



Kahani

a South Asian literary magazine for children



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New Year wishes to you from everyone at Kahani! With the recent tsunami disaster in South Asia, we know it's hard to feel like celebrating. Many of you, including some of our contributors in this issue, had family members who were directly affected by the devastation. Help make '05 a better year. You can join in the relief effort by organizing a fund raiser. Go to UNICEFUSA.org and click on 'Youth Action' for some tips. Drop us a line at editor@kahani.com and let us know how you did!

'05 is going to be crazy hectic for us at *Kahani*. With this winter issue, *Kahani* becomes a bi-monthly magazine. That means we'll be coming to you every other month, so be sure to check your mailbox regularly!

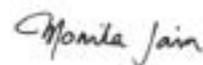
Winter blues got you down? We've dug up some awesome games from around South Asia that'll cheer you up! And if that's not enough, challenge yourself to a word find activity that celebrates winter in the Indian subcontinent.

Our Spotlight this month falls on Shazia Mirza. You know what her job is? It's to make people laugh. Yup. She's the world's first female Muslim standup comic. Make sure you check out www.kahani.com to hear a special message for you from this very funny lady! For those who prefer something a wee bit more serious, we've got three brand new short stories written and illustrated especially for *Kahani* by our amaaaazingly talented South Asian writers and artists.

Kahani is getting better because we're listening to you. That's why we added four more pages of fun, starting with "The Language Playground" by master linguist Anu Garg. With every issue, you'll get the inside scoop or kahaniyan (get it?!) behind words and languages! For those who prefer a little rhyme with their words, we've brought back nani and dadi in a delightful poem that's sure to remind you of your special grandma.

And finally, thanks to all of you who wrote in. We LOVE your e-mails and letters—the good, the bad and even the 'you can do better.' Check out page 26 and read what some of you had to say! Hey, next time, it might be your letter you read!

Enjoy!



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Cover artist

Aruna Rangarajan

Contents

Short Stories

3 How Does My Garden Grow?

By Pooja Makhijani

Illustrated by Aruna Rangarajan

12 Princess Priya

By Anjali Banerjee

Illustrated by Natasha Jain

17 My Dad Works at Night

By Vidaya Khisty Bodach

Illustrated by Arindam Mukherjee

Features

7 Winter Games

Art by Priya Verma

10 Poetry

Written and illustrated by Vikram Madan

16 The Language Playground

By Anu Garg

Departments

9 Search and Solve!

By Balaji Thirumalai

21 Book Review

By Poornima Apte

22 In the Spotlight

By Kirthana Ramiseti

24 Little Badmash

By the Badmash Crew

26 Letters to the Editor



How Does My Garden Grow?

Written by Pooja Makhijani, Illustrated by Aruna Rangarajan

Spring

“Wake up! Wake up!” Mom pulls open the pink gingham curtains in my room and yanks on my blanket. “We are planting our vegetable garden today.”

I know that Mom won’t listen to my pleas of “five more minutes” this morning. She has been looking forward to this day since we turned the soil last fall, right before the first frost. I roll out of bed and put on my favorite sandals. With a trowel in my hand, I trek out to the backyard, where Mom is already waiting for me.

It is a still, spring morning. The doors to our small, wooden shed are wide open. Inside are rakes, hoes, pots of different shapes and sizes. Outside, 24 tomato seedlings sit in neat rows. “First we’ll plant these,” Mom tells me.

“Let’s dig!” I say, as we get down on our knees. I begin to make evenly spaced holes

along the length of our garden. The soil is soft and moist in my hands. Earthworms crawl up to the surface and onto my fingers. Mom carefully places each plant in and I cover them with a handful of dirt and leaves.

By sundown, we are done. It has been a long day. I stand up and scrape the dried dirt off my knees. My back is hurting and I am worn out, but I already can’t wait to pick these vegetables when they are ripe. I know they will find their way into all of Mom’s favorite recipes: fresh tomato soup, paneer with bell peppers, and eggplant parmesan.

Summer

“We have to weed and water today,” Mom says as she braids my thick hair.

“Ow,” I say. “Don’t pull so hard.”

Mom laughs. She puts her arm around me as we walk out the back door.

All morning, we weed our garden. Some of the weeds come out easily, while others break off when I give them a tug. We yank even the tiniest weeds. Mom says it is better to get them while they are small. By lunchtime, we have dark, brown dirt under our fingernails.

Bang! Scratch! Clang! Mom runs a rake along the fence as we walk back outside after our afternoon meal. She is trying to scare away a rabbit that is rummaging under her pepper plants. Our own Peter Rabbit visits almost every day and Mom tries her best to scare him away. Earlier in the summer, he would run

to the other side of the yard into his burrow, but now he just looks up toward her, and then carries on foraging for his snack.

“Here, take this,” she says, pulling the red and green dupatta off her neck. “Scare him away, before he takes something!”

I pull the long scarf from her hands and twirl and whirl it above my head. I run between the rows of broccoli and summer squash, and chase him away, but not before he plucks the biggest, greenest pepper.

Around dusk, after the hot summer sun dips behind the trees, we water our growing plants. I hold the snaking, green hose with both my hands and give our thirsty garden a drenching shower. My feet sink into the mud.

When I become tired, Mom takes it from me, and sprinkles the lawn and washes down the side of the house. She even tries to spray me, but I am too quick for her.



Fall

I kick off my sandals and collapse onto the lawn. The grass tickles the bottoms of my bare feet.

We are sweating and exhausted. We have just filled four brown paper grocery bags full of summer squash and I know Mom will give the biggest ones, which are longer than my arm, to my aunts, my teachers, and our neighbors. Beside the bags, a white, plastic laundry basket is overflowing with tomatoes.

“Try one,” Mom says as she reaches in and picks out the two biggest ones.

I roll the yellow-red tomato around in my hands and brush away a light layer of sand that covers it. I take a huge bite.

It bursts in my mouth, sending juice down my chin and seeds onto my lap. It is sweet and tangy.



In a few weeks, when the weather outside turns crisp, Mom and I will sit in our steamy kitchen, hunched over deep pots, watching some of these

tomatoes boil and bubble. Mom will then pour the cooled concoction into ice cube trays and I will transfer the frozen blocks into plastic bags and put them into the downstairs freezer. Mom will use them day after day in spaghetti sauce or salsa or dum aloo and we will savor the taste of summer in every bite.

But for now, Mom and I enjoy this Indian summer evening. We watch flocks of birds fly in a “V” overhead, heading south for the winter. We see the leaves of the strongest oak tree in our yard begin to turn orange. And we continue to harvest our dark purple eggplants and lush heads of broccoli.

Winter

I rest my head against the window sill. It snowed last night and a dusting, as fine as powdered sugar, covers the gray tree branches, Mom’s terra cotta pots, and the wire trellises that we use to support the tomato plants.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Mom says as she hands me a cup of warm milk.

“It’s so silent,” I say.

