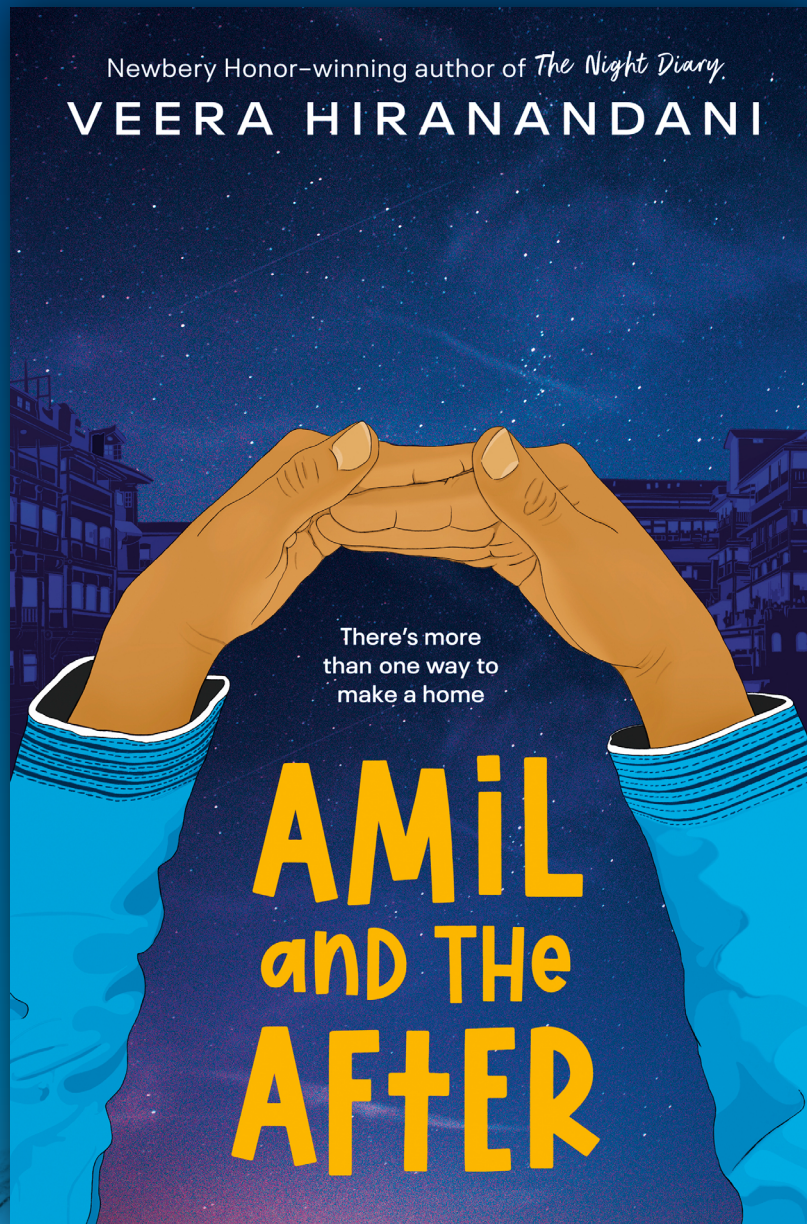


# An **EDUCATOR'S** guide to



The companion to  
Newbery Honor-winning  
*The Night Diary*





★ "Searingly  
emotional."

—BOOKLIST,  
starred review

★ "Engrossing."

—SCHOOL LIBRARY  
JOURNAL, starred review

★ "A masterpiece."

—KIRKUS REVIEWS,  
starred review

## ABOUT THE BOOK

At the turn of the new year in 1948, Amil and his family are trying to make a home in India, now independent of British rule.

Both Muslim and Hindu, twelve-year-old Amil is not sure what home means anymore. The memory of the long and difficult journey from their hometown in what is now Pakistan lives with him. And despite having an apartment in Bombay to live in and a school to attend, life in India feels uncertain.

Nisha, his twin sister, suggests that Amil begin to tell his story through drawings meant for their mother, who died when they were just babies. Through Amil, readers witness the unwavering spirit of a young boy trying to make sense of a chaotic world, and find hope for himself and a newly reborn nation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**VEERA HIRANANDANI**, author of the Newbery Honor-winning *The Night Diary*, earned her MFA in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College. She is the author of *The Whole Story of Half a Girl*, a Sydney Taylor Notable Book and a South Asia Book Award finalist, and *How to Find What You're Not Looking For*, winner of the Sydney Taylor Book Award and the New York Historical Society Children's History Book Prize.

