



EDUCATOR GUIDE

Picture Book | 5-7 Years | Grades K-2

Key Themes:

Bharatanatyam, Cultural Dance, AAPI, Diversity, Social Emotional Learning, Culture, Asian-American Families, Indian-American Families

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Dancing Devi

By Priya Parikh

Illustrated by N. Dejeswini

Devi knows that she's a good dancer. In fact, she's one of the best Bharatanatyam dancers at her dance school. So she's very upset when she learns she's lost the big dance competition. Her mom is a perfect dancer and Devi needs to be, too. Devi vows to practice her facial expressions and footwork until her dance is flawless, but no matter how much she practices, she keeps making mistakes. Come along with Devi as she learns that failure is an important part of learning and growing.



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Growing up, Bharatnatyam played an important role in **Priya Parikh's** life. Training as a Bharatanatyam dancer for more than a decade, she completed her Arangetram in 2009. When she's not dancing and writing, Priya is a public health professional, working with nonprofits and the public sector, to improve access to healthcare services globally.



N. Dejeshwini is a self-taught artist based in Chennai, India. Dejeshwini spends time observing the beauty and aesthetics of life and nature, and fills her artwork with emotion and cheer. *Dancing Devi* is Dejeshwini's fourth children's book.

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Reading Comprehension, Grade 1-2: 1R2-2R2: Identify a main topic or central idea and retell key details in a text and summarize portions of a text.



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The Art of Storytelling

Part A: Reading Comprehension

Read *Dancing Devi* as a whole group, pausing briefly during key moments to ask students prompting questions. After completing the class read aloud, teachers can ask students some general questions to get students thinking about the narrative structure of the book. Some prompting questions include:

- Is this story fiction or nonfiction? How do you know?
- **Plot:** How did the story start? How did it end? What happened in the middle? What were the key events in the book?
- **Narration:** Who is telling the story?
- **Setting:** Where is the story set?
- **Characters:** Who are the main characters? How did the character's actions affect the story?
- **Problem:** What is the conflict or problem the characters must resolve? How did they do this?

Next, invite students to retell the story by using a story map. Story maps improve students' comprehension of a narrative text and give students a framework for identifying elements of the story. Though many of these elements were discussed as a whole group, using a story map individually or with a partner will help students capture and organize the ideas effectively.

Depending on students' familiarity with story maps, teachers may wish to model how to complete the graphic organizer using a well-known fairy tale so that students understand how the components are to be completed.

[You can find a sample generic template of story map here.](#)

New York State Next Generation ELA Standards

Reading Comprehension, Grade 3: 3R7: Explain how specific illustrations or text features contribute to what is conveyed by the words in a text (e.g., create mood, emphasize character or setting, or determine where, when, why, and how key events occur). (RI&RL)



ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

The Art of Storytelling

Part B: Facial Expressions and Emotions

In *Dancing Devi*, Devi mentions how important facial expressions are in Bharatnatyam. Facial expressions convey emotions and are an important part of storytelling. We can interpret the main character's emotions through the words in the story as well as the illustrations.

The next day, Devi woke up early. She sat down in front of the mirror and began to practice her **abhinaya**, her facial expressions.



Picture books that convey a variety of emotions are a wonderful way to support students' social-emotional development and build empathy.

Not only do students see a visual representation of the emotion, but they learn the importance of understanding different perspectives and the complexity of emotions. Educators can use illustrations as prompts for discussions about emotions, empathy, and social situations. They can ask questions like, "How do you think the character feels?" or "Why do you think they reacted that way?" This encourages critical thinking and emotional reflection.

In the next activity, students will flip through the story to find the many emotions felt by the characters. Fill in the table on the following page. The clues you find can be pictures or words. The first row is completed as a sample. Following the scavenger hunt, teachers can facilitate a discussion about emotions and empathy.



[Download an activity sheet for younger students here.](#)



Tip: Use [this video flip book](#) to view the book on a larger screen.

READING FACIAL EXPRESSIONS

Clue	Emotion	How do you know?	What events led to this emotion?
"But her name wasn't called at all." (pg 5)	Unhappy, disappointed	Devi looks down at her lap. Her eyes are closed.	She wasn't chosen as a winner at the dance competition.

New York State Arts Standards

3rd VA:Cn11.1.3a. Recognize visual characteristics commonly found in works of art and design from a particular culture.

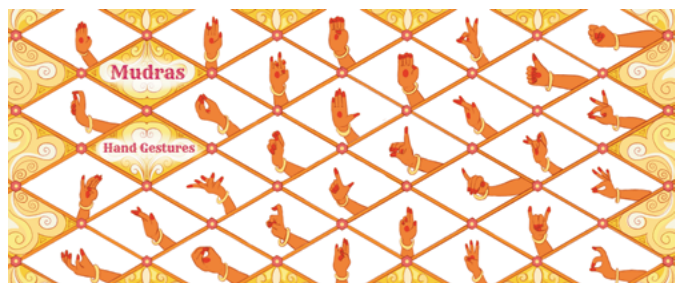
3rd VA:Cn11.2.3a. Brainstorm ideas for and experiment with changes to simple items used in daily life; share results.



ARTS

Mudra Hand Art

In Bharatnatyam, there are many *mudras* or hand gestures that help convey the emotions of the story being told. In *Dancing Devi*, the mudras are shown in the first few pages:



Students can watch Bharatnatyam videos to see the ways in which mudras are used in dance performances. Like facial expressions, mudras are also part of the storytelling. In this activity students will use their imagination and creativity to With a partner, they can choose one hand gesture and attempt to replicate it.