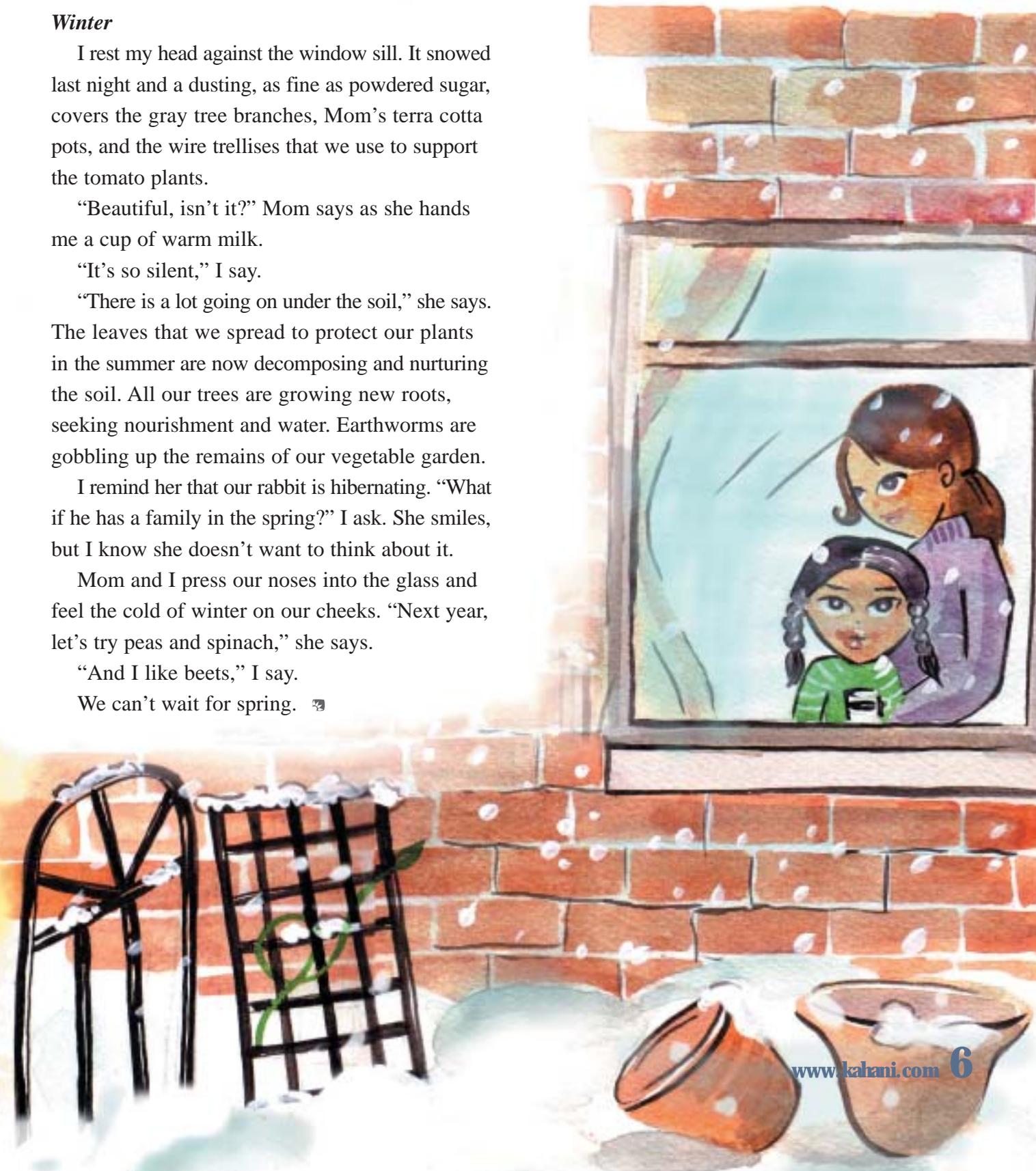
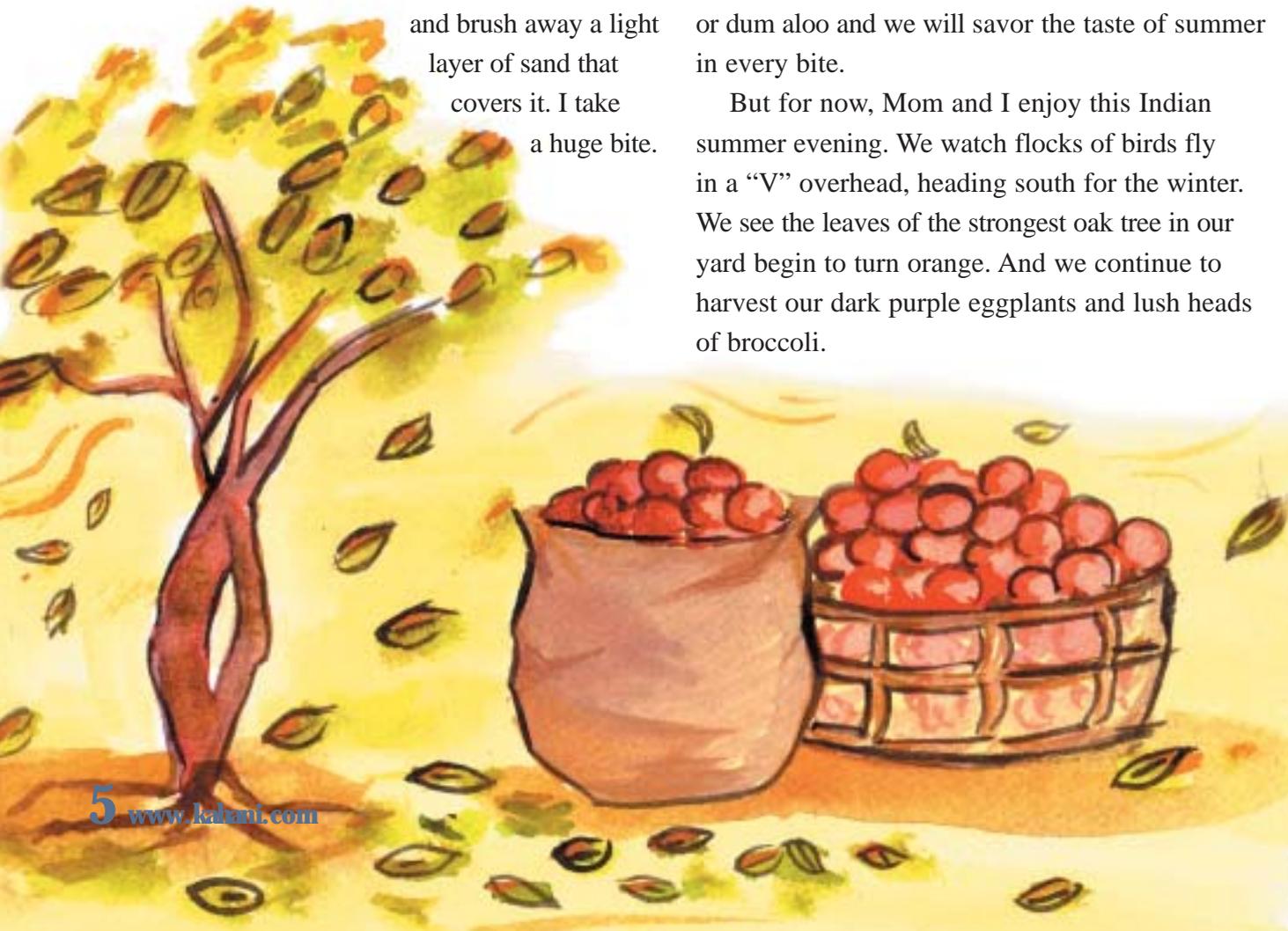
“There is a lot going on under the soil,” she says. The leaves that we spread to protect our plants in the summer are now decomposing and nurturing the soil. All our trees are growing new roots, seeking nourishment and water. Earthworms are gobbling up the remains of our vegetable garden.

I remind her that our rabbit is hibernating. “What if he has a family in the spring?” I ask. She smiles, but I know she doesn’t want to think about it.

Mom and I press our noses into the glass and feel the cold of winter on our cheeks. “Next year, let’s try peas and spinach,” she says.

“And I like beets,” I say.

We can’t wait for spring. ❄️



Winter Games

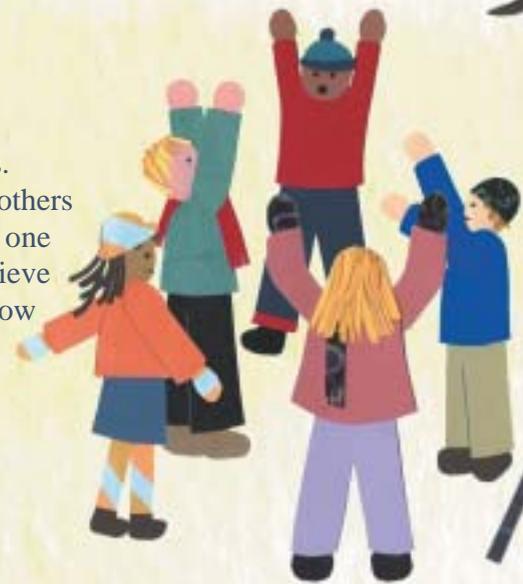
Art by Priya Verma

In Japan, parents always say *kodomo wa kaze no ko*—children belong to the winter wind and never feel cold! So, in that spirit, we present games from South Asia that you can play outside. For those who prefer to sit by a warm fire, we've got some board games on the next page. Be sure to download the game grids from www.kahani.com. And hey, did you notice this nifty artwork? The children, park and grids are all made up of pieces of colorful paper! Let the games begin!



Gultara—Bangladesh

You'll need one ball and at least five players. One person throws the ball into the air. The others must catch it before it hits the ground. If no one does, then the first player has to quickly retrieve the ball and tag someone else by hand or throw the ball at him. The tagged player becomes the new thrower!



Dhandi Biu—Nepal

You'll need a stick that's about two feet long and a seed (like a peach pit). Two or more people can play this game. Put the seed on the ground. The first player must hit the seed with the stick and make it flip into the air. She must hit it twice more while it's in the air. On the third hit, she has to knock it as far away as possible! Whoever hits the seed the furthest wins the game. This is a tough one!



