

Poetry classroom activity suggestions:

What's outside your window? Focus on this for 5 minutes, and then write a poem about what's outside your window. How does your mood affect what you see, and vice versa? Now, read the first page of BORN BEHIND BARS. What does Kabir see outside his window? How does it make him feel?

White space, in a poem (or story), according to Dr. Padma Venkatraman, is the place where the author and the reader meet, and become co-creators, collaborating to make the work come alive. BORN BEHIND BARS is formatted so the text appears in bars – with spaces between them, in which your imagination, like Kabir's, can come alive.

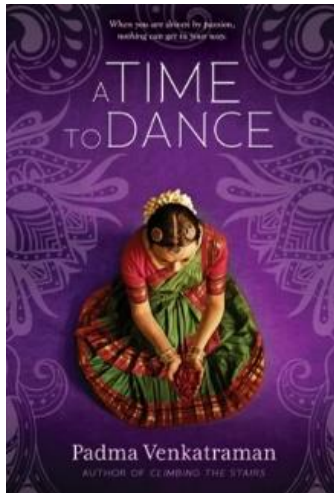
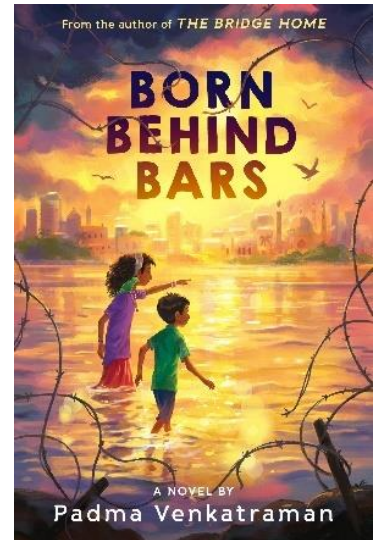
Bring the author into your classroom, by watching and listening to videos of her classroom activity starters at:

<https://vimeo.com/611887252>

<https://vimeo.com/611887502>

<https://vimeo.com/611887447>

<https://vimeo.com/611887418>



Poet Renee La Tulippe has a wonderful website which includes several activity prompts, such as this “outtake” from the novel A TIME TO DANCE (which was released to starred reviews in Kirkus, Booklist, SLJ, VOYA and PW). Read the poem here:

<https://www.nowaterriver.com/community-collection-11-visual-poems-with-padma-venkatraman/>

and discuss Visual Poems and how the visual element contributes to each verse in this poem. Why (do you think) the verses are shaped differently? (There are NO wrong answers, ever, with poetry).

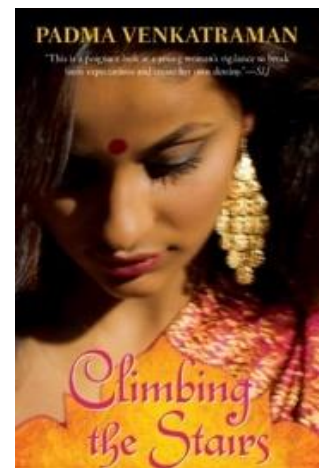
Padma Venkatraman is poet who pays a lot of attention not only to how poems sound, but also how they look. Play with the shape of words in your poem, and then read “Whenever You See A Tree” by Padma Venkatraman (published in Poetry Magazine) for another example of her concrete poetry. This poem is also a great way to discuss the role of a poem's title, and how much work can be accomplished by a well-chosen title. This poem can be accessed via <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/padma-venkatraman>

Patriotism / Peace and nonviolence Poetry prompt, using CLIMBING THE STAIRS: Encourage students to write their own poem about peace, or patriotism or both, after proving background:

Speak about WWII, and then, visit this website to download a photograph. Cite evidence from a photograph (source: www.wewerethere.defencedynamics.mod.uk/ww2/india_1.html) showing soldiers from the British Indian Army who fought for the ALLIES during WWII. Explore visual literacy by asking What is happening in this photograph? What do you know about the contributions of people from the Indian subcontinent, First Nations (Native Americans), African Americans, Japanese Americans, Latinos and other persons of color/ American immigrant communities that fought in WWII?

