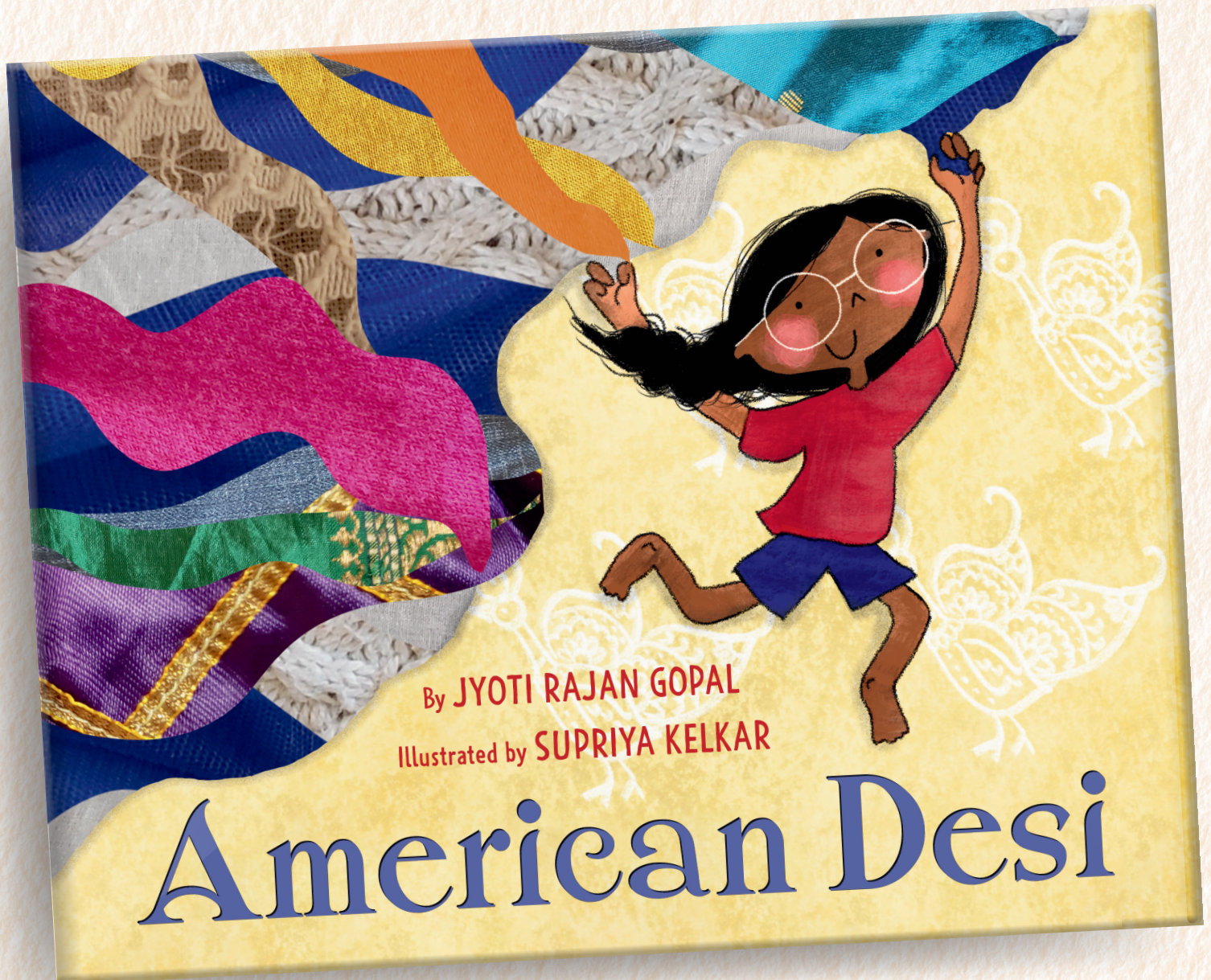


LITTLE, BROWN AND COMPANY BOOKS FOR YOUNG READERS

## Educator's Guide | Ages: 4–8





## Themes:

Cultural Identity

Bicultural identity

Cultural Differences

Community

Family relationships

Self-esteem

## From the author:

Growing up as a child of Indian parents, in Thailand and Indonesia, attending international schools, I straddled multiple cultures in my daily life. My South Indian home, my American international school, and my local community each brought different languages, different traditions, a different way of being.