A former editor at Simon & Schuster, she now teaches in the Writing for Children and Young Adults MFA Program at the Vermont College of Fine Arts.



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★ "A Tender Companion  
To [The Night Diary]."

—SHELF AWARENESS,  
starred review

★ "Powerful."

—BOOKPAGE, starred review

**DR. NITHYA SIVASHANKAR** is an assistant professor of children's and young adult literature at Texas State University. Her research on Partition narratives for young children has appeared in *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* and *Literary Cultures and Twentieth-Century Childhoods*.



# PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

1 Watch “[Why Was India Split Into Two Countries?](#)” by Haimanti Roy with your students in order to provide them with a background of the Partition of India into the nation states of India and Pakistan.

2 If your students haven’t read *The Night Diary*, consider giving them a brief overview of that novel and the style in which it was written. *The Night Diary* is a novel in the epistolary style (a collection of letters) and is told from the perspective of one of the twins, Nisha. Before the class begins to read *Amil and the After*, present the context of the Partition and the story of Nisha and Amil’s family and their forced displacement from Mirpur Khas to Jodhpur in 1947. You can also guide them to read the brief blurb on the back cover of *Amil and the After* to inform them that this book is a companion to Hiranandani’s Newbery Honor–winning *The Night Diary* and read aloud the first page of chapter 1 in *Amil and the After* to provide the crux of the first novel in this duology.

- a Also consider showing them this [author video](#) of Veera Hiranandani discussing *The Night Diary*.



3 Examine the cover art of *Amil and the After*. Invite the students to consider what is in the foreground and the background. Ask:

- a Whose hands do we see?
- b Through whose perspective are we seeing the two hands?
- c What might the background setting be?
- d What do you think “There’s more than one way to make a home” means?
- e What might the “After” in the title stand for?

4 Introduce the terms “forced displacement,” “refugee,” “Partition survivor,” and “trauma” to the students. Ask them what the dedication in the book (“To the survivors”) means, and why it matters.

# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS



- 1 Do you prefer writing like Nisha or drawing like Amil as your medium of expression? Why do you prefer this medium, and how does writing/drawing make you feel?



- 2 Hiranandani quotes Prime Minister Nehru's words in chapter 1: *"At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world sleeps, India will awake to life and freedom"* (p. 5). How did Nehru's words contrast with what actually happened when India became free from British rule?



- 3 The word "lucky" is mentioned quite often in this novel. For instance, in chapter 3, Amil whispers *"Lucky, lucky, lucky,"* while "stepp[ing] over a crack in the sidewalk" (p. 25). He also reminds himself that he needs to focus on "how lucky they were, just like Papa kept telling him, instead of letting his mind wander over to the unlucky things like no friends, missing home, and the terrible memories of the journey over the border" (p. 25). In the author's note too, Hiranandani writes that healing and change "often depends on just plain luck." Do you think luck plays an important role in healing and in dealing with a traumatic experience? Do you think Amil's reminders about how lucky they were helped him deal with his traumatic past, or do you think that these reminders harmed him more?



- 4 Why is it very important to Amil to find a "perfect friend" (p. 41)? And why does he feel like he will "probably never have a real friend again" (p. 46)? Do you have, or have you wished for, "perfect friends" and "real friends"? What do your friends mean to you?

- 5 We see Amil remembering traumatic memories from his displacement journey every now and then in the story. How does Amil feel while remembering these incidents? What does he do in order to process these memories and heal? Whose support does he seek in this process?

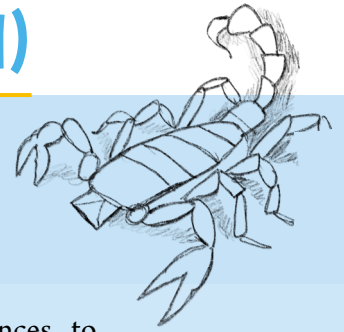
- 6 On page 120 of the novel, Papa asks Kazi, "When will the cycle of violence end?" What is the cycle of violence that Papa is talking about?

- 7 How is Vasim's experience of displacement similar to and different from that of Amil?

