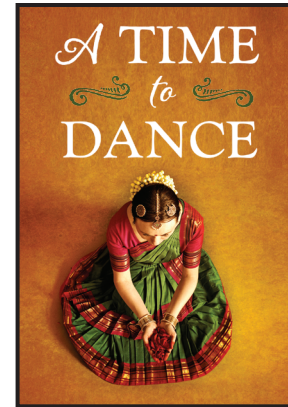


RESEARCH AND ACTIVITIES

- Conduct a short research project to discover and briefly describe a few dance traditions from parts of the world other than India. Compare these forms of dance and generate your own related questions on dance (modern and contemporary) the world over.
- Veda's story is inspired by true stories of differently-abled dancers. Research the life story of a differently-abled person who, like Veda, overcame hurdles to accomplish his/her goal. Compare and contrast this person's experiences with the turning points in Veda's story. How are this person's emotions similar to or different from Veda's feelings? Did this person undergo any change in attitude that parallels the growth in Veda's character? Substantiate your answers with quotations, provide a list of references (print and digital), and justify how you assessed the credibility of the references you cited.
- Read Walt Whitman's "Proud Music of the Storm". How does he approach and express the theme of spiritual bliss attained through dance? How does young Veda communicate her understanding of the deeper aspect of her dance tradition and her inner-growth through her experience of relearning dance? In what fundamental way does the use of narrative poetry (as opposed to other modern types of poetry) change the way a theme, such as "the power of art" is approached?
- Compare and contrast Russell Freedman's biography *Martha Graham* with *A Time to Dance* in terms of how each work approaches the following related themes: a young woman's passion for dance; overcoming hurdles to become an exceptional dancer; obsession with awards/recognition versus inner spiritual growth through art; pushing one's creative artistic expression through dance.
- Is there any art, craft, or other activity that you feel as passionately about as Veda does for dance? Using what you have learned by studying the sequence of poems in *A Time to Dance*, write about something you love doing, focusing on a key event that triggered your passion and on any hurdles you have encountered that threaten to keep you from devoting as much time and attention to it as you would like (or nearly destroyed your ability to pursue this passion). Employ relevant details and effective techniques, as Veda does, to show, rather than tell the reader how you felt and help build toward a climax/conclusion that shows your success or failure to overcome the hurdle.

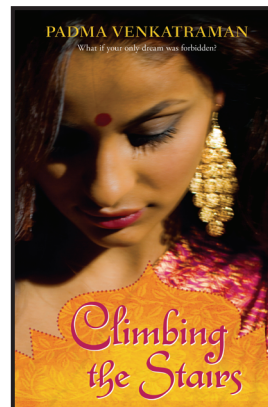


A Time to Dance

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Ages 12 up • Grades 7 up

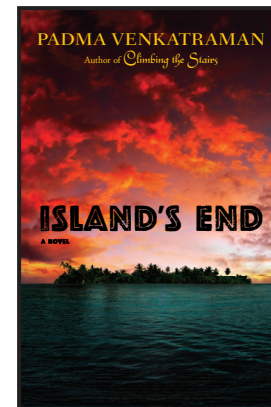
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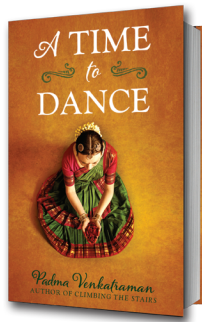
DISCUSSION GUIDE

A TIME to DANCE



Padma Venkatraman
AUTHOR OF CLIMBING THE STAIRS

ABOUT THE BOOK



Veda, a dance ingénue, loses her leg in an accident. As she struggles to dance again, she reconnects with life more compassionately, awakens to love, and discovers the spiritual power of art.

★ “Venkatraman weaves together several themes so elegantly that they become one . . . The fluid first-person verse uses figurative speech sparingly, so when it appears . . . it packs a punch . . . A beautiful integration of art, religion,

compassion and connection.”—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “In Venkatraman’s delectably scented, sensual world, lyrically told through verse and through Veda, life is illuminated as a beautiful celebration of doing what comes naturally, as best as one is able . . . To even have a passing thought that Veda is disabled, rather than differently abled, would be utter madness.”—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “The descriptions of contemporary India are beautiful and Venkatraman weaves images so divine that you can see the statues of Shiva, hear the ankle bells in the bharatanatyam dance, and smell the acrid scent of burnt rubber from the accident . . . Told in verse, this story is magnificently strong as Veda’s determination dances off the page and into the reader’s heart.”—*VOYA*, starred review

