Dear Reader,

The Night Diary is historical fiction set in India in 1947. During this time, India is freed from British rule, but religious tensions among Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims cause India to partition into two countries: India and Pakistan. As twelve-year-old Nisha grapples with the idea that India is no longer whole—no longer a place where Hindus, Sikhs, and Muslims live together in peace—she also grapples with her own identity; her mother, who died when she was a baby, was Muslim, and her father is Hindu. As religion separates families and everyday life becomes dangerous, Nisha and her family leave what is now Pakistan and become refugees, struggling to cross the border into India and begin a new life.

Students experience the empowering messages of hope, overcoming fears, finding one’s voice, and appreciating people for who they are. In addition, students explore the themes of identity, family, and belonging. This layered novel also encourages students to examine the concepts of social justice and social class.

The Night Diary is a refugee story that appeals to readers from 5th through 10th grade. These Core Curriculum Lesson Plans present discussion questions, activities, and writing prompts that align with the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and History and Social Studies for grades 5–7. This guide is broken up into three parts. The lessons can be used as part of a comprehensive English and/or History unit that lasts for three to four weeks, or you might choose to use the lessons as enrichment activities to deepen student thinking as you conduct a whole class or small group novel study. This novel offers many options for further exploration and research about the causes and effects of the partition of India in 1947.

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Pre-Reading Activities

1. View the interview with Veera Hiranandani, author of The Night Diary and her editor, Namrata Tripathi at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6QsTzyjfl8U
   - Ask: What are you wondering? What parts of their conversation interested you?
   - Have additional primary source photographs ready for students to examine. Ask students to take a few moments to write about the details they see in the photos. Ask: What do you notice? What catches your attention?
   - In addition to any available movie trailers, consider Ghandi starring Ben Kingsley or Earth by Deepa Mehta.

2. The cover art represents Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh people on the cover, all conveyed by the various items on their wrists. For instance Kalava/mauli (Hindu) and karas (Sikh), and bare wrists (could be Muslim). Ask the students to notice and note details in the artwork on the book cover.
   - Discuss: What is happening to the outstretched hands and arms on the cover? What words or phrases come to mind as you view the hands and arms? What do you infer from all the sleeves being blue? How are the arms alike/different? What might the actions of the arms, hands, and fingers represent?

3. In order to spark curiosity and to generate thinking about the big ideas, invite students to complete the following anticipatory guide.

   Directions: Read the statement and place a checkmark to show whether you agree, disagree, or are not sure.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>I agree</th>
<th>I disagree</th>
<th>I’m not sure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being smart doesn’t have to be about reading or math.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>It might be about artwork or being able to understand others.</td>
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<tr>
<td>When people are separated into groups, they start to believe that one group is better than the other.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Quiet voices sometimes get people’s attention even better than loud voices.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone should dress the same, enjoy the same foods, and practice the same religion.</td>
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4. Create a jackdaw by gathering items or pictures of items related to the story in order to generate anticipation. Be sure to consider primary sources such as photographs and newspaper stories related to the location, culture, time period, and characters. Invite students to add to the assemblage as the story unfolds.
   - You might include these items or find pictures of these items online: mortar and pestle on page 252; any of the ingredients or spices mentioned (for example: cumin seeds, coriander seeds, gingerroot, turmeric root, garlic, mango, lentils, rice, okra, etc.); pictures of meals from the text (sai bhaji on page 252 or any of the meals explained in the glossary of the book); bangles; a diary (p. 109, 175); a diary and other items that Nisha brings with her on page 93 (three pencils, jewelry in a silk sack, gold coin, pinch of dirt); and a red ribbon (Hala’s gift to Nisha); primary source photographs and newspaper articles (p. 91) of the time period of the partition.
   - Have students choose an item from the assemblage and write about it in their journals. For example, they might infer the purpose of an object or the meaning of a picture. They might record a list of wonderings or questions.

5. Invite students to investigate the glossary and discover important words that are commonly used in India and Pakistan.
   - Have small groups choose three words/concepts and become “experts” on them before reading. Using online sources, have students explore the terms or concepts beyond the definition provided in the glossary. After discussing the meaning within their group, have groups demonstrate the meaning by creating a sketch or short skit, or by locating a photograph or short video online. For food items, students might choose to locate a short cooking video or a recipe.
   - Groups teach the class as the items appear throughout the story.