[Download an activity sheet for younger students here.](#)

Next, using a blank piece of paper, students can trace their mudra. Students can use additional lines and colors to create a fun illustration. As an extension, students can use their mudra art as a prompt to write a story or myth!



Image source: <https://artistro.com/blogs/news/how-to-draw-animals-with-your-hands-totally-cool-handprint-drawing-ideas-for-you-and-your-kids>

National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies: Culture

Explore and describe similarities and difference in ways various cultural groups meet similar needs and concerns

Presenting a “compare and contrast” chart demonstrating the similarities and differences between two or more cultural group in a given category



SOCIAL STUDIES

Traditional Dresses from Around the World

In *Dancing Devi*, some traditional South Asian dresses are illustrated. One example is a sari as worn by Devi’s mother below:



Another example is a salwar kameez, as depicted here:



These are two examples of traditional dresses worn in India. All around the world, countries each have their own beautiful traditional clothing. The sari, for example, is an elegant, lengthy piece of fabric skillfully draped around the body. Saris come in a variety of fabrics, colors, and intricate designs. Similarly, in Japan, people wear beautiful kimonos, which are graceful, floor-length robes tied with an elegant sash called an obi. In Africa, we see dazzling dashikis, which are bright and bold tunics with eye-catching patterns. These unique garments hold stories of history and culture, acting as a important link to a culture’s history.

In this activity, students will go on a virtual field trip using [Google Arts & Culture: Exploring Traditional Clothing From Around the World](#). Teachers can lead the field trip as a whole class or students can explore in small groups. Students will examine the pictures of traditional clothing from various cultures. To ensure cultural relevance and responsiveness, teachers should also incorporate examples that reflect the diversity of the students in the class.



SOCIAL STUDIES

Encourage students to ask questions and share their thoughts about the traditional clothing they find interesting. Students can also identify the similarities between the various traditional clothing.

Facilitate a class discussion about the different traditional clothing created and presented by the students:

- What did you learn from exploring traditional clothing from various cultures?
- Which traditional clothing did you find the most interesting and why?

Extension:

Students can research one culture's traditional clothing and create a presentation to share their research. Teachers can organize a cultural fair where students can present their research and share interesting facts about the countries and cultures they represent.



Next Generation Science Standards: Grade 4, Measurement and Data: 4.MD.6, Measure angles in whole-number degrees using a protractor.



MATHEMATICS

Angles with Feet

In Bharatnatyam, there are various foot positions known as *paada bheda*. Some of these foot positions are shown on the last page of *Dancing Devi*.



In this activity, students will need a copy of various foot positions (see page 11). They will use a ruler and protractor to measure the angles created by each position.

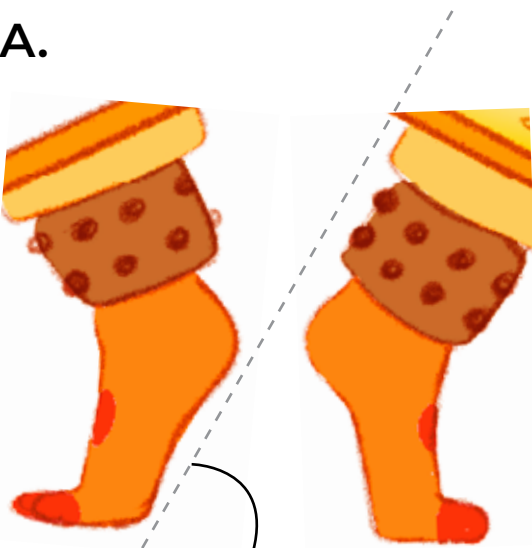
Using a ruler, students can draw a line along the base of the foot. Students then draw a line parallel to the floor. The two lines should intersect to create an angle. Students then use a protractor to measure the angle created by each foot position.

As an extension, students can work in pairs to try to do the foot positions themselves. They can use a large protractor to measure the angles to ensure their footwork is precise.

[Download an activity sheet for younger students here.](#)

MEASURE THE ANGLES

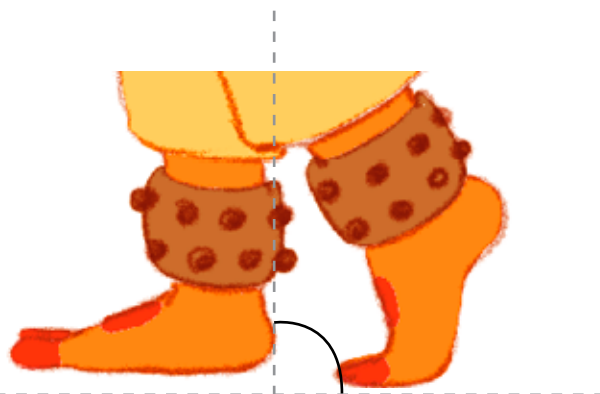
A.



B.



C.





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This guide was prepared by **Anjali Joshi**, a science teacher and curriculum developer by day and children's book author by night. She has 15+ years of experience in the field of K-12 science education, and recently completed a Master of Science at the University of Oxford where she had the opportunity to research educational technology and the effective implementation of K-8 STEM curriculum.

At dawn and dusk, she spends her time fighting monsters, training Pokémon, and playing dress-up with her two amazing kids. Connect with her at authoranjali Joshi.com.