I was deeply connected to each of these communities and yet within each, there were many times I felt like a phirangi (*fee-rung-ee*), a foreigner.

I belonged and yet, I did not. It took me a while to embrace that being part of more than one culture is a gift. That it makes me the pretty cool person that I am.

The word, desi (*they-see*) means, “from the homeland”, and is used by many in the South Asian communities here in the United States. I wrote *American Desi* for my younger self, for my daughters who are Indian American, and for all children straddling multiple identities who may be wondering where they fit in. I want them to know they don’t have to choose one identity over another. They can embrace all their wondrous colors!

## For Teachers:

All activities in this guide can be adapted for different age groups in the elementary school.

## Before You Read:

Talk about the front and back covers of *American Desi*.

*What is the girl holding?*

*What do you notice about it?*

*What do you think the girl is feeling?*

Compare the front endpapers and the back endpapers.

*What is similar? What is different?*



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### Let's Discuss!

#### 1. Text-to-self connections:

- What is the question that the girl keeps asking in this story? What do you think it means?
- What are some ways you feel pulled and pushed by the different parts of you?

#### 2. Text-to-text connections:

- Think of other books you may have read that talk about belonging or fitting in. How is this text different from or similar to those books?

#### 3. Text-to-world connections:

- How is this story similar to something that may happen in your everyday world? Do you know people who may be "straddling" different parts of themselves?

#### 4. In *American Desi*, the girl connects colors with the different parts of who she is like in "the jangling yellow of Bollywood moves, the shimmering blue of hip hop grooves". What colors would you choose for the different parts of you? Make a list!

### Let's Do!

#### Art activity

In *American Desi*, Supriya Kelkar, the illustrator, used a variety of materials, objects and textures to illustrate all the things that were important to the girl (and important to the illustrator).

Create a collage about you! What materials could you find and use to create this collage? What colors would you use for the different parts of you? Use these questions to help you decide what to include in your collage.

- What activities do you love?
- Who are the people you love?
- What languages do you speak?
- What are your favorite foods?
- What are the sounds and smells that remind you of home?
- What do you love to do with your family?

#### Literacy activity

*American Desi* is a story written in rhyme, but poems don't have to rhyme. You can use the same questions you used for the art activity to help you brainstorm for an *I Am* poem. Here's an example of a poem that the little girl in *American Desi* might write:

*I Am*

I am my mommy's smile and my papa's eyes

I am my grandpa's laugh, loud and proud

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I am black, black hair and brown, brown skin  
I am gooey mac 'n cheese and spicy hot dosas  
I am bright red, a cricket ball soaring high  
I am "take me out to the ballgame" blue  
I am kunju  
and beti  
and yo sis!  
I am Tamil and Hindi and English, words blending  
I am flowy dupattas and tinkling bangles  
I am blue jeans and snappy kicks  
I am a step-step twirl dancer, whirling whirling.  
I am ME!



For lower grades, you can do interactive writing with them on a chart first, and then try lines of their own on paper or in a journal.

For any grade, you may also choose to transform this into a Spoken Word activity.

A template for an *I Am* poem is provided at the end of this guide for scaffolding.

### Social Studies Activity

1. In this story, you hear about some of the clothing, dancing, language, and food that belong to the author's Indian heritage. Choose one or more of these to research. For example, you may be wondering:

*Where are pavadais worn?*

*What are idlis and dosas made of? Which part of India does this cuisine come from?*

Do a deep dive into any page that sparks your interest.

2. Research your own cultural background. (Depending on the age of students, it could be as simple as asking questions to family members or as detailed as creating a presentation).

### Math Activity

Interview a classmate about their community, their family, their favorite things to do, their favorite colors, their favorite foods.

*What similarities do you notice?*

*What differences?*

*Where do you overlap?*

Introduce the Venn Diagram as a way to represent similarities, differences and commonalities. A template for a Venn Diagram is provided at the end of this guide.