6. In order for students to gain a sense of the setting (India in 1947), have them view online maps and interactive timelines.
   - Ask students to compare and contrast maps from before and after the partition.

**Correlates to Common Core Standards:**
SL.5-7.2, SL.6-7.1, RI.5-7.4, RI.6-7.4, W.5-7.9, W.6-7.9, RI.5-7.7, L.5-7.4
6. On page 32, we learn about the tensions between Hindu students and Muslim students at Amil’s school. Nisha says, “Everything is different now, even though it’s exactly the same. I can see it all around us, but I don’t know what to call it. It’s like a new sound I can hear in the air.”

7. Exploring Craft Strategies: How does the author communicate meaning? Have students discuss the power of the following examples and invite them to try out the strategies in their own notebooks:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Comparisons using Similes and Metaphors</th>
<th>Personification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“They explode in my mouth like fireworks.” (p. 26)</td>
<td>“He says letters to him are like bugs and grass waving in the wind.” (p. 45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I needed all the feelings to stop looking like a pile of dirt and be cool enough for me to translate them” (p. 46)</td>
<td>“I felt my courage to speak go out like a Flame” (p. 46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“He felt the truth sink down into his stomach like a pile of coal” (p. 86).</td>
<td>“I felt the truth sink down into my stomach like a pile of coal” (p. 84).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“My childhood would always have a line drawn through it, the before and the after.” (p. 86).</td>
<td>“They would have drawn a line right through us!” (p. 90).</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

8. Ask students: What significant moments occur at the goodbye party (p 78)?

- Invite groups to choose a scene from the party and enact it with peers. Ask audience members to note: What do we learn in this scene about the characters and their circumstances? What do we learn about the theme of family?

9. Invite students to consider the value of education in this story. Give small groups one of the following pages. Ask groups to locate and discuss a powerful passage or quotation about education on the page and then share it and discuss it with the class:

- Page 18: Nisha compares her school to Amil’s school and we learn that “not all girls go to school” and that “Papa says it’s important to be educated.”
- Page 43: Nisha and Amil learn that it is not safe to go to school anymore and that Dadi and Papa will teach them at home.
- Page 46: Nisha’s reaction to not going to school.
- Page 92: Nisha must leave all of her books behind when she leaves.
- Page 103 (Looking ahead): Papa has Amil take the Mahabharata book.

10. Nisha asks Mama, “Is it the brain that makes people love and hate? Or is it the heart?” (p. 88)

- Invite students to tackle this philosophical question by sharing resources with students about kindness, love, and diversity.
- Have students locate moments in the text when there is a contradiction between what Nisha is learning about the world around her versus what she feels is right.
1. Have students continue the exploration of how the author uses food as a way for Nisha to express herself and as a way to create mood in the scenes.

- Food references in this section include mango slices (p. 12), roti and dal as they flee (p. 116), mango (p. 121), dry rice for fasting (p. 122), candy on the trail (p. 184), spices (p. 179), and dal (p. 180).
- Reread the passage on p. 180 in which Nisha stirs the “warm, yellow dal” and discuss the author’s purpose with food.

2. On page 103, Amil burns his drawings.

- Have students share their thoughts. What is the significance of this act? What might this symbolize?

3. After Amil spills the water, Papa says, “Don’t spill it again. There’s life in here. Treat it like that” (p. 119).

- Ask students to continue the exploration of how the author uses craft to communicate meaning in this section: How is this act a turning point for Nisha and her family?

4. As Nisha struggles on page 129, she writes about a girl who walks past her: “I caught a girl’s eyes, a few years younger than me, hair and clothing rumpled and dirty. She looked like a small, frightened animal, weighed down by her belongings. I probably looked like that to her.”

- What is the significance of this girl walking past Nisha? What does this reveal about the social and economic context of their situation?

5. At one moment during the grueling walk, Nisha says that Papa treats Amil “like an annoyingfly” (p. 130). Nisha reflects, “I wish Papa would be nicer to him. Amil is only being all he knows how to be. But I guess I was being mean too.”

- Invite students to write a short opinion response in their journals: In what ways do you agree or disagree with Nisha’s thoughts?

6. Ask students to consider how the author uses craft to communicate meaning in this section:

- Invite students to mine the section for the following: flashbacks (p. 140), comparisons using simile or metaphor (for ex. p. 100, 116-117, 128, 129, 141, 144); and small movements to show character emotion (p. 150), in addition to any other words or phrases that grab their attention.
- Ask them to choose a craft strategy and try it out in their notebooks.