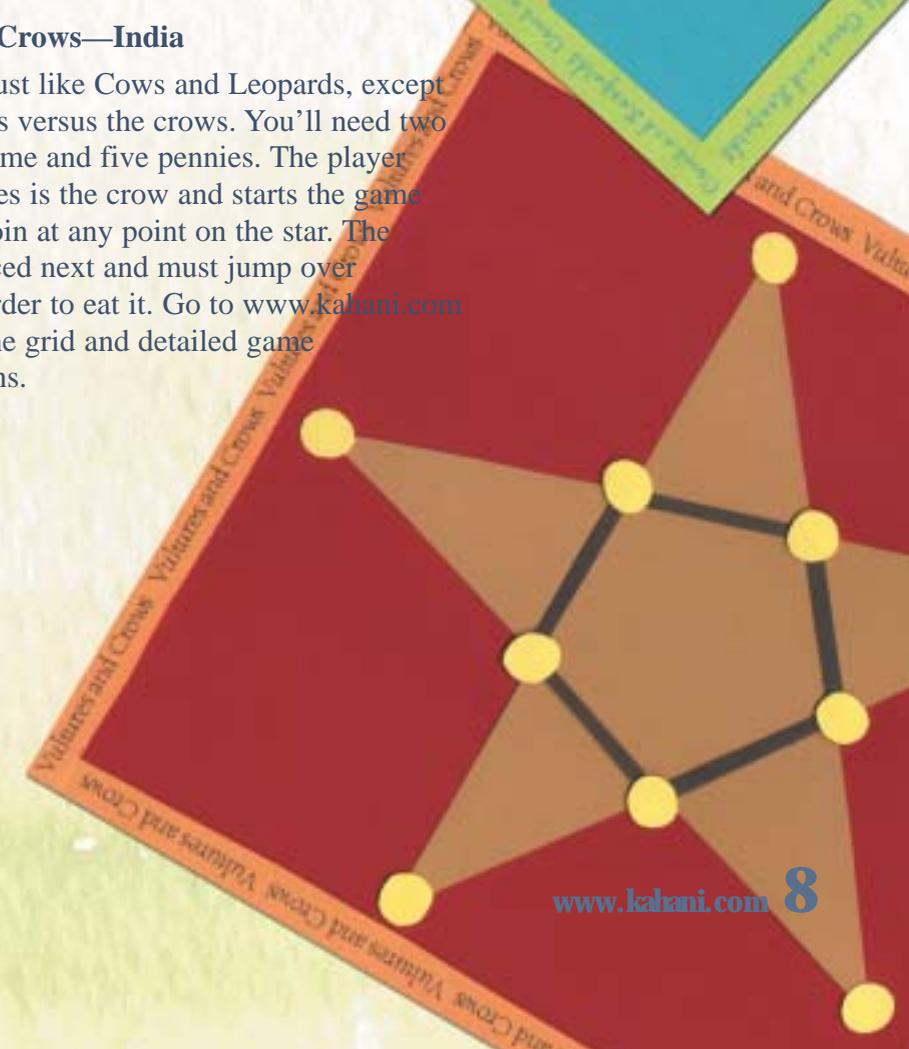
Cows and Leopards—Sri Lanka

Many countries have different versions of this game. For this Sri Lankan one, you'll need two players, two dimes and 24 pennies. The leopards (dimes) must try to eat as many cows (pennies) as possible. The cows, meanwhile, have to corner the leopards so that they cannot hunt anymore. You can place your coins at any point where two or more lines meet and you can move in any direction to the next point. Go to www.kahani.com for the game grid and detailed game instructions.



Vultures and Crows—India

This game is just like Cows and Leopards, except it's the vultures versus the crows. You'll need two players, one dime and five pennies. The player with the pennies is the crow and starts the game by putting a coin at any point on the star. The vulture is placed next and must jump over a crow in order to eat it. Go to www.kahani.com for the game grid and detailed game instructions.



Winter in South Asia

Created by **Balaji Thirumalai**

From Bangladesh to Sri Lanka, winter is a time for much hustle and bustle. See if you can figure out the answers to the following clues. Many of you told us the puzzle in our last issue was waaaay too difficult, so we've tried to mix it up a bit! Let us know how we did. The answers are on www.kahani.com. We've even included Web site links in case you want to research the clues some more!



1. Considered the national flower of Nepal, this flower is called lali gurans in Nepali and blooms in late winter. Name this flower.
2. Which very wet, very colorful Indian festival marks the end of winter and the beginning of spring?
3. Despite its odd name 'the wettest place on earth,' this east Indian city dries up during the winter months. Name this city.
4. Pakistan has a national holiday called Quaid-E-Azam on December 25th to celebrate whose birthday?

5. How many athletes did India send to the 2002 Salt Lake City Winter Olympics?
6. Which country celebrates three national holidays in winter—Victory Day on December 16, Martyr's Day on February 21, and Independence Day on March 26?
7. Every February, the population of this small historic town in the Pakistani province of Baluchistan swells as hundreds of tribesmen gather with their animals to celebrate farming and agriculture. Name this town.
8. Now a popular winter garment, this shawl derives its name from the Persian word for the wool that is sheered from Tibetan goats. Name this shawl.
9. Poland's Krzysztof Wielick made history on February 17, 1980 when he became the first person ever to make a successful winter ascent of what mountain?
10. Every winter in late January, the south Indian town of Thiruvaiyaru hosts a Carnatic music festival to honor which music legend? A similar festival is held in Cleveland, Ohio, every year as well.
11. The Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir has two capital cities. The 'summer capital' is Srinagar. Which city is considered the 'winter capital'?
12. Which 'high flying' Pakistani festival marks the end of winter and ushers in spring?
13. If you wished someone "Happy Losar" on New Year's Day, you would be in what country?

Dadi Jan, Hazuramma, Paati and Ba are some of the many, many different names for grandmother. But one thing they've all got in common is that warm, cozy grandma hug. There's nothing else like it! So what do you call your grandmother?

Nani's Cooking

Written and illustrated by **Vikram Makin**

- My nose says I should hurry
- My nose says I should scurry
- My nose says I should worry
- My Nani's cooking curry

- My Mama says it's yummy
- It tickles up my tummy
- And when my nose gets runny
- My Nani thinks it's funny

- This food has too much spice!
- Can I please eat some ice?

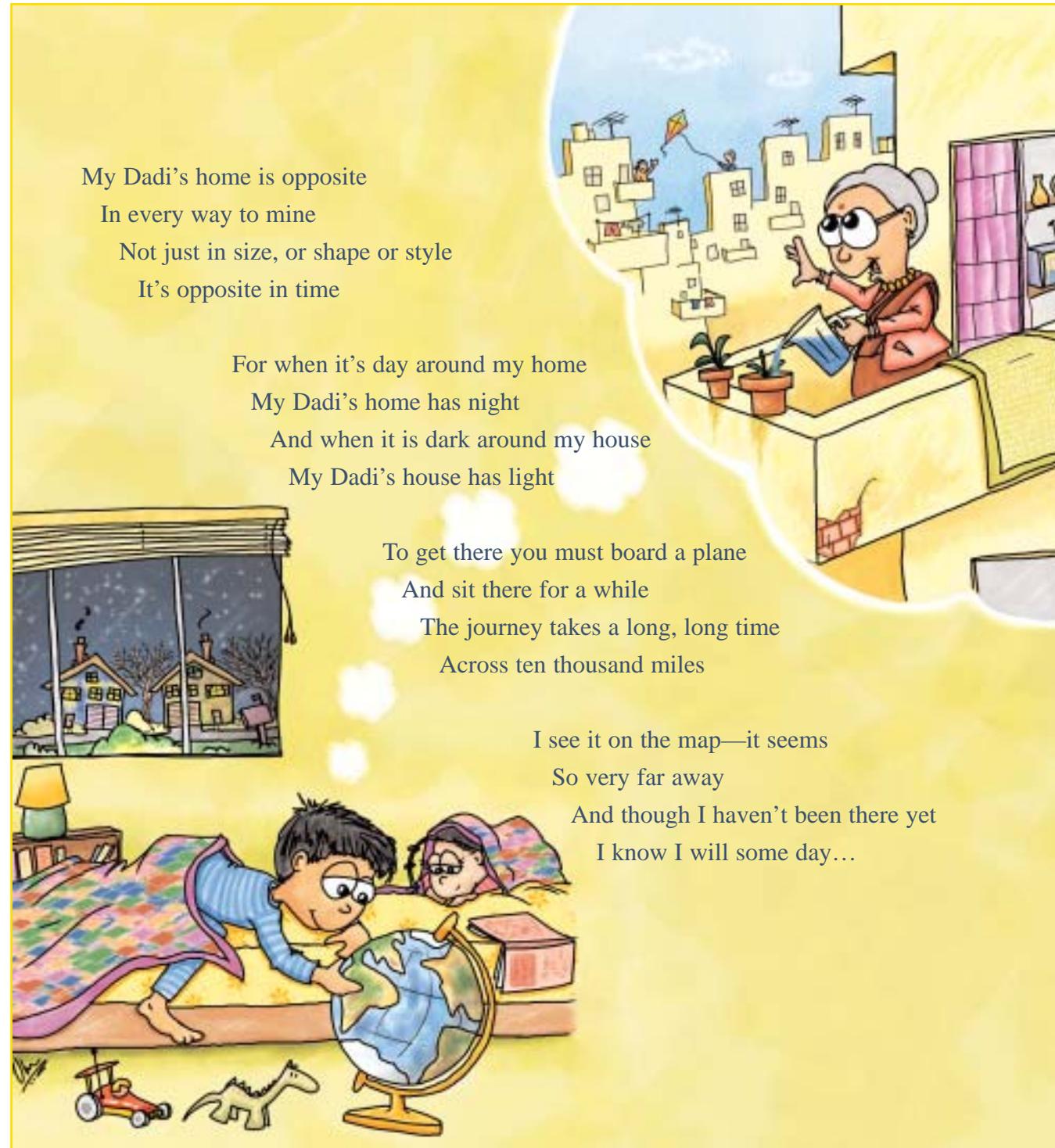
- What else is Nani cooking?
- My head says don't go looking
- My eyes see hot food cooling
- Uh-oh! My mouth is drooling!