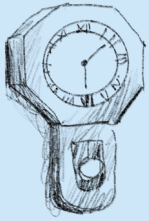




# DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONTINUED)

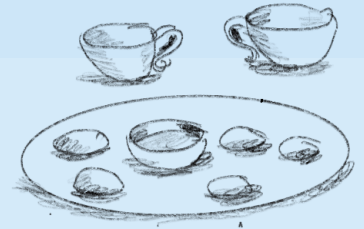


8 Toward the end of chapter 16, Amil and Nisha talk about lines and divisions between groups of people. What kinds of lines and divisions do you see around you or in the media?



9 This novel—the second half especially—contains references to Gandhi, and in chapter 24, we learn that Gandhi has been killed. How is the figure of Gandhi presented in this novel, and why is it important that he, his death, and the aftermath of his death is brought up in this story of Amil, Nisha, and their family?

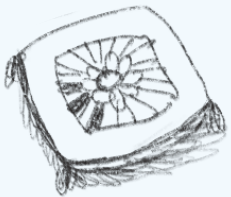
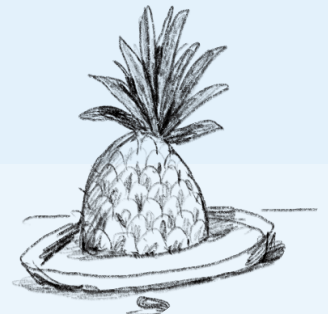
10 Why is the bicycle so important to Amil? What is the significance of the bicycle and what does it stand for? Do you have an object similar to Amil's bicycle that you have desired and that is meaningful and valuable to you?



11 Hiranandani brings up instances of caste discrimination (especially in the context of bullying at school) a few times in the novel. What did you understand about caste discrimination in this novel? Why do you think Hiranandani wrote about these instances in *Amil and the After*?

12 Discuss the evolution of the relationship between Papa and Amil from the beginning of the story until the end. What kind of a father is Papa to Amil and Nisha? Why does Amil have a fraught relationship with Papa, and how does their relationship improve toward the end of the novel?

13 Although a secondary character in *Amil and the After*, Nisha is still an important figure in this story. How do we see her healing journey alongside that of Amil? How is her healing journey similar to or different from that of Amil, and who is part of her support system?



14 This novel talks about how the Muslim characters, Kazi and Vasim (and even Miss Khan on page 119), had to change their names to Kavi and Vishal (and Mrs. Chatwani) after they crossed the border, indicating the power that names have in highlighting a person's identity. How do you think Kazi and Vasim would have felt to be called Kavi and Vishal in public? Do you think your name is important to your identity? How does it define you as a person?

15 What did you think about the illustrations in this novel? Do you think that Amil sketched some important scenes from his life in order to feel closer to his mother? Or do you think he drew in order to make sense of the world around him, like Nisha suggests he should, at the beginning of the novel (p. 8)?





# POST-READING ACTIVITIES

1 Discuss the genre of this novel—historical fiction—and invite your students to either write or converse about the value of engaging with historical narratives set not only in the distant past but also in a distant setting. A sample prompt for this discussion could be: Why do you think it is important for us to read and think about stories of the Partition survivors from India and Pakistan in the present day?

2 On page 232 of *Amil and the After*, Nisha tells Amil that she is “writing a new story about a magical place where people could go to be safe and everyone lived forever . . . Everyone had to figure out how to live with one another no matter who they were, dark-skinned or light, this religion or that.” Ask your students to choose between the formats of a written story or illustrated artwork to imagine and present this magical place to their peers and to you. What might this place look like? Who might the characters in it be? Your students could choose to either write about or sketch a scene from this story set against the backdrop of this magical place.



3 When we consider the illustrations by Prashant Miranda in this novel, they fall under two broad categories: a) those that are of everyday instances, where Amil is looking outward (such as the snapshot-like illustrations on pages 19, 38, 51, 63, and 163), and b) those that are of Amil looking inward, to share the feelings that he is experiencing (such as the ones on pages 40–41, 47, 88, and 123). Invite your students to choose a snapshot from their lives during the course of the week and to illustrate a scene that could be shared with the class, if they would like. Following that, invite them to choose a feeling—it could be related to fears, doubts, yearning, etc.—and illustrate either themselves experiencing that feeling (as Amil does on pages 40–41) or a metaphorical object/scene that might depict the way that they are feeling (as in the illustration on page 123). This could be artwork that they choose to keep private. Alternatively, they could also draw a self-portrait, like the one Amil has drawn of himself on page 2 of the novel.