7. On page 144, Nisha drinks her first sip of water in two days. She uses the metaphor “liquid diamonds.”

- Have students share their opinions on the effectiveness of this metaphor. What is being compared and why? What is the impact on readers?
- Ask students to notice the author’s use of sentence fluency—how she creates a two-word sentence: “Liquid diamonds.” Discuss how this slows the pace, emphasizing the significance of the words.

8. A Muslim family saves Amil’s life by accepting the family into the shelter and providing them with space. Papa says, “We need shelter. My son will die if he doesn’t get warm” (p. 146). Ask small groups to discuss:

- How does this scene celebrate humanity in a time of conflict?
- How is this moment a turning point for Nisha and her family?

9. When a man grabs Nisha and holds a knife to her throat, Papa lets the man go and says Ghandhiji’s words, “An eye for an eye makes the whole world blind” (p. 171). Have students discuss:

- Do you agree with the way that Papa responds?
- In what other ways does Papa work to build bridges and show humanity in his life?
- Nisha later reflects: “There was something about having it happen that made me less scared than more scared” (p. 177). How does the knife incident affect Nisha? What does she come to understand about the man?

10. Papa introduces Rashid Uncle and says, “He can’t speak, only write” (p. 174). A few pages later, Nisha writes, “What would I do without Amil? He is my voice. He asks the questions I can’t.”

- Invite students to choose two characters and compare and contrast them by creating a poem for two voices.
- Start by showing students examples of poems from two voices from print or online sources and discuss the points of view and how the format works—the lines in the middle show ways in which the characters are similar (these lines are spoken together when read aloud). The lines on either side show character differences and are read one at a time by the two different voices.
- Have students mine the text and their notes on characterization in order to include details. Encourage them to include big ideas.
- Invite students to practice reading their poems and share them with partners, in small groups or with the class.

**Correlates to Common Core Standards: SL.5-7.1, SL.5-7.3, SL.5-7.4, SL.5-7.5, L.5-7.5, RL.5-7.1, RL.5-7.2, RL.5-7.3, RL.5-7.4, RL.5-7.9, RI.5-7.1, RI.5-7.2, RI.5-7.3, RI.5-7.4, W.5-7.1, W.5-7.4, W.5-7.6, W.5-7.9**

- Ask students to share their opinions: Do you think Nisha was a coward? Why or why not?
- Encourage students to think about the concept of bravery. Invite students to read, view, and hear additional texts about bravery including poems, books, quotations, videos, and contemporary songs.
- As students continue to read, ask them to flag places in the text when a character shows bravery and overcomes fears. (For example, you might consider p. 210, 243, and 254.)
- Students work in groups to communicate the energy and significance of these brave moments through one of the following:
  - Create group movement, considering moving in high and low stances and fast and slow paces.
  - Create a group tableau, posing their bodies as frozen statues to symbolize bravery (rather than showing the exact action of the scene).
  - Create music with found objects or locate music to communicate the power of bravery.
  - Create an abstract painting, choosing colors, shapes, and lines to represent bravery.
- Groups might consider having one or more students read the passage while they perform the movement, tableaux, or music to communicate the message.

3. Continue the exploration of food and how the author uses food as a way for Nisha to express herself and to create mood in the scene. Consider the following:

- When Nisha is frying dough in hot oil she writes, “I watched each circle puff up and felt a lightness I hadn’t felt in so long” (p. 205).
- Nisha describes how cooking makes her feel on pages 243-244 and she writes, “When Gandhiji spins, maybe he finds some peace like I do when I cook” (p. 244).
- The significance of saai bhaji being the first meal she cooks on her own for the party and how it reminds her of home (p. 232).
- Challenge the students to choose one of the powerful scenes with cooking in the text and create a found poem by picking out key words and phrases from the passage and arranging them into a poem. Invite them to repeat a line or two to highlight meaning and create rhythm and beat.

4. Nisha writes, “I still don’t understand. We were all part of the same country last month, all these people and religions living together. Now we are supposed to separate and hate one another. Do you understand how the fighting between groups when those close to her, both Hindu and Muslim, embody kindness and love?

- Have groups locate examples of the kindness she experiences from those she knows and loves.
- Invite students to consider: Do individuals have the freedom to choose their behavior, even when they are part of a larger group?

5. Discuss in groups: What is the symbol of having to leave the “half-carved doll” that Rashid Uncle was making her (p. 224)?