- I sniff... I lick... I nibble...
- I chew, I **chomp**, I **GOBBLE**
- I'm stuffing up my tummy
- Nani, this food is yummy!



Opposite in Time

Written and illustrated by Vikram Madan



My Dadi's home is opposite
In every way to mine
Not just in size, or shape or style
It's opposite in time

For when it's day around my home
My Dadi's home has night
And when it is dark around my house
My Dadi's house has light

To get there you must board a plane
And sit there for a while
The journey takes a long, long time
Across ten thousand miles

I see it on the map—it seems
So very far away
And though I haven't been there yet
I know I will some day...

Princess Priya

Written by Anjali Banerjee, Illustrated by Natasha Jain

Priya burrowed into her sleeping bag. She never should've come to Amy's birthday sleepover. The other two girls chatted about what time they were born, in what hospital, on what day. Priya couldn't answer those questions.



Amy held the flashlight beam under her chin, lighting up peach-pink cheeks. "I was born on a sailboat," she said gleefully. "In a storm. Daddy docked in Seattle and I popped out at 3:16 a.m."

"Whoa, no way. A boat?" Liz sat up in bed. Her frizzy red hair stuck out around her face.

"I was born in New York City on Thanksgiving, right after dinner. My mom ate too much turkey." The girls fell into gales of laughter.

Priya shut her eyes and pretended to snore. Maybe if they thought she was asleep, they wouldn't bother her.

Amy nudged her. "What about you, Priya? When were you born? Where?"

Priya snored louder.

"We know you're faking it," Liz said.

"Come on."

"Yeah, tell us," Amy said. "Your mom and dad are blond-haired, and so is your little brother. Why are you so dark? You're adopted, right?"

Priya stopped snoring, opened her eyes and sat up. "When did you figure that out, Einstein?"

Amy stuck out her bottom lip.

"How come you have an Indian name and your brother doesn't?" Liz asked. "Priya and Rory Svendsen."

Priya shrugged. She didn't want to say, Mom wants me to remember where I came from. Priya couldn't remember India. Her birthday was a gaping hole that would never fill. A lump of sadness rose in her throat.

Amy shone the flashlight beam in Priya's face. "Were you born in a hospital?"

Priya wished she knew. What to say? "I was born in a palace. I was a princess."

"Whoa," the girls replied in unison.

"See? I have the royal birthmark." Priya lifted her bangs to show the faint, round birthmark on her forehead. "My real mother, Queen Kamala, wrapped me in silk and cradled me in a golden crib."

"No way." Amy dropped the flashlight, picked it up again.

Priya nodded soberly. "While my parents were off in the jungle, they were killed by a gang of thieves."

"Wow," Liz said. The girls stared wide-eyed at Priya.

"My uncle put me up for adoption, and the rest is history."

"You are so lucky," Liz said. "A princess." Amy murmured in agreement.

Priya smiled, but her stomach turned inside out. She didn't feel so hot about lying. Well, maybe she had been a princess. You never knew.

Saturday morning Amy's mom didn't have to work, so she made blueberry pancakes for breakfast. The girls laughed and talked, snorting milk out their noses and drowning their pancakes in lakes of maple syrup. Priya forgot about the night before.

After Liz's mom came to pick her up, Priya's mom arrived in the Subaru. Priya's golden retriever, Raju, burst out and nearly knocked Priya over. He jumped up and licked her face.

"Raju, stop!" She wrapped her arms around his neck. She'd been away only one night, but she'd missed him.

"Raju," Mom said, getting out.

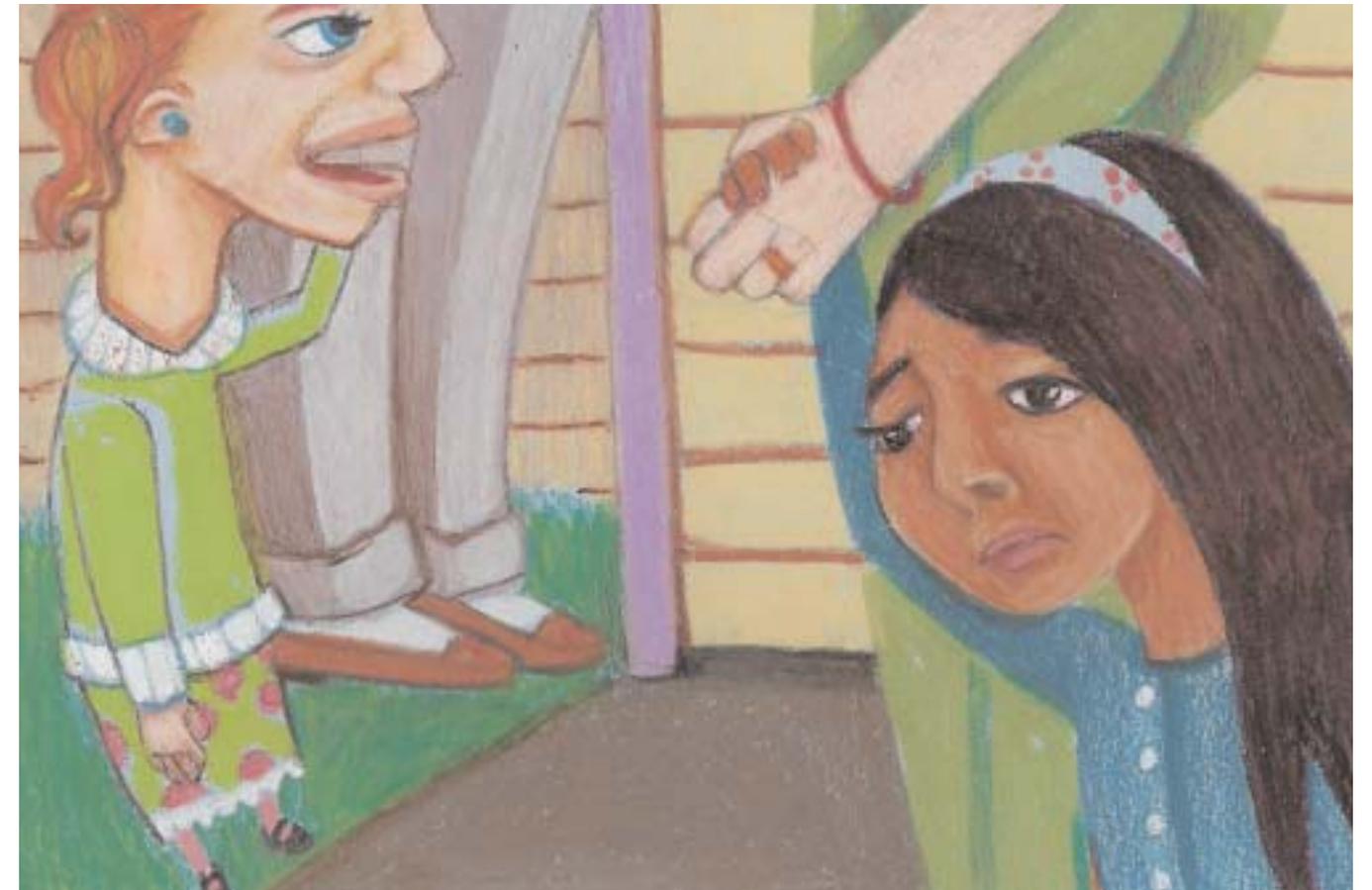
"Back seat. Now." Raju crept back into the car. Mom rushed over and hugged Priya as if they'd been separated a year.