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## Common Core Literacy Standards (K–5)

- Make connections between self, text and the world around them
- Recognize and make connections in narratives, poetry, and drama to other texts, ideas, cultural perspectives, personal events, and situations.
- Write informational or opinion pieces, engage in peer review and discussion, and engage in shared research and writing projects. (Detail dependent on grade level)

## Common Core Social Studies Unifying Themes and Practices (K–5)

### Themes

- Individual Development and Cultural Identity
- Development, Movement, and Interaction of Cultures

### Practices

- Ask and develop questions about self, family, and community
- Identify similarities and differences between self, others, and communities

## Common Core Math Standards (K-5)

- Represent and interpret data

## Other Books to Read

- *Where Are You From?* by Yamile Saied Mendez and Jaime Kim
- *Home Is In Between* by Mitali Perkins and Lavanya Naidu
- *What I Am* by Divya Srinivasan
- *Eyes That Kiss In The Corners* by Joanna Ho and Dung Ho



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## Template for I Am poem.

(This template can be adapted as needed)

I am my mommy's \_\_\_\_\_ and my papa's \_\_\_\_\_

I am my grandpa's \_\_\_\_\_ and my grandma's \_\_\_\_\_

I am \_\_\_\_\_ hair and \_\_\_\_\_ skin  
(color, texture, feel) (color, texture, feel)

I am \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_  
(favorite food) (favorite food)

I am \_\_\_\_\_  
(favorite activity)

I am \_\_\_\_\_ , \_\_\_\_\_  
(favorite activity) (color)

I am \_\_\_\_\_  
(nickname)

I am \_\_\_\_\_ ,  
(language or languages)

I am \_\_\_\_\_  
(what you like to wear)

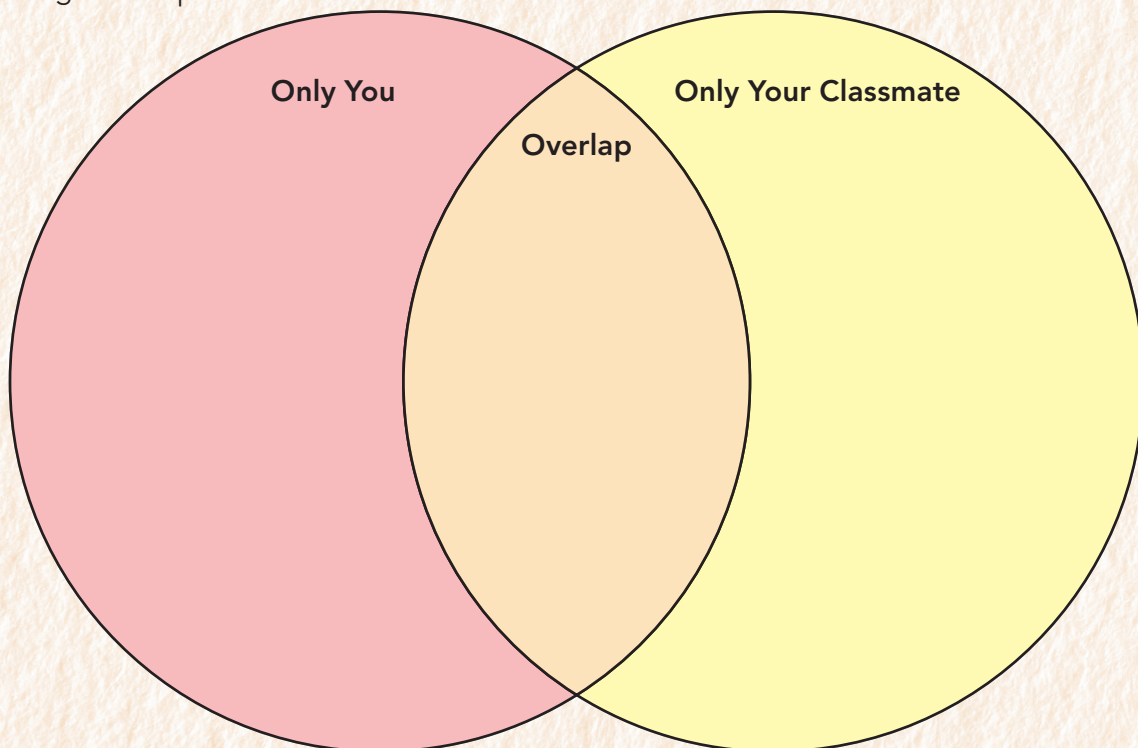
I am \_\_\_\_\_  
(what you like to wear)