6. On page 237, Nisha recounts the bloody scene at the train in which Sikh men, Muslim men, and Hindu men fight. She writes that a Muslim man and a Hindu man had fallen next to each other and that “they lay close together, hands touching” (p. 237). Nisha says, “I watched them die like that” (p. 237).

- Have groups use the power of tableaux (silent, still statues) to show this scene.
- Audience members list words and phrases that come to mind as they view the statues.
- Discuss: What is the significance of this moment?

7. On page 250, Kazi has joined the family again and Nisha writes, “As I went to sleep that night, I felt peaceful in a way I never had been. We were put back together. To Nehru, Jinnah, India, and Pakistan, to the men who fight and kill—you can’t split us. You can’t split love.”

- Have small groups choose from the text one of the many references to parts of a whole divided, then united. Invite them to visually represent how the parts make a whole. (They might create puzzle pieces, divide drawings in half, etc.)
- Have students discuss the important question: What brings the parts together?

Some examples to consider:
- The idea of twins as parts of a whole: “If I die, I’m glad I’m here with my brother, the other half of me” (p. 237).
- Muslim mother and Hindu father giving Nisha and Amil two parts to their whole identity
- India as a whole breaking into parts (old India and new India) and Gandhi wanting a “united India” (p. 90)
- Being separated from Kazi in the partition then finally reuniting with him?
- Joining Rashid Uncle, part of Mama’s family
- “When you divide people, they take sides” (p. 45).
- Remembering her mama’s name is Faria, Nisha says, “It reminds me of the whole person you were, beyond my mama” (p. 226).

8. Highlight the significance of Nisha’s voice by allowing students to hear some of her powerful quotations:

- Examples on pages: 129, 129, 150, 150, 151, 178, 188, 192, 205-206, 243-246, 270
- In small groups, students use available technology (ex. iMovie, Audacity, or any recording tool).
- Groups choose quotations highlighting Nisha’s voice. Then, groups record and record the quotations one after another.
- Group members decide how they will record and record each quotation—chorally, in partnerships, or by taking turns one by one.
- Extension: Invite students to add music or pictures to help communicate the tone, mood, and meaning of the quotations.
- Ask: In what ways does hearing the words and music or viewing the visuals impact our understanding?

9. Invite students to explore issues of social class by returning to the following passages.

- When Nisha compares her home in Mirpur Khas to her new home in Jodhpur and says, “I didn’t know we were so rich until we became poor” (p. 213).
- Students might also think back to page 81 and pages 179-180 when Nisha wonders if Rashid Uncle had a cook who might have been Hindu and had to leave.
- Ask: Why would the author include these passages? What does she want you to know?

10. Ask students to consider how the author uses craft to communicate meaning in this section.

- Invite students to mine the section for the following: comparisons using simile or metaphor (for ex. p. 197, 198, 250); small movements to show character emotion (for ex. p. 202); any other figurative language or words that grab their attention.
- Have students choose a strategy and try it out in their own writing.
Essay ideas

1. How does Nisha express herself throughout the story? What moments and people empower Nisha to make her voice heard? When does she feel frozen or unable to speak? In what ways does she grow?

2. How does Nisha come to understand her identity? Is she still searching for answers? What experiences allow her to think about who she is and why she is the way she is? How does knowing and understanding other people help her?

3. In what ways does Amil grow and change throughout the story? What experiences and people impact his growth?

4. Choose two characters and explore their relationship over time.
   - What are some of the moments when they appreciate each other for who they are?
   - What are some of the moments when they want the other to be different?
   - In what ways does their relationship grow and change over time? What moments in the text cause this growth?

5. The Night Diary, while historical fiction, can be thought of as a refugee story. Further explore the present-day refugee crisis. Compare and contrast how Nisha’s story is similar to that of present-day children refugees.

6. What are some moments in the text when fear plays a role in the characters’ decisions? In what ways do the characters overcome their fears? How do bravery and hope prevail? (In order to get ideas flowing, see p. 95, 145, 179, 185, 208, 210.)

7. In what ways is Nisha’s story one of hope and how does it celebrate diversity and humanity?

8. Explore the significance of silence and quiet during key moments in the text. You might consider these ideas and pages as part of your work: At the train: p. 227; preparing to leave: p. 100; whispers: p. 27, 50; talking without words: p. 100.