"You smell like cinnamon," Priya said. Mom always smelled good.

"Rory's making cookies. I think he dumped a thousand cinnamon sticks into the dough." Mom laughed—an easy sound that always warmed Priya's heart. "I missed you. Did you have fun?"

"Yeah - why is Rory making cookies?"

Mom winked. "After your dance lesson, we're going camping. Surprise."



Priya leaped for joy. They'd make s'mores, tell ghost stories and run through the woods with Raju.

"You take dance lessons?" Amy asked with envy in her voice.

"Bharat natyam," Mom said. "It's a traditional Indian dance."

Priya liked bharat natyam. She was good at it, and many of the other students had been born in India.

"I wish I could take dance lessons," Amy said. "Priya gets to take bharat natyam 'cause she's really a princess."

Priya froze, the heat rising in her cheeks.

"What?" Mom said.

"She's a princess, born to Queen Kamala in a palace," Amy said. "She told us."

Priya's face got hotter.

"Is that so?" Mom's right eyebrow rose.

Mrs. Watson looked shocked.

"Her real parents were killed, so her uncle sent her to America for adoption." Amy blinked innocently.

Silence.

Priya's heart sank. She thought of how much she loved her family, how much fun they had. She enjoyed helping Rory with his homework. She and Dad took a Bengali language class together. Mom read to her before bed every night.

The Language Playground

Written by Anu Garg

On warm evenings, Dad set up the tent in the backyard, and Priya and Rory pretend-camped. And she loved Raju more than life. Tears came to her eyes.

“It’s not true,” she said. “I made it all up. I wasn’t really born in a palace. I was born in Kolkata, but that’s all I know. I don’t know what time I was born. I don’t know what day, and I don’t know exactly where.”

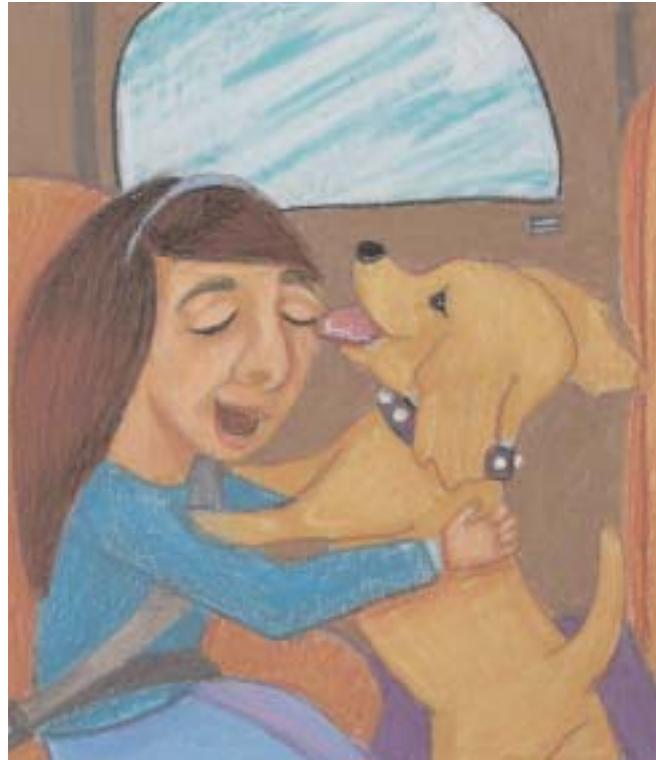
Mom took her hand. “Priya—”
“I made up being a princess because the girls were talking about birthdays. I wanted to be special—”

“You are special. Don’t you know that?”
“I know.” Priya burst into tears.
“Thanks for having Priya over,” Mom said quickly. Amy and her mom stood with their mouths open.

On the way home, Priya sat next to Raju in the backseat. “I’m sorry, Mom. I don’t know what came over me.”

“It’s okay. I know life is hard sometimes.”
“But I’m really happy most of the time. When the girls start to talk—I get a little sad.”
“I know. We can talk whenever you want.”

Raju nuzzled Priya’s face and licked the tears from her cheeks, making her laugh. “I don’t really want to be a princess, Mom.”
“Shush,” Mom said, and smiled. “Don’t you know? You will always be my princess.”



Have you ever wondered where words come from? Who makes them up? Why is that white shiny round thing we see in the sky every night called moon and not “foofum”? Who decided the color red is spelled r-e-d and not r-i-d? And just how many words are there in this world? What is the longest word? What is the shortest?



Welcome to the Language Playground! Here we’ll play with words and have fun with language. We’ll explore where words come from and discover their stories.

For starters, can you see a tooth in a dandelion flower? Huh?! That’s how we get the word dandelion! It came to English from the French language. In French, *dent-de-lion* means ‘tooth of a lion’—because its leaves look like the sharp teeth of a fearsome lion!

Words travel from one language to another. When people who speak different languages meet, they learn words from each other. When

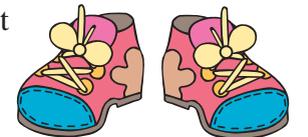
people who spoke English met people who spoke Hindi, they exchanged many words. And when words migrate to another language, their meaning often changes.

When you rinse and wash your hair with shampoo, you’re using a word that came from Hindi: *chumpee*. In Hindi, *chumpee* means massage. But when it was adopted into English as shampoo, the word changed to mean washing your hair or the liquid soap you use to wash your hair.



Now a question: what do a bicycle and a biscuit have in common? Both begin with the letters bi. Bi means two. So a bicycle has two wheels. And a biscuit is twice baked (or used to be).

Here are a few words to describe things you use every day. The little tags at the ends of your shoelaces are called aglets. That’s because in French *aiguille* means needle and *aiguillette* is a little needle. So, an aglet makes a shoelace work like a needle that you can thread through the holes in your shoes. Those holes are called eyelets.



And finally, a chad is the little circle that’s cut out when you punch a hole in a sheet of paper. Why is it called a chad? Nobody knows. Sometimes, the origin of a word is a mystery that’s never been solved.

Have a question about words or languages? Write to wordsmith@kahani.com and we’ll try to answer it here.

Did you know? International, or intercountry, adoption in the United States picked up in the 1950s shortly after the Korean War. Statistics show that in 1993, about 7,400 children made America their new home. That number rose to nearly 22,000 children in 2003. That’s an increase of almost 300%.

India is the dominant country for South Asian adoptions. In 1993, according to the U.S. State Department, 331 children were adopted from India. Ten years later, that number rose to 472 children. Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka have had much fewer adoptions over that same time.

To keep in touch with their adopted children’s cultural heritage, many families attend ‘heritage camps.’ These are overnight retreats with games and educational activities that teach the

families about their children’s cultural background. “It’s the one time in the year the children can see others who look just like themselves,” says Pam Sweetser of the Colorado Heritage Camps. “Nobody asks any questions.” Ms. Sweetser started CHC when she adopted her son Sam from India when he was three. Now 12 years later, the camp hosts nearly 350 people, including families with children from Nepal, every year. “We do Indian cooking, dancing and even yoga,” says Ms. Sweetser, “but everyone’s favorite activity is cricket!”

‘Birthland’ or ‘homeland’ tours are another way for families to reconnect. They spend days touring the sights, but the real highlight is a visit to the children’s birth places and, if possible, even the orphanages.

My Dad Works at Night

Written by Vidya Khisty Bodach, Illustrated by Arindam Mukherjee



On the night before I turn nine, Dad wakes me up. “Anjali, Anjali,” he whispers. I rub the sleep from my eyes. “Are you ready to go to work?”

I jump out of bed. Tonight, I get my first flying lesson! The night air is cool. I put my hand in Dad’s warm hand. He drives us to the airport. That’s where he works.

The airport is busy even though it’s midnight. One man sweeps the floor. A few people wait in line at the counter with their suitcases. Children sleep on chairs joined together. There is even a man getting his shoes shined.

Dad wears his badge and pins another on me. “You are my guest,” he says. I feel important. We walk to another building and I see airplanes go up into the dark night sky. Dad has to push buttons at the door to get inside. We walk through narrow hallways until we reach an enormous machine.

