



BOOKTALK

Twelve-year-old Rahul Kapoor is starting seventh grade in a small town in Indiana, and according to Principal Jacobson, it's going to be "the best school year ever." Rahul isn't entirely sure that's the case, but his parents, his aunties and uncles, and his friend Chelsea all seem determined to not only ensure it's a good school year, but each of them, intentionally or not, are working hard to embarrass him as well. When the resident school bully, Brent, makes life nearly unbearable, Rahul becomes determined to find something he can be the best at, because if he can be the best at something, then Brent will leave him alone and everyone will see him as worthy of looking up to! So, the only question left is, what is he the best at?



Grades 3-7

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The book starts out with Rahul being told about how this—seventh grade—is going to be the best school year ever, but he is far from convinced. According to the first few chapters, what is it that Rahul is so afraid of about the new school year?
2. There are many forms of discrimination that occur throughout *The Best at It*, from sexism to racism to misogyny to homophobia; what other forms of discrimination do you know about? How do Rahul, his friends, and his family each react to these forms of discrimination? How do they push back against the discrimination and try to find ways to thrive?
3. In chapter eight, Rahul is talking with Bhai about his grandmother, and he finds out a lot about the discrimination she faced when she was younger. What does Rahul take away from this conversation? What do you take away from the conversation?
4. When Brent confronts Rahul about his crush on Justin, Rahul first denies it, then refuses to admit anything, and then later challenges Brent during a bullying incident at school. What do you think about Rahul's different reactions? How might you act in a similar situation? Consider why you would react in those ways.
5. Rahul finds a number of possible hobbies, sports, and other things during his search for something to be the best at. His Vinay Uncle spends a lot of time either laughing at Ra's endeavors or making snide remarks to his father. Why do you think Vinay Uncle is so opposed to Rahul's decisions? In your own life, do you ever have people who seem to think your hobbies are pointless or unworthy? Consider your reactions.
6. Homophobia is a fear, dislike of, or prejudice against those who aren't heterosexual. A few of the characters in *The Best at It* exhibit this way of thinking. Have you encountered people who think this way? How have you or others reacted to homophobic comments or actions?
7. At times throughout the novel, Rahul feels embarrassed by his family, and sometimes even his friends. Take a moment to find examples of this in the novel and then consider if you have ever felt embarrassed by your family or friends. Why do you think that is?



THE BEST AT IT

BY MAULIK PANCHOLY
EDUCATORS' GUIDE

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

8. Rahul exhibits symptoms of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder and general anxiety. In what ways does this book help to explain OCD and other mental illnesses to you? Consider how you can better react and respond if you come across someone who is experiencing the symptoms of OCD.
9. Take a moment and think about the makeup of your community. Do you have any events like the International Bazaar that celebrate different cultures, whether through food, entertainment, or something else? If yes, think about how these events make sure to celebrate each community. If no, consider how you and your community could work to celebrate racial and ethnic diversity.
10. Feminism, very simply put, is the idea that women are important, powerful, and should be as celebrated in society as men. How is feminism shown throughout the novel? How does Rahul's family teach him to be a better feminist?
11. Masculinity presents itself in many ways, some more positive than others. Sometimes people try to prove their masculinity by being mean to women—insulting them, telling them they can't play sports, etc. Do you notice this throughout the novel? Do you ever notice this kind of thing in your own school? How do you react? Discuss with your peers how you can work against this kind of toxic masculinity.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

R.E.S.P.E.C.T. At many points throughout the book, family members, friends, and bullies make comments that disparage girls, while they try to make boys seem better. Make a list of characters who show respect toward girls and characters who seem to view boys as better. Think about how this might happen in your own community. As a class, make a list of characters and discuss how each of them can be understood as a good influence or a negative influence on Rahul.

I have so much to share! Have students come up with up to five journal entries from the perspective of a character from the book, addressing the International Bazaar, and what food, activities, and/or other elements they would want to highlight to ensure their own background is a part of the festivities.

Best Dance. Have students come up with a theme and a venue for a school event (a dance, pep rally, or some other event) and ask them to discuss ways of making the event as inclusive as possible. In what ways would their event(s) welcome people of different genders, sexualities, racial backgrounds, abilities, classes, etc.?

Don't even think about it! Imagine you, a friend, or a classmate is the focus of bullying at your school. With a group, discuss how you would handle the situation. With your students, take the time to go over your own school's policies and procedures around bullying and make sure they're in line with what your students are bringing up.