9. Further explore the concept of drawing lines and boundaries as well as parts and whole’s in this text and in the world today. How are things divided and united in the text? How are things divided and united in today’s world? What messages do we learn from this?

10. Choose a character in the text that makes you want to know more about her/him because her/his story is not fully told. Imagine and write the untold story of this character. Consider these ideas: Papa, Dadi, Rashid Uncle, Hafa, the mother and son separated from their family at the train, a Muslim girl in the new India who has to flee to Pakistan, etc.

11. Find a passage or quotation that you find significant. Write about its power and meaning.

Invitations for research and further explorations:

1. Consider examples of voice and expression in today’s world.
   - Have students conduct a research project to examine the role of children in present-day women’s marches. Begin with the images from the author’s interview and list the empowering words and phrases from the posters.
   - Locate additional images and posters from the women’s marches and add the messages to the list. Use sidewalk chalk to share the empowering messages on the playground.
   - Discuss: How do voices affect change in today’s world?

2. Invite groups to conduct a short research project on Gandhi.
   - Use online resources including leveled text sets at https://newsela.com/text-sets/262706.
   - Locate and discuss passages about Gandhi in the text (for example, those on pages 45 and 71 and later in the text on pages 102, 103, 244).
   - Ask groups to create a short presentation using digital tools to highlight Gandhi’s actions, message, and most notable quotations.
   - As students continue to read the text, ask them to be on the lookout for instances when characters act in ways that embody the message of Gandhi.
   - Have students respond in their journals to answer the questions: In what ways might Gandhi’s message inspire people in today’s world? How might they inspire me?

3. Research present-day child refugees.
   - Have students begin at The Classroom Bookshelf to locate resources: http://www.theclassroombookshelf.com/?s=refugees
   - Invite students to conduct an author exploration by visiting Veera Hiranandani’s website: http://www.veerahiranandani.com/
   - Invite groups to conduct a short research project on Gandhi.
   - Have students write two questions for the author and consider having her join your classroom for a free twenty-minute Skype session or more.

4. Learn about the religions in the story, including Hinduism, Islam, and Sikhism.
   - Use online resources such as the leveled texts at https://newsela.com/text-sets/262706

5. Consider girls and education in the world today.
   - Research the bravery of Malala Yousafzai. Share online interviews and picture books about Malala, including: Malala: A Brave Girl from Pakistan/Iqbal: A Brave Boy from Pakistan by Jeanette Winter.

6. Have students respond in their journals to answer the questions: In what ways might Gandhi’s message inspire people in today’s world? How might they inspire me?

7. Research spoken word poetry and spoken-word poets, such as Sarah Kay, and Project VOICE (http://www.projectvoice.co/)
   - Choose a powerful excerpt from the text in which Nisha communicates passion or strength, or takes a stand. Let the passage inspire you to create poetry. Practice speaking your poem and share it with others.

“Nisha’s sweet, sheltered world disappears overnight when her country splits in two—now Hindus must live in India, Muslims in Pakistan. But Nisha’s both. Where can her family be safe? Hirananandani’s story is set in an historical time little known to American children, but she tells it in a way that makes it accessible, timely, interesting and real.”

—Kimberly Brubaker Bradley, author of Newbery Honor–winning The War That Saved My Life

“Veera Hirananandani’s storytelling is exquisite and compelling. For Nisha, like so many of us, home is a complicated place and this heartbreaking and hopeful novel reminds us that even in places where there is great loss and strife, there is deep joy, renewed faith. The Night Diary is a treasure for young readers who are searching for their place in the world, who are determined to bring home with them wherever they go.”

—Renée Watson, Piecing Me Together

★ “Believable and heartbreaking... A gripping, nuanced story of the human cost of conflict appropriate for both children and adults.”

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ “This rich, compelling story, which speaks to the turbulence surrounding India’s independence and to the plight of refugees, should be in all libraries.”

—School Library Journal, starred review

★ “The diary format gives her story striking intimacy and immediacy, serving as a window into a fraught historical moment as Nisha grapples with issues of identity and the search for a home that remain quite timely.”

—Publishers Weekly, starred review

Meet Veera Hirananandani

Veera Hirananandani earned her MFA in creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College. She is the author of The Whole Story of Half a Girl, which was named a Sydney Taylor Notable Book and a South Asian Book Award Finalist. A former book editor at Simon & Schuster, she now teaches creative writing at Sarah Lawrence College’s Writing Institute and Writopia Lab.