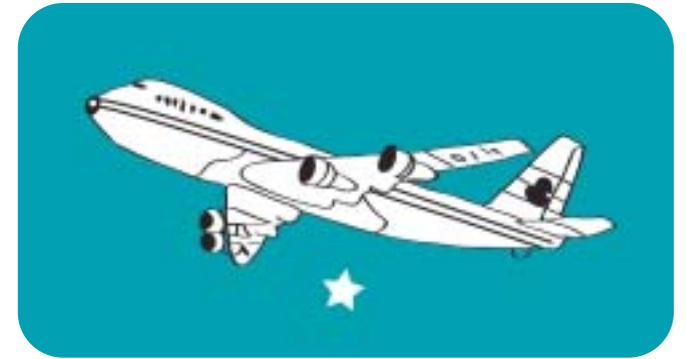
“Is that the giant spider you work in?” I ask. Dad laughs. “That’s a simulator. During the day, pilots learn to fly inside it. The simulator never leaves the ground, but pilots feel as though they are flying.”

“Oh, that’s why you always work at night.” I don’t know why I never figured this out before. I climb in. “It’s exactly like the cockpit when we took our trip to India!” I say. Buttons, dials, levers shine.

“Where do you want to go?” asks Dad. He’s outside the cockpit fiddling with the computers. “Seattle,” I say. I’ve got cousins there. It’ll be fun. Dad joins me. He sits in the pilot’s seat. I am the co-pilot. We buckle up. Dad takes off! We go up and up.

When I look out the window everything becomes smaller and smaller. The houses, trees and cars look like my toys. I see beaches and

a coastline. I even recognize downtown Houston. Then we are in the clouds.



“When do I get to fly?” I ask. After all, I am supposed to be getting my first flying lesson. “How about now?” Dad asks. I’ve never been so ready. “Most planes fly themselves now. We plot the course and the computers do all the nitty-gritty work. But I’ll switch off the autopilot. She’s all yours.”

I listen carefully to Dad while I fly. I use the control wheel to make wide turns. I push the stick and go lower, beneath the clouds, to see highways crisscrossing the fields. We almost nosedive! But I pull the stick up, which brings the nose up, and fly steadily.

“Good work, Anjali,” says Dad.

“How come you’re not a pilot?” I ask.

“Pilots must have very good vision,” says Dad, pushing up his thick glasses back on his nose. “I do the next best thing—I pretend to fly an airplane. Computers control the simulator. I program different situations on the computers.”

“What kinds of situations?”

“Oh, like flying with only one engine. Another

situation is stormy weather. The pilot needs to learn how to control the plane in strong wind and rain. I can program that kind of weather into the simulator and the pilot can practice flying through it and landing safely.” He smiles. “Most pilots don’t even get to fly a real Boeing 747 until they get their first job. They learn everything in flight school, then they spend a lot of hours practicing in the simulator. When they fly a real airplane, they’re prepared.”

I believe him. My first flight feels real to me. “Do you get to fly just for fun?” I ask.

“I fly every time I have to test my programs. That’s always the best part,” says Dad.

“It’s raining,” I say.

“That’s Seattle,” says Dad. “Turn on the wipers.”

Everything gets bigger and bigger. I see the mountains and the Space Needle. Dad lines

up the nose with the runway lights. I feel the wheels on the ground as we zoom down the runway. Slowly, slowly, we come to a stop. There’s even a man waving a flag.

“This is the best birthday ever!” I give Dad a bear hug.

When we climb out of the simulator, we’re back in Houston. We walk through the narrow hallways to eat mint and butter sandwiches in Dad’s office. I munch on an apple. We go back to the simulator and Dad works on the computers while I take a nap in the pilot’s seat.

Later, we wave goodbye to all the people working at night.

The golden sun comes up on our way home. As the rest of the world awakens to a new day, Dad and I cuddle up to sleep. And I dream of flying an airplane. 🛩️



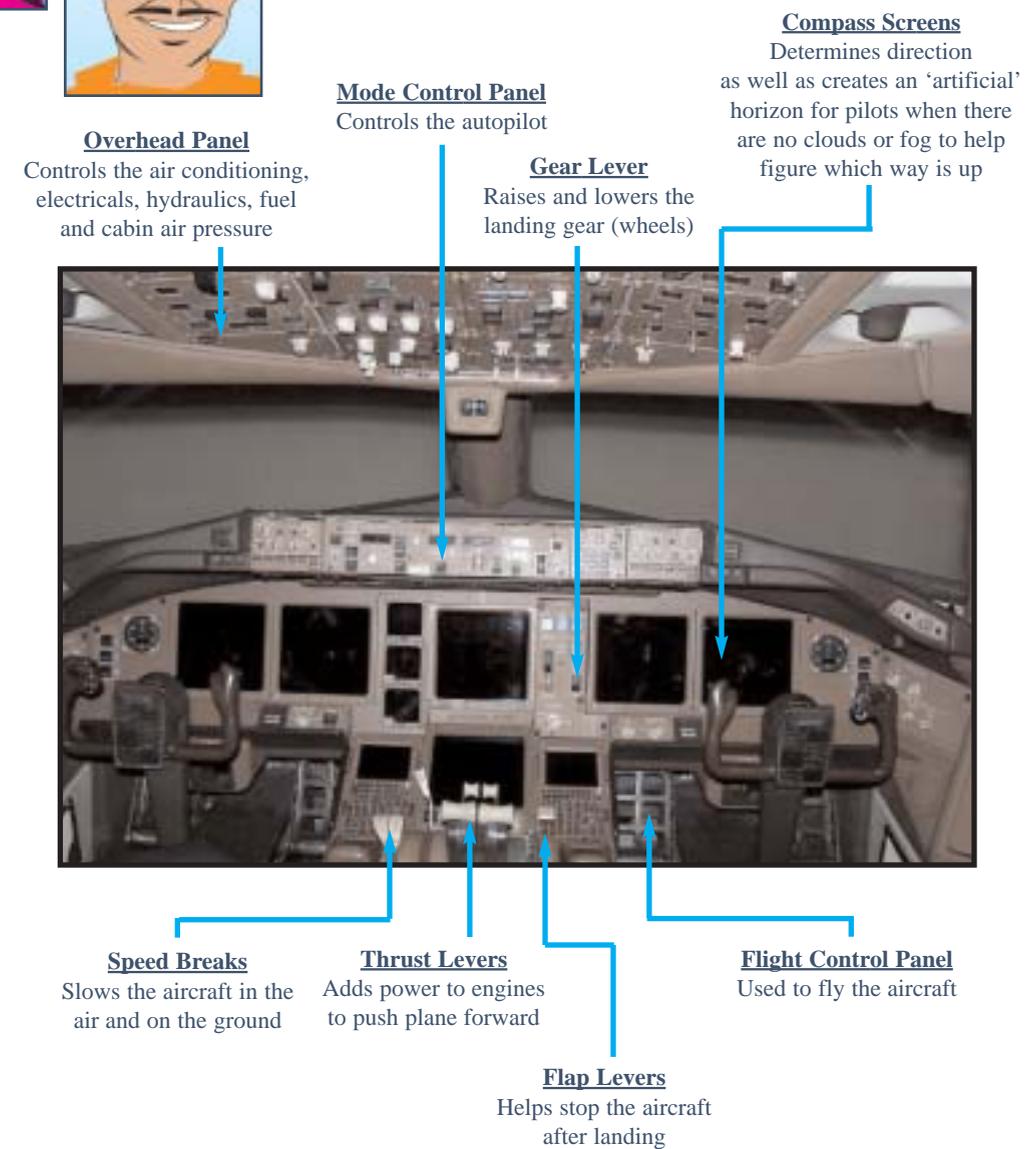
Visual Dictionary



“Hey guys, ever wondered what all those flashing buttons and gazillions of levers do?”



“Here's a quick tour of the pilot's cockpit in a Boeing 747.”



Shazia Mirza Standup Comic

Written by Kirthana Ramiseti

The lights dim, and the audience quiets down. A woman in a dark shirt and gray pants walks out on stage. “Hi, my name is Shazia,” she says into the microphone. “I can’t stay very long because my dad gave me a ride here; he thinks this is a library.” The audience laughs, and Shazia smiles.

Shazia Mirza is a standup comedian. That means her job is to stand up on stage and make people laugh by telling funny stories and jokes about events in her life or situations she has observed.

During a recent performance at a New York performing arts center, Shazia had the audience chuckling at her childhood stories of growing up in England.

“My mum’s been trying to marry me off since I was 18 ... months old,” Shazia jokes. She was too young to get married, but Shazia knew from an early age that she wanted to entertain people.

