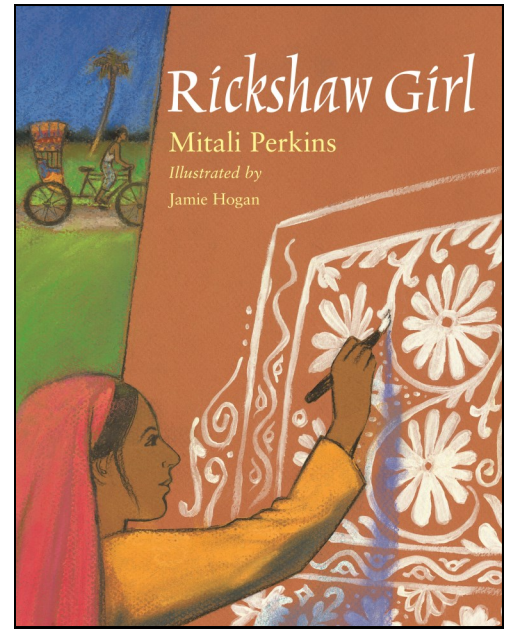


Rickshaw Girl

A Discussion and Activity Guide

Developed by Charlesbridge with Mitali Perkins
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Naima is a talented painter of traditional *alpana* patterns, which Bangladeshi women and girls paint on their houses for special celebrations. But Naima is not satisfied just painting *alpanas*. She wants to help earn money for her family, like her best friend, Saleem, does for his family. When Naima's rash effort to help puts her family deeper in debt, she draws on her resourceful nature and her talents to bravely save the day.



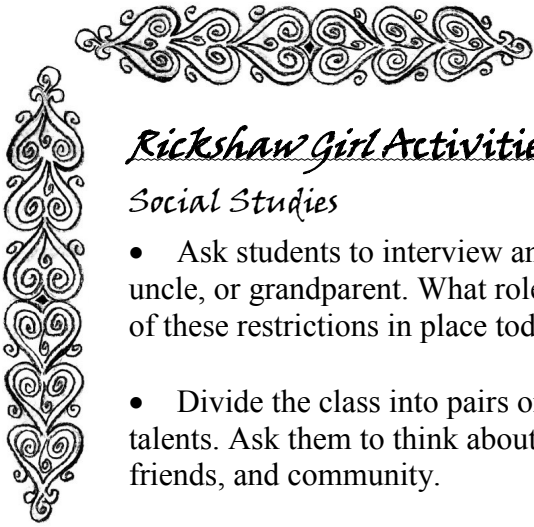
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Discuss *Rickshaw Girl*

- Ask students if they liked Naima. Why or why not? Did they agree with her decision to take the rickshaw? What would they have done in her position?
- Naima is ten years old. She had to stop going to school because her parents couldn't afford to send both her and her sister. Discuss the benefits of education with your students and ask them if they would like to leave school at age ten. What would they do?
- Naima's sister Rashida says, "I think it's hard to grow up" (page 12). What do your students think about this statement? Many children are excited to grow up, and they plan to do many things when they get older. Discuss your students' plans for the future.
- Naima's mother's golden bangle is precious for two reasons—in an emergency, it can be sold for a sum of money, and her family has owned it for several generations. Ask students to draw or take a picture of something that has belonged to their family for more than two generations (don't put their names on their pictures). Put the pictures up on a bulletin board. Ask students to decide which object other than their own they might want. If given the choice, would they trade their possession for the other one? Why or why not? Discuss as a class or in small groups.
- Naima wasn't allowed to drive her father's rickshaw because she is a girl. Her friend Saleem, however, was able to help his father because he is a boy. Naima's chores included doing the laundry, setting the table, and washing her father's rickshaw. Discuss the different roles daughters and sons play in students' own family cultures.

- Naima’s father tells her to fix her hastily-made *alpanas*, saying, “Don’t do it for the prize. Make them right for *their* sake” (page 48). Discuss what he means by this.
- Naima thinks to herself, “If only I had been born a boy” (page 21). Ask students if they ever wish they were someone else. Discuss why they think life might be better as another person. Conversely, discuss how Naima discovers her own strengths and ability to contribute to her family’s welfare. Ask students what they think are their personal strengths.
- Societies change from generation to generation. How is Naima’s life different from her mother’s? What might be causing those changes? Ask students to list some differences between their lives and their parents’ lives. Do your students think their society is changing faster than Naima’s? Why or why not?
- Painting *alpanas* is a tradition handed down from mother to daughter in the Bangla culture. Ask students about their own heritages and discuss how their families celebrate them. Do your students have any artistic family traditions?
- While most people are aware of their ancestral heritage, many don’t discuss what qualities make their families American. Ask students to brainstorm American traditions and social norms such as Thanksgiving, equal rights, jazz, etc. Additionally, ask your students if they think there are specific roles for boys and girls in American culture.
- Naima goes to work for a woman who owns a rickshaw repair shop. This is unusual because Bangladeshi women don’t usually own businesses, and because repairing rickshaws is considered men’s work. In her author’s note, Mitali Perkins discusses how all this is changing. Discuss microfinance with the class and think of ways a poor person in a village like Naima’s might overcome poverty. Log on to www.nobelprize.org to learn about the 2006 Nobel Peace Prize winners, Muhammad Yunus and the Grameen Bank. Together they created a bank system that grants micro loans to help finance new businesses. Ninety-five percent of their borrowers are women.