OR Ask students if they ever witnessed something they disagreed with. When that happened, what did they do? Then, read the Protest March chapter of CLIMBING THE STAIRS and introduce them to Rev. Dr. MLK Jr.'s principles of nonviolence. For a more details see

www.padmavenkatraman.com resources tab, drop down menu. Listen to rapper Common's “A Dream” music video from *Freedom Writers* and let this inspire a discussion on connections between Gandhi and King. Use Uma Krishnaswami's Thread of Peace as a resource.



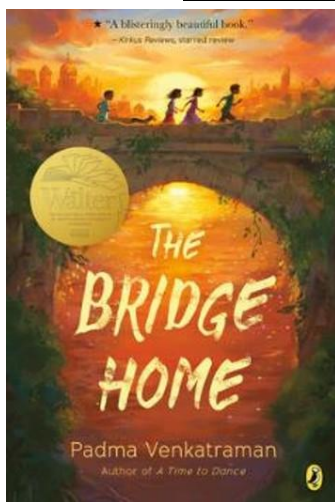
@padmatv (TW) @venkatraman.padma (ig)

<https://bit.ly/3yRx9VJ>



Below is a “Bingo” game, which includes a poetry writing prompt inspired by Padma Venkatraman’s Global Read Aloud novel THE BRIDGE HOME. Several other activity suggestions are available on Padma Venkatraman’s website, along with general diversity resources, links and suggestions (e.g. diverse scary story recommendations etc.) Scan the barcode on this handout to access Dr. V’s website.

Viji, in the Bridge Home, is speaking directly to Rukku; the book could be viewed as one long letter. Write a letter to another character in The Bridge Home (not Rukku).	Bananas are Rukku's favorite fruit. What fruit is your favorite? Why? Talk to your family about their most and least favorite foods.	Organize a book drive to collect and donate new or used books to others who may need them.
Do you have a pet or know someone who does? Is it a dog like Kutti? Write a poem about a pet, and read a poem about a pet. If you're having trouble finding a poem about a pet, try to get a copy of Pet Crazy (edited by Sylvia Vardell and Janet Wong).	Look up 6 facts about India. How do you know if something you read or hear is true? How can you figure out if a book or website can be trusted? Maybe a teacher or librarian can help you think about this?	Make a bead necklace or bracelet, or try your hand at another craft that uses beads. Try experimenting with color and pattern.
Viji, Rukku, Muthu and Arul are firm and forever friends. List five things you like about one of your closest and dearest friends.	"Start giving thanks for what you do have" Arul says, in The Bridge Home. Write a poem about something you're grateful for. Try reading the collection ThankU (edited by Miranda Paul) to get an idea of different poetic forms you could use.	How much waste do you create each day? What are some wasteful habits you have? How can you better conserve water, energy and food? Change your actions in some way so your behavior becomes more friendly and caring toward the environment.



12 thoughts on diversity from Dr. Padma Venkatraman

1. Respect verbal and written copyright
2. Include international perspectives
3. Excellent literature evokes empathy (thus making any book/character “relatable)
4. Fight Ageism (keep diverse books that you love on your shelves, honor older and current award-winners)
5. Go beyond awards and buzz, respect your choices, if you love a book, treat it as you would a prize winner
6. Explore diversity within categories (e.g. South Asia Book award showcases many diverse South Asian voices)
7. Respect religious and socioeconomic diversity and raise awareness of disability issues
8. Use compassion as a central argument to find Common Ground during book challenges
9. Reconsider the place of classics in your classroom with grace and courage
10. Learning is lifelong; give yourself compassion if you err; and don’t hold back for fear or making mistakes
11. Remember diversity conversations need to be conducted in safe, nurturing ways
12. Teach poetry (not just novels) by poets who self-identify with historically

underrepresented and marginalized communities

Dr. Sarah J Donovan’s Ethicela blog has several resources and writing prompts including

<https://www.ethicalela.com/?s=Padma+Venkatraman> ; <https://www.ethicalela.com/14-30-hate-outlived-poem/> ; <https://www.ethicalela.com/14of30verselove-padmavenkatraman/> (creating a mirror poem)

Do you like teaching poetry? Would you like to download FREE lesson plan suggestions related to diversifying poetry in the classroom or write a post about a collection of poems or verse novels that you’ve enjoyed? For recommendations, resources, and reviews, or to contribute your essay on teaching diverse poetry or verse novels, visit www.diverseverse.com. We’re especially interested in hearing from educators who self-identify with and wish to amplify and support historically underrepresented or marginalized communities.