Born and raised in Birmingham, England, she grew up in a traditional Muslim family. When she was seven, she starred in her first school play as Mary Magdalene in a Christmas nativity play. It was Shazia’s first time in the spotlight. “I enjoyed the attention [on stage] so much that my teachers had to call my name to exit!” she says, grinning as she relives this memory.

But Shazia, 28, did not start performing comedy until she was in her early twenties. She studied biochemistry in college, and then went on to teach physics at a high school in London’s East End. The experience was tough, because the students were mostly difficult teenagers whom she had to work hard to win over and gain their respect. In a way teaching prepared Shazia for being in front of people and holding their attention.

One night, she accompanied her friends to an “open-mike night” at a local Birmingham restaurant. That’s when anybody can try out a comedy routine and tell stories and jokes in front of an audience even though they have little or no experience. When Shazia tried it, she realized she had found her “accidental calling.”

“I enjoyed the challenge of trying to make them laugh,” she says, “and to also have the freedom to say whatever I wanted.” From that point on, she attended classes in comedy and acting. Shazia also started performing at clubs in the evenings. Soon enough, her popularity began to rise.

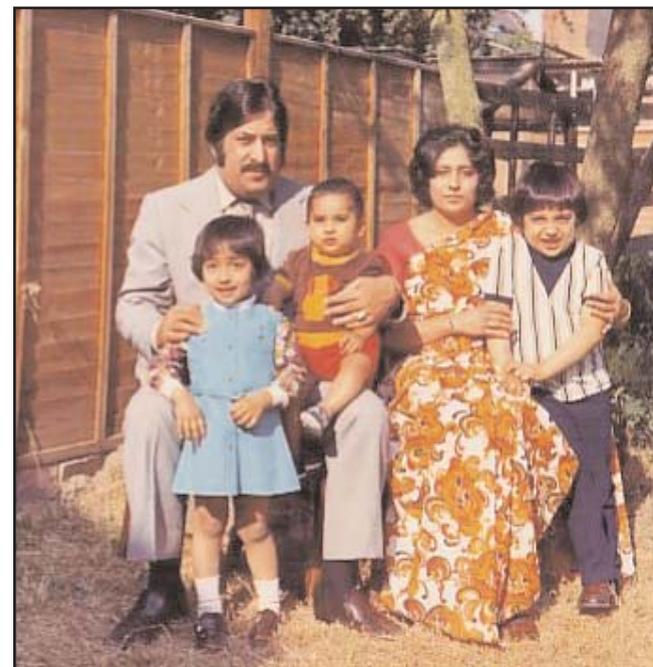
But while Shazia was enjoying her public fame, she kept her new job a secret from her parents. “My brothers and sister knew, and one night



Copyright Henry Lundholm



Shazia as a 1-year-old baby



Shazia, 3, with her parents and siblings

my brother let it slip that he was going to see me perform. They all ended up coming to the show.” It took some time for her parents to adjust to her new career, but Shazia finally won their approval.

“Although they’d like to see me settled down and married, they’re proud of me. My mom loved it when she saw me perform [in front of an audience] for the first time, but she was worried that I had to make them all laugh!”

Her parents are not her only fans. Shazia has received numerous awards and in 2002 was named Asian Woman of the Year by British Prime Minister Tony Blair. Shazia has also played sold-out shows in both Europe and America; in fact, being a standup comic has allowed Shazia to travel the world, which is what she considers to be one of the greatest advantages of her job. She has also performed in Egypt, Denmark, Germany, Sweden and Scotland.

Shazia also dreams of becoming a Hollywood star, and is currently working on creating a sitcom based on her home life when she was growing up.

Will she ever perform in Pakistan?

“Maybe. I would love to do a few shows there one day.”



Listen to a very special message from Shazia to you on www.kahani.com.

For now, Shazia continues to keep a journal in which she takes notes for her comedy routine. It’s an old habit. Shazia has kept a diary since she was eleven years old, writing poetry and stories about things that happened in her own life with her family. “I took things that happened to me,” she says, “and made them into stories.” Her childhood writing habit now helps her in her career.

Today, Shazia is the world’s first female Muslim standup comedian. She takes special pride in her status because of the hard work



Copyright Paresih Gandhi

involved to be taken seriously by others in her community and in the comedy world. “It’s always a battle, all the time,” she says. “But it’s worth it.”

“You can be anything you want to be even if you’re South Asian, as long as you work hard and believe in yourself.” Shazia Mirza is definitely proof of her own advice. ☑

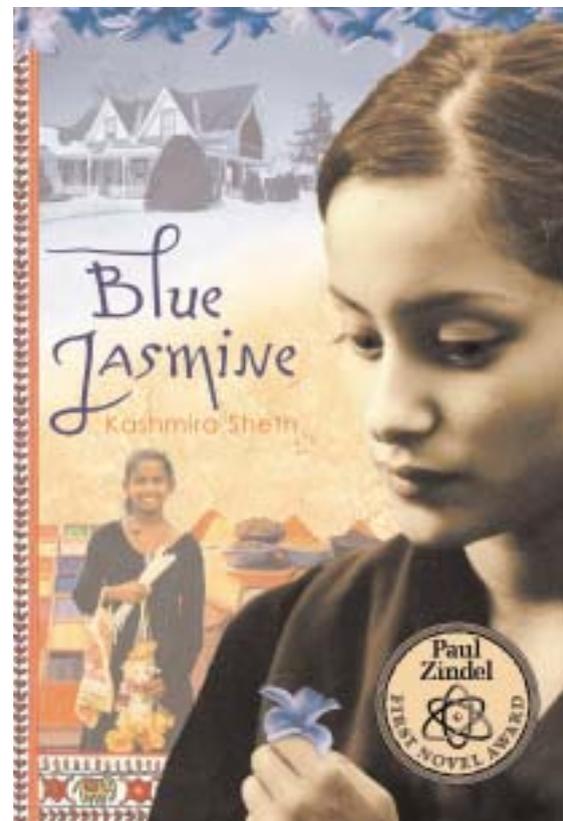
Blue Jasmine

by Kashmiri Sheth

Reviewed by Poornima Apte

If you have ever wondered what it is like to immigrate to a new country and culture, you will love *Blue Jasmine* (Hyperion, 2004).

Just before she turns 13, Seema Trivedi makes the most important journey of her life—she is uprooted from her life in Gujarat, India, and moves to Iowa with her parents and her younger sister, Mela. Having spent most of her childhood with an extended family that included her grandparents, aunts and uncles, Seema is understandably upset. “Pappa, Mommy, Mela, and I, broke off from our family the way a lump of ice breaks off from a whole snow cone,” she says. When Seema moves, she also leaves behind Mukta, a poor friend who lives in a one-room hut close to the city market.



In Iowa City, Iowa, Seema finds life too still and quiet at first, and her broken accented English makes her shy to speak up in class. Despite her initial struggles, she makes friends and does well in school until a new girl, Carrie, moves in. Carrie makes life miserable for Seema by teasing her endlessly about her mannerisms, her “smelly” Indian food, and her accent. Once Seema picks up dandelions and wears them in her hair only to have Carrie tease her about it. Later, Seema learns from a close family friend that dandelions are considered weeds in America, and that nobody wears flowers in one’s hair here.