Rickshaw Girl Activities

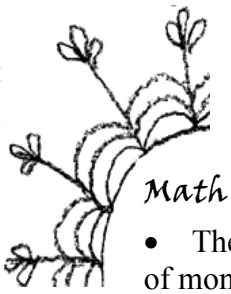
Social Studies

- Ask students to interview an older member of their family—a mother or father, aunt or uncle, or grandparent. What role restrictions or social restraints did they grow up with? Are any of these restrictions in place today?
- Divide the class into pairs or small groups. Have students interview each other about their talents. Ask them to think about ways in which they use these talents to help their family, friends, and community.
- Naima paints *alpanas*. These are decorative patterns that Bangladeshi women and girls paint in their homes for special celebrations. Naima is very talented and wins prizes for her *alpana* designs. Study the designs in the illustrations in *Rickshaw Girl*. Have the class create their own *alpanas* and decorate the classroom. Pair this activity with a study of Bangladesh culture and custom. Have Bangladeshi Day at school and have the class prepare traditional foods and wear *lungis*, *kurtas*, *salwar kameez*, and *sarees*. Instructions on how to wear these items are in the back of the book.

Art

- **Chalk *Alpanas*:** Use white chalk on the pavement or on black paper to outline patterns. Then use colored chalk to fill in the design. Visit Patak's Journey Through India (<http://www.journeythroughindia.com/diwali/rangoli.php>) or Kentucky Educational Television's Arts Toolkit Lesson Plan on Rangolis (<http://www.ket.org/artstoolkit/visual/lessonplan/248.htm>) for design templates.
- **Sand or Salt *Alpanas*:** In traditional *alpana* patterns, the outline is drawn on the floor and then filled in by carefully sprinkling colored powders. Draw an outline of a pattern on the ground using chalk, then fill in the different sections with colored sand (available at art stores) or salt (add food coloring to salt, spread thin, and allow to dry). Students may also draw an *alpana* outline on a piece of dark paper, fill in each section with white glue, and sprinkle the glue with colored sand, salt, or glitter. Do one color at a time and shake the excess off onto a large piece of newspaper. (See "Making Rangoli, Step by Step" on Kamat's Potpourri, <http://www.kamat.com/kalranga/rangoli/making.htm>).
- **Rice *Alpanas*:** In Bengali villages, *alpanas* are made with rice paste. To color rice, add food coloring to two teaspoons of rubbing alcohol in a Ziploc bag. Pour in about $\frac{3}{4}$ cup of uncooked rice. Close the bag tightly, shake well, and then pour onto a piece of wax paper or aluminum foil to dry for a day. Children can draw patterns on the floor or ground and then use the rice to fill in the patterns.
- **Virtual *Alpanas*:** Visit <http://iKolam.com> and check out the *alpanas* (*kolam*) in the gallery section. Have students draw some of their own, either on the site (via Flash animation) or on paper. (Note: *Alpanas* are seen throughout India, but they are called by different names where different languages are spoken. For example, they are known as *kolam* in South India and *rangoli* in North India. They are called *muggulu* in the state of Andhra Pradesh, *rangavalli* in Karnataka, *chowkpurana* in Uttar Pradesh, *madana* in Rajasthan, and *aripana* in Bihar.)





Math

- The rickshaw painter in *Rickshaw Girl* was able to set up her business by borrowing a sum of money from the village bank. Ask students to imagine that they are given a \$1,000 loan from a bank that must be repaid fully in five years with 20% additional interest per year. What is the total amount they will have paid in five years? How might they invest the initial \$1,000 to make more? What is the minimum amount they would have to earn each year to have \$1,000 in the bank at the end of five years and repay the original loan with interest?
- Set up a classroom economics system with your own classroom currency. Everyone should have a job for which the others must pay. Perhaps these are jobs that help the classroom, such as chalkboard eraser, trash emptier, test distributor, etc. Perhaps students create jobs for themselves, such as the student with the neatest handwriting can provide the date and a thought for the day on the chalkboard; the student who likes public speaking can lead the class in the Pledge of Allegiance; and the student who likes to draw can sell his or her work to classmates. Everyone must pay taxes and rent and students have to buy or lease their books and other classroom materials. This is a fun way to teach fiscal responsibility and observe how money and status may go hand in hand.
- The official currency of Bangladesh is called *taka*. When Mitali Perkins wrote *Rickshaw Girl*, sixty-four *taka* was equal to one U.S. dollar. Have students investigate other types of currency and figure the current exchange rates. If a chocolate bar costs one U.S. dollar or sixty-four *taka*, how many German *marks*, Japanese *yen*, or South African *rand* does it cost?

Language Arts

- The glossary in *Rickshaw Girl* defines several objects that are commonplace for Naima and Saleem but may be unfamiliar to people living outside of their country (e.g., rickshaw, *kurta*, *alpana*, *biryani*, *roshogollah*). Ask students to find the places in the story where these words first appear. What can they learn about these items from their context in the story (without turning to the glossary for help)? Now, ask students to choose three objects that they see all the time—things that Naima and Saleem might never encounter. Have students write a short story that includes those three objects, describing them so that a Bangladeshi person of the same age might be able to understand what they are without using a dictionary.
- *Rickshaw Girl* is full of descriptive language. “...her eyebrows rising like crows’ wings” (page 8). “He was a rich-looking passenger, juicy with money” (page 19). “The rickshaw just kept hurtling through the thicket like a stampeding animal” (page 31). Discuss how this language contributes to the story and why imagery is important in storytelling. Have students find other examples of descriptive language in the book. Assign students the task of writing a short story using descriptive language to paint a picture with words.

Geography/World Cultures

- Imagine Naima or Saleem appearing on television for a five-minute news interview. Divide the class into pairs, with one person acting as Naima or Saleem and the other taking the part of an investigative television news reporter. Have each pair choose a category such as history, geography, climate, religion, music and art, the economy, etc. Students must come up with specific questions for the reporter and do research online and in the library to provide Naima or Saleem with detailed, informative answers.