★ “This exceptional novel, told entirely in verse, captures beautifully the emotions of a girl forced to deal with a number of challenges and how she overcomes them on her way to becoming a confident young woman . . . It is sure to appeal to readers who are also trying to find their place in the world.”—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “Heart-achingly hopeful and beautifully written, this story will remain with readers long after the final line of verse.”—*BCCB*, starred review

“With words that move with grace and elegance . . . Venkatraman has drawn a vivid picture of contemporary India, and given a gift of faith and hope to all who, like Veda, find their dream slipping away.”—Gloria Whelan, National Book Award Winner

“Brief lines, powerful images, and motifs of sound communicate Veda’s difficult struggle to accept her changed body . . .”—*The Horn Book*

★ FIVE STARRED REVIEWS ★

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



In addition to *A TIME TO DANCE*, Padma Venkatraman is the author of two critically acclaimed novels: *ISLAND’S END* and *CLIMBING THE STAIRS*, both of which were released to starred reviews and won multiple awards. She turned to writing, her first love, after obtaining a

doctorate in oceanography at the College of William and Mary and conducting post-doctoral research in Environmental Engineering at Johns Hopkins University. She enjoys reading from her work and speaking to students, teachers and librarians and has participated on panels at Harvard University, PEN and other venues, given commencement speeches at schools and provided keynote addresses at teacher and librarian conferences. Padma is an American and she lives in RI with her family.

Visit the author’s website at www.padmasbooks.com

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- As Veda’s story begins (in the Prologue, “Temple of the Dancing God”) what details of time, place and voice help orient the reader to the narrator and the setting of the story?
- How do Veda’s descriptions and actions in “Temple of the Dancing God” introduce the reader to her relationship with dance?
- How do Veda’s reflections, dialogue and actions in the poem “Hoping and Waiting” establish the characters of Paati, Ma and Pa?
- Throughout the novel, how does the spare dialogue develop the characters and their conflicts?
- In the poem “Time” how is Veda’s shift of thought from the present to the past signaled? How does the brief flashback reiterate her passion for her art and reinforce aspects of her character and the characters of Shobana and Mrs. Subramaniam and Veda’s relationship with them?
- What words, phrases, comparisons, details and aspects of sensory language help express Veda’s various emotional states in the poem “Speed”?
- What actions and metaphors convey the various emotions Veda experiences in the hospital after her accident?

- How does Veda’s experience of winning an important dance competition help build toward her intense shock after the accident? If the story had begun with the poem “Waking” (instead of starting with Veda’s narration of earlier events), might a reader have felt the same level of empathy for her loss?
- What role do Paati’s words, actions and history play in helping Veda recover mentally?
- How does Veda’s passion for dance deepen and change after she acquires a new teacher?
- How are Jim and Govinda different, especially in terms of the roles they play in Veda’s life and the way she sees them? Cite the text to strengthen your answer.
- How do events and themes in *A Time to Dance* reflect the Biblical philosophy expressed in Ecclesiastes of a “time for every purpose under heaven”?
- How does Veda’s story in *A Time to Dance*, set in contemporary India, draw on India’s religious history, symbolism and mythology?
- Compare Veda’s stage performance before her accident with the scene in which she dances alone beneath the banyan tree and in the final scene of the novel. What words and phrases in the text show the change in Veda’s attitude toward dance?
- Do you think Veda’s character changes as the story progresses? What actions does she take that indicate she is growing less self-centered?
- When do you think there is a key turning point in Veda’s relationship with her mother? How does dialogue show the development in their relationship?
- How does Veda’s role as a teacher help her grow? What role do her students play in helping her learn?
- What small and large hurdles does Veda have to overcome after her accident? Are you or do you know someone who is differently abled? What challenges do you/they face on a daily basis?
- Veda remarks that Jim’s politically correct words help lessen her pain in a small way. To what extent do you think it matters to use politically correct terms when we speak?
- When Veda meets Kamini for the last time in the novel, Veda suggests that the accident actually helped her grow. Cite specific places in the text where Veda seems to feel this way, and what aspects of growth she attributes to the loss of her limb. Have you had similar feelings about challenges you’ve overcome that might have shaped and strengthened your personality?