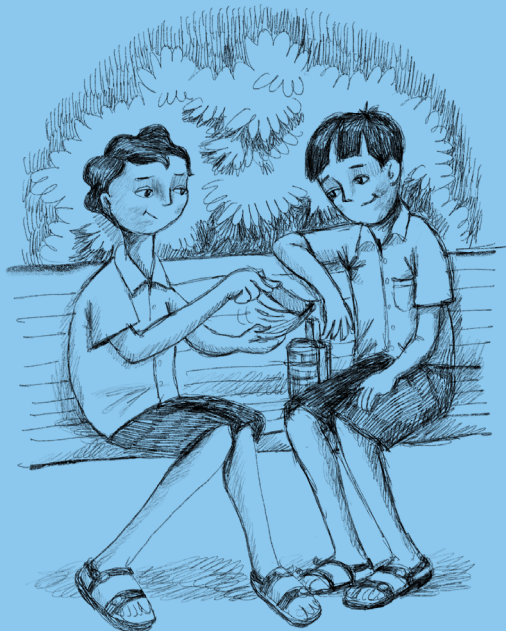




# POST-READING ACTIVITIES (CONTINUED)

- 4** Watch the video of the Partition survivor Sudershana Kumari from the Partition Museum YouTube channel with your students. Sudershana was eight years old when she was forced to flee from her home in present-day Pakistan. It is important to note that not all parts of this video are suitable for audiences ages eight to twelve, so please watch before sharing with students, as after the 1:56 mark, her story becomes very graphic and not appropriate for younger listeners. You may show the first part of the video (until 1:56 minutes) to give your students an idea of a survivor recounting their tale and why it is important to make the space for and listen to survivor's stories. You could ask them to think about how Amil would perhaps be very close in age to Sudershana if he were real, when this video was recorded in 2018.

- a** To provide an overall view, another video to consider watching is this one from the 1947 Partition Archive. Please watch this one before sharing with students as well.



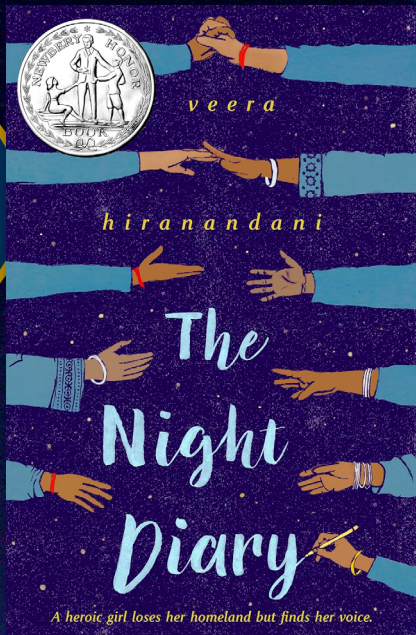
- 5** *Amil and the After*, in its essence, is a displacement survivor's tale. Engage in an inquiry project with your students to find out how child survivors of forced displacement in the present day are expressing their stories and experiences. Ask questions along the lines of:

- a** What modes do child survivors use in order to communicate their memories and experiences to a wider audience?
- b** How do mass media and social media play a role in helping child survivors tell their stories?
- c** What mode do you think Amil might use in the present day in order to express his feelings and experiences, and why?



# DON'T MISS THESE READS FROM VEERA HIRANANDANI!

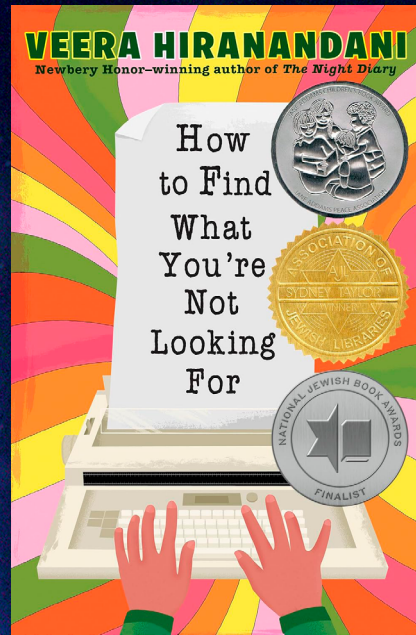
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