



## Educator Guide

### Ages 8-12



**Puneet Bhandal**

#### **Blurb**

12-year-old Bela has always dreamed about becoming a famous Bollywood star, and now the opportunity might finally be within her grasp. When a reality TV show gives her the chance to dance in front of the nation, she knows that she is performing for a place at the most prestigious stage school in Mumbai. Can Bela win the Dance Starz competition to bag a place at the Bollywood Academy and move one step closer to her dreams of stardom? And will child star Monica, the most "in" girl at school, see her as a friend or a rival?

#### **About the Author**

Puneet Bhandal is a former Bollywood film journalist and the current owner of an Indian occasionwear boutique where her dresses are modelled by real-life stars including 'Miss England 2021'. *Starlet Rivals* is her debut novel.

## **Before Reading**

### **Building Background Knowledge - Bollywood**

Originating from the combination of "Hollywood" and "Bombay," – the city now known as Mumbai - Bollywood refers to the Hindi language sector of India's movie-making industry. Each year, around 1500-2000 movies are produced across India in 20 different languages. Bollywood films are the most popular and the ones with the largest global audience. They are most acclaimed for their lavish song and dance performances. Ask your students if they have heard or seen a Bollywood movie before. If they are familiar with Bollywood films, what are some of your students' favorites? Play a clip from a dance sequence from the film to build context (or just excitement!) before reading. Author Puneet Bhandal recommends *Sholay* if you want a golden oldie and perhaps *Jab We Met* for a modern-day entertainer.



## **Art and Culture - Classical Indian Dance**

In the story, Bela's routine for the Dance Starz tryout combines Bharatanatyam, the oldest dance form in India, with modern Bollywood or Western steps. Prior to reading this story, share some examples of Bharatanatyam performances with your class on YouTube. Have your students share what they already might know about classical Indian dance, and then have them come up with a list of questions to research. From which part of India did the dance form originate? When was the first known performance? Why is this dance form so important?

| What We Know | What We Want to Know | What We Learned |
|--------------|----------------------|-----------------|
|              |                      |                 |

## **During Reading**

### **Reading Literature - Character Traits**

Bela and Monica, the “starlet rivals”, are two important characters in this story. Have your students think about the traits of each character as they read. Make a list for each to help your students compare and contrast the two characters. As your students read the text, discuss how Bela and Monica's character traits drive each character to make certain choices or take certain actions in the story. How do their character traits affect other characters? What causes some of their character traits to change, if at all?

### **Persuasive Writing - #NepotisminBollywood**

Nepotism is a theme that is discussed throughout the story. Bela, in particular, feels the impact of nepotism as she pursues her dream to break into the world of Bollywood. “Ordinary people like us don't get the chance to perform on TV. We don't know anyone in show business...” she says in her speech after winning Dance Starz. Define nepotism as a class and have students identify examples of nepotism in the text and how it impacts the lives of different characters. Can they think of other examples in the world today where nepotism exists? After the discussion, have your students write an opinion piece on their view of nepotism using concrete evidence from the text or the world. Do they feel nepotism is fair or unfair? Why or why not?

### **Social Emotional Learning - Taking a Different Perspective**

This story is narrated by Bela, which means we get to experience the story from her perspective. When we think about what other characters may have been thinking or feeling in the moment, we may better understand why they do certain things or make certain choices in the story. Have your students choose a chapter or scene from the book and write it as a diary entry from another character's perspective. What do they learn about the characters by doing so? How did this help them understand the story and the actions of certain characters?



### **Comprehension & Discussion Questions:**

- What has Bela's dream been since she was a young child?
- Why is a spot at Bollywood Academy so sought after?
- Why do you think Bela's mom wants her to try out for Dance Starz?
- Why do you think Monica stops smiling after Bela's speech on Dance Starz?
- What do you think the newsletter headline "A Rags to Riches Tale or a Flash in the Pan?" means? How does it make Bela feel?
- What are some of the differences between the settings of Bollywood Academy on Kohinoor Island and Bela's home in Chandivali?
- Who are considered "insiders" at Bollywood Academy? Why are Sophie and Bela both considered outsiders?
- How does Monica treat Bela during their first class together? What happens?
- What is Monica's character like in the story? Why do you think she is like that?
- What does Bela discover is the real reason behind her getting the role in Mystery?
- What do the hashtags #NepotismInBollywood and #BoycottBollywood mean?
- What role does social media and the news play in Bela and Monica's rivalry?
- Why do you think Monica suddenly gets to do the lead dance in the movie Jigsaw?
- What happens after Tara makes fun of Monica in public?
- What do you predict will happen when Bela goes to meet Om Shankara? Why do you think this? What actually happens? What important event does Bela miss because she's on her way to meet Om Shankara?
- Which characters are supportive of Bela after she misses the Film Glitz shoot?
- Why do you think Bela doesn't want to tell her friends back home what has really been happening at the Bollywood Academy?
- Why does Bela finally stand up to Monica? What prompts her to do so?
- What advice does Priyanka give to Bela about paying attention to social media?
- How does Bela respond to Monica's fall on stage? What would you have done as Bela?
- In what ways do Bela and Monica change throughout the story?
- What are some of the lessons that we can learn from this story?



## **After Reading**

### **Social Studies - Social Media and the News, #FactorFiction**

In today's world, social media and the news can be a powerful way to connect people and share information, but they can also spread misinformation and make us feel things about ourselves that are not always true or healthy. Ask your students to think or write about other examples in the text that point to the way media impacts the lives of characters in the story. What role does the media play in the rivalry between Bela and Monica? What do they think the characters learn by the end of the story? How could these lessons apply to the way we interact with social media and the news in our own lives?



### **Writing - #FriendsLikeFamily**

Bela's friends, family, and community play an important role in the story. There are many moments when Bela begins to doubt herself, but her #friendslikefamily and her real family are always there to support and encourage her. Have your students choose an event or moment in the story when they think Bela is facing a problem or a challenge. Have them compose a text message, email, or social media post as if they were one of Bela's #friendslikefamily or one of her actual family members. What encouraging words would they share with her? What advice would they give?

### **Making Connections - Passion Projects**

"There was something about music and dance that made me feel relaxed and happy from within." Despite all of the challenges Bela faces in the story, when she begins to dance, something changes inside of her. Ask your students to think about the things in their lives that make them feel the way Bela feels when she dances. What passions or interests do they have? What is something they are excited to learn more about? Have your students choose a question, activity, or topic to explore further in your class. Then, encourage them to use different sources to gather information on this topic. Have them put together a small presentation to share their "passion project" with the rest of the class. It could be a poem, a picture, or a new game that they teach the class. The sky is the limit!

