youvisit.com/tour/louvremuseum>
- Create a new wardrobe (either in the book era or current) for a fictional student. Choose a new country to live in. Assume your school will not have a uniform. You have a week to create a new wardrobe for your student that, like Raneer did for Tara and Sonia, will have your student at the top of acceptable fashion in their new school. Include all needed pieces for the new area and climate for a week. You may draw, sew, or use magazines. Other resources may be applicable, just ask. Digital, physical, and poster presentations will have distinct rubrics for content and presentation.

English Language Arts:

Have students journal for a given amount of time in and out of class just for themselves. They will not turn this in. They can keep it, continue journaling, or burn it in the end. However, to complete the assignment, they need to write a reflective exposition on their experience with additional compare with Sonia's journaling experience. This may be split into two parts to increase authentic expression in the reflective writing portion and give editorial practice.

Social Studies:

- Have students select one of the socio-political subjects from the book and create a research project that is both historically based and details the current effects or current events that are tied to it.
- Have the students watch a selection of videos on the unique background and immigration experience of the Das family. Follow with discussion. I provided some examples with potential videos below.
 - Indian Partition : <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/interactive/2017/08/india-pakistan-bangladesh-formed-170807142655673.html>
 - Casteism in India: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HyCQDIwHIXY>
 - Color Discrimination in India: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BQc2guo-Lg> (incidence of foul language).
 - Being Black in India: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fx5kdS3-FsI>
 - Multiracial in America: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FZWn-VRkZTw>

Math:

To explore remittance, have students choose a fictional career and create a basic family budget based on that income. To find median income for these career choices see: <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/>. Then take a look at <http://www.pewglobal.org/interactives/remittance-map/> to discover how much people remit around the world from the US. Consider what percentage of the average income that would be and how that would affect the family budget. Follow this up by creating a new family budget including remittance. Students may choose by country or you may assign a country to remit to (blind selection using paper slips works well).

Conclude with a discussion about how this affected your budget and how it would affect family life.

Drama:

Learn the Elements of Drama (useful website: http://3.bp.blogspot.com/-qbkVyV5vf90/VixXtVXp4uI/AAAAAAAAAR0Y/3nEqW4qljCM/s1600/IMG_3122.jpg). Assign groups a different type of drama. Giving primacy to those in the book and expanding if needed. Have the groups watch one of these dramas and complete the form above to present to the class.

Science

Visit these sites to learn more about India’s genetic heritage.

- <https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=9wbctuKOySc> (Speculation about DNA test results. One incident of foul language.)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aMPsYuGCzM4> (Same man talks about DNA test results. One incident of foul language.)
- <https://www.upi.com/Modern-DNA-reveals-ancient-origins-of-Indian-population/6721494272565/>
- <https://thediplomat.com/2018/03/what-my-dna-says-about-indias-history/>

Music

Music and movies have a long history in the US and in India, but Bollywood are very different from Hollywood movies. Visit the links below to learn more

- <https://qz.com/india/857675/la-la-land-theres-a-simple-but-key-difference-between-hollywood-musicals-and-bollywood-movies/>
- https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Sharaf_Rehman/publication/311964788_The_Role_of_Music_in_Hindi_Cinema_THE_ROLE_OF_MUSIC_IN_HINDI_CINEMA/links/586542d908ae8fce490c2302/The-Role-of-Music-in-Hindi-Cinema-THE-ROLE-OF-MUSIC-IN-HINDI-CINEMA.pdf?origin=publication_detail
- https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Music_of_India
- https://m.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLMRKdK25AuPXtFUNJGm_WV87BlhJIS2sK

Vocabulary:

Bengali	Adulterous	Kameez
Partition	Cadences	Muster
Registrar	Enunciating	Queue
Monsoon	Sanskrit	Assuage
Fenugreek	Liberated	Ratified
Harmonium	Oxymoron	Patriarchal
	Jute	Perpetuate

RELATED WEBSITES

Mitali Perkins Interview - You Bring The Distant Near

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PFL7eIJwvf0>

This is a long interview with the author about herself and the book

Author talk by Mitali Perkins

in YOU BRING THE DISTANT NEAR by Mitali Perkins

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3aG4ZCgFdmQ>

Mitali Perkins reads from YOU BRING THE DISTANT NEAR

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jbjrjCVBrJk>

This is a short talk by the author giving background on the Author and the book. This second link is from the same talk where she performs and expressive reading of an excerpt.

Welcome to Mitali's Fire Escape! a safe place to think, chat and read about life between cultures

<http://www.mitaliperkins.com/>

Explore more about this fantastic author, her life, and her books.

The Complete Works of Rabindranath Tagore

<http://tagoreweb.in/Render/ShowContent.aspx?ct=Verses&bi=72EE92F5-BE50-40B7-EE6E-0F7410664DA3&ti=72EE92F5-BE50-4B37-EE6E-0F7410664DA3>

This link is directly to the complete poem Gitanjali 63 of which a portion is titular to this book. His works cover many literary arenas. Explore his extensive works here, which include Rabindra Sangeet (Tagore Songs).

Fabulous Solo Harmonium by Nirmal Sidhu

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r87GYVCBiPU>

The harmonium is an interesting instrument similar to but unique from the accordion.

Kathak Performances and information

Kathak Dance | Vidya Patel | TEDxBrum

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fz_Tpp0q73A

This one provides some context for the art as well as great performance (English and Hindi)

TEDxMasala - Nikita Banawalikar - Kathak Dance Performance

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vzYTbOIMtN4>

This is a great sample of Kathak's storytelling abilities. (In Hindi)

Kathak solo, performance test at Kathak Kendra.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2C8yoijO-cA>

Experience a wonderful Kathak performance. It is long and in Hindi. Shows the expressiveness and storytelling intrinsic to the art.