I am a \_\_\_\_\_  
(a physical act that you love ex. climb, leap, run, snuggle)

I am ME!

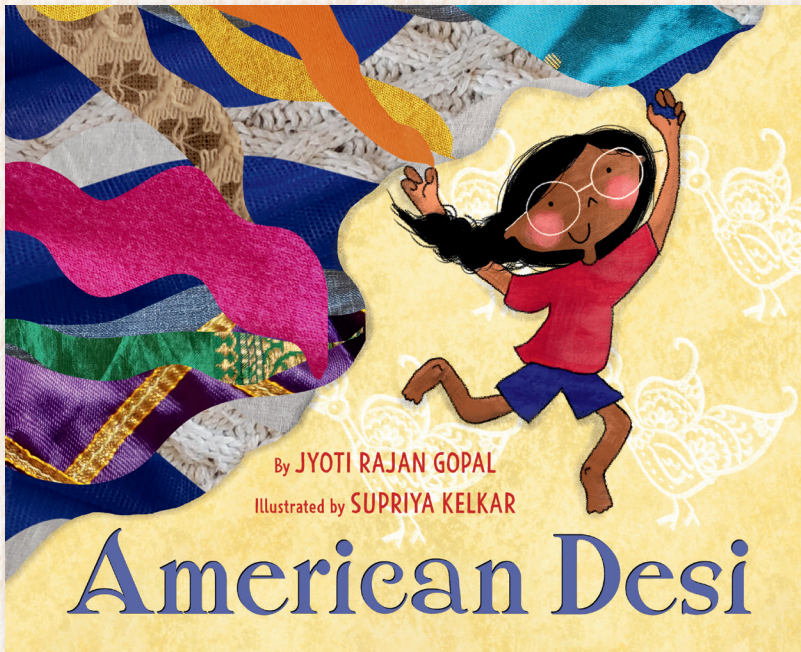
## Venn Diagram Activity:

Interview a classmate about their community, their family, their favorite things to do, their favorite colors, their favorite foods (and whatever else interests you!). Choose one color circle for your answers. Use the other color circle for your classmate's answers. If your answers are the same for a question (for ex. you both like to play baseball), put those in the orange overlap area.



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### About the book

A young girl longs to know where she fits in: Is she American? Or is she Indian? Does she have to pick or can she be both? With bright, joyful rhyme, and paired with an immersive art style using American and Indian fabrics, *American Desi* celebrates the experiences of young children growing up first and second generation Indian American: straddling the two cultural worlds they belong to, embracing all they love of both worlds and refusing to be limited by either.

This story is a powerful tribute to the joy of being South Asian and for every reader who aspires to bridge their worlds with grace, grit, and confidence.

### About the Author and Illustrator



**Jyoti Rajan Gopal** is a kindergarten teacher, writer, and mom who loves taking any opportunity to break out her Bollywood moves and hip-hop grooves. She grew

up in Thailand, Indonesia, Myanmar, India, and China and now lives in New York City, so she knows what it feels like to be caught between multiple cultures. She chooses to embrace all her wondrous colors! This is her debut children's book.

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Twitter: @JyotiGopal

Instagram: @jyotirgopal



**Supriya Kelkar** grew up in the Midwest, where she learned Hindi as a child by watching three Hindi movies a week. Supriya is a screenwriter who has worked on the

writing teams for several Hindi films and one Hollywood feature. She is the author of *Bindu's Bindis*, *American as Paneer Pie*, and *Strong as Fire, Fierce as Flame*, among others. This is her debut illustrated book.

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This educator guide was prepared by the author, Jyoti Rajan Gopal.