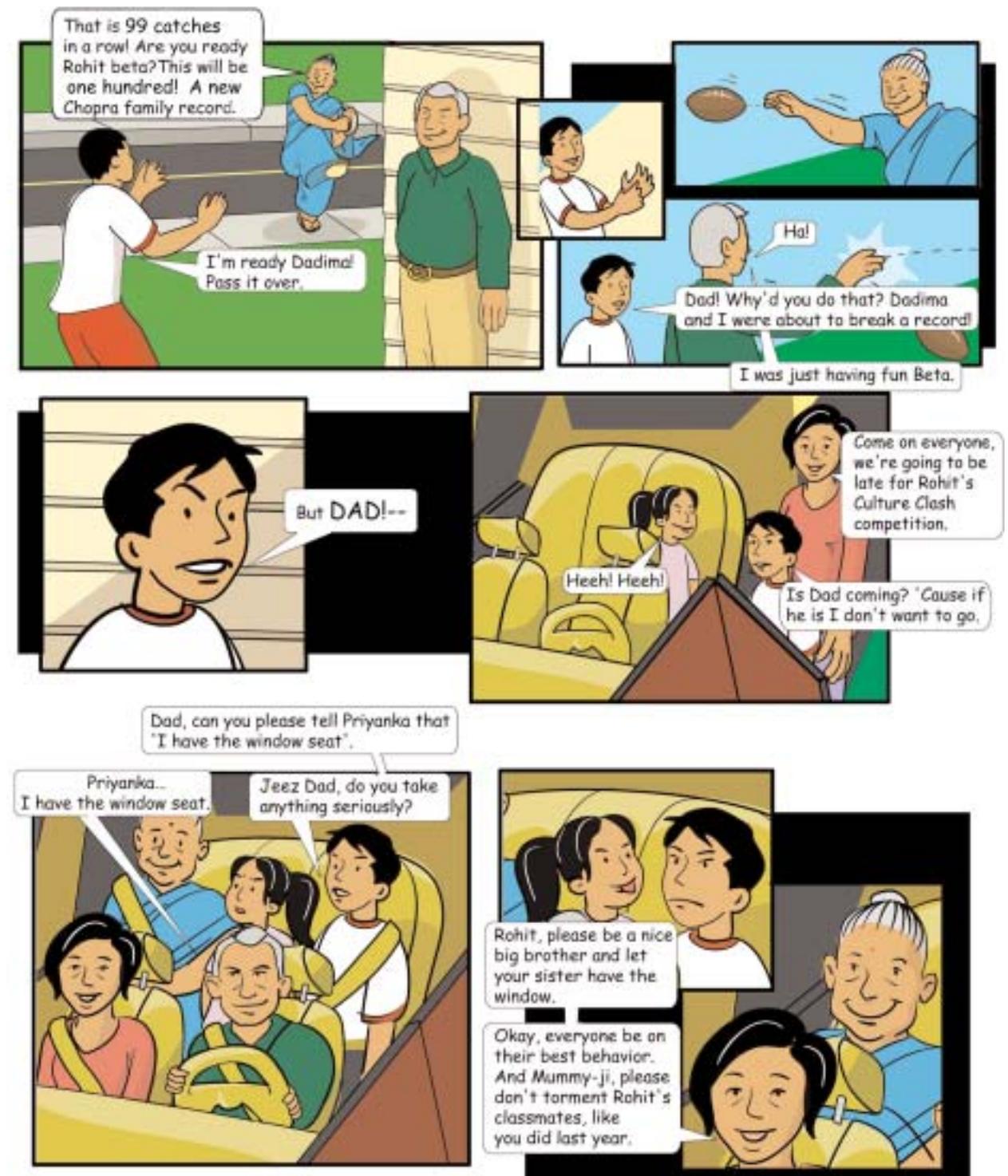
Carrie’s mean attitude toward Seema is soon tempered and through Carrie, Seema realizes that she herself had been mean to Mukta back home, calling her “stinky” on more than one occasion. Such insights in the book bring out the humanity of people beautifully.

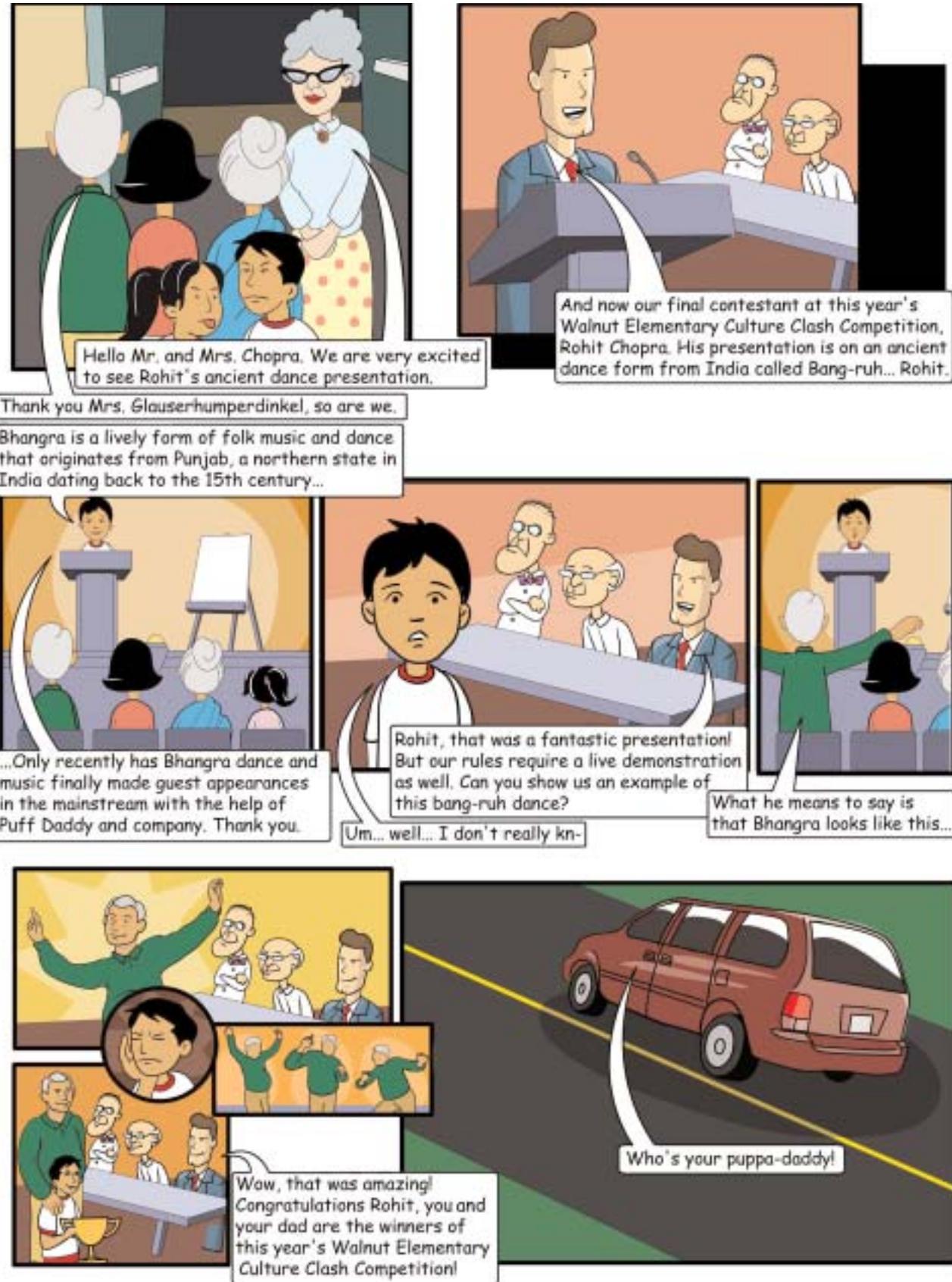
Blue Jasmine is the debut novel from author Kashmiri Sheth who based it on her own experiences when she moved alone from India to Iowa as a teenager. The book won the Paul Zindel First Novel Award for 2004. The award is given every year to books that portray the cultural and ethnic diversity of the United States.

Toward the end of the story, when Seema returns to India for a brief visit, she comes to understand that she has changed and so has the rest of her family. Equally important, she realizes that it is okay to love two sets of people on two continents.

“Like an airplane attached to two shimmering wings, I was attached to two precious homes,” Seema says at the end of the book. After reading *Blue Jasmine* you will understand the beauty of that simple statement. ☺

Little BADMASH™ by the badmash crew





Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,
I wanted to let you know that my 5-year-old twins loved the "Little Badmash" cartoon. They could see themselves in it as it depicts things that are part of their daily lives. Keep up the good work, it is much appreciated!
Vandana Y., MA

Dear Editor,
Please include some stories, etc, about adopted children!
Candace P., CO

Editor: Hope you enjoy reading "Princess Priya." Let us know what you think!

Dear Editor,
My name is Monika and I am nine years old. I really liked the stories in *Kahani* magazine. I also liked the comic a lot. My favorite thing in the first issue of *Kahani* was the book review. I will definitely try to read *The Conch Bearer*. I can't wait to read the next issue of *Kahani*.
Monika P., 9, CA

Dear Editor,
I really love *Kahani* because it has stories about things a lot of Indian American kids go through every day. It is funny and the kind of magazine you will want to read over and over again. It is great.
Neha P., 10, MD

Dear Editor,
Just one request. To have a truly South Asian authenticity, it would be great to cover Pakistani culture and people as well.
Basit Q., NJ
Editor: You are absolutely right. Our mission is to include Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Nepal as well. Hope you like our Spotlight on Shazia Mirza and look out for an original story by Rukhsana Khan in our next issue!

To *Kahani*,
I really enjoyed the magazine. The stories were cool. I would like to see more crossword puzzles (my favorite). I would like to see more crafts too! The comic was very funny. I liked the pictures too!
Devina P., 11, TX

Write to us at Editor@kahani.com.
Or, send a letter to:
Kahani
P.O. Box 590155
Newton Centre, MA 02459

Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

