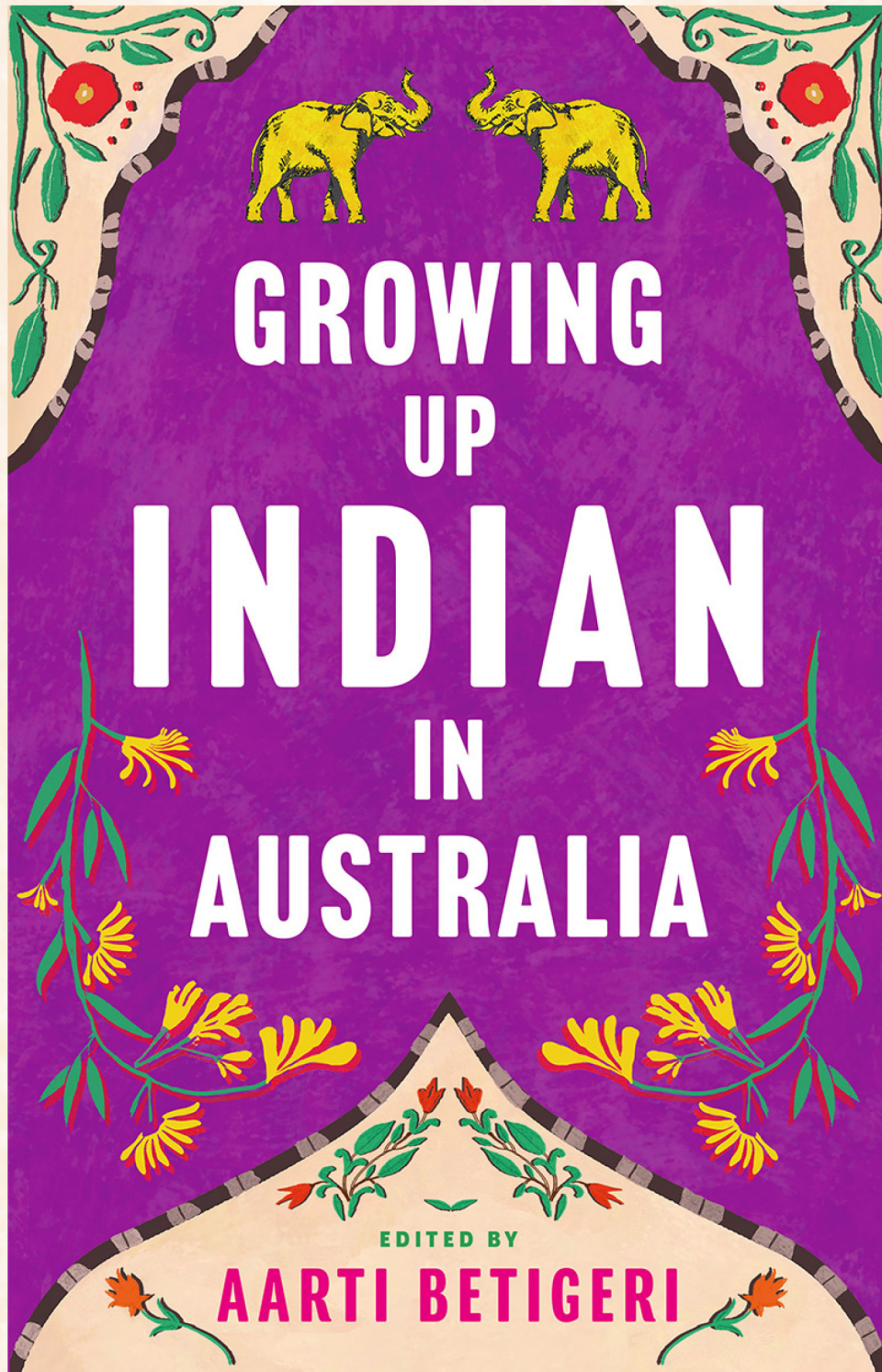


Teaching Notes

by Preeti Maharaj



Year levels: 9–12

Teacher professional development

Themes: belonging, culture, identity, family, migration, society, racism

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Section A

Synopsis and pre-reading tasks

Synopsis

Growing Up Indian in Australia is a collection rich with code-switching texture, colour, languages, food and stories that span the breadth of the country and the experiences of the Indian diaspora. The writers in this anthology demonstrate the diversity and intersectionality of Indian identities across class, race, gender, sexuality and religion. Their stories also speak to the universality of human experiences – from migration to evolving friendships, and carving out spaces in which complex identities can thrive, all whilst navigating family relationships and expectations. The writers take us across real and imagined landscapes that transcend continents and time, interrogating what it means to be Indian in Australia.

Pre-reading tasks

Questions to consider:

- What are the connotations of the anthology's title: *Growing Up Indian in Australia*?
- What aspects of Australian history and contemporary politics may shape a reader's understanding of *Growing Up Indian in Australia*? Consider:
 - the White Australia policy
 - patterns of immigration since British colonisation
 - *The Racial Discrimination Act* (1975)
- What constitutes institutional, structural, interpersonal and internalised racism?

Research tasks:

- Create a timeline of the arrival of Indian immigrants in Australia.
- Research and present on:
 - the caste system in Hinduism and caste discrimination in India
 - the use of 'caste' in Australian history to discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Section B

Questions to provoke discussion and thinking while reading

‘A Chutney Alphabet of Anglo-Indian Spells’ by Michelle Cahill (pp. 8–18)

- What do we learn about Cahill’s diverse family history?
- How does Cahill experience life as a migrant growing up in Australia?
- What are the impacts of migration on different members of Cahill’s family?
- What are three themes that are explored in this story?
- What does chutney symbolise in this story?

‘A Tale of Three Beaches’ by Sharon Verghis (pp. 19–32)

- What does Verghis experience as a newly arrived migrant in Australia in 1988?
- Why does Verghis stop going to Cronulla Beach and what does this signify about her growth since 1988?
- What happens during the Cronulla race riots and why is this not a surprise to Verghis?
- What do the tales of the three beaches tell us about the stages of Verghis’ life in relation to her identity and sense of belonging?
- What does Verghis mean when she writes, ‘... we also contain all the geography of our lives... [the] silhouettes live on inside us’ (p. 32)?

‘When I’m in Australia, and When There’s No One I Know’ by Natasha Pinto

(pp. 33–38)

- How do Pinto and her sister justify being Australian?
- How does Pinto move or ‘code switch’ between her two worlds?
- How does Pinto’s mother respond to the isolation of migration over the years?
- What does Pinto’s father’s blue lab coat symbolise and evoke in this story?
- What impact have Pinto’s parents had on how she views the world?

‘Memsahib Marple and the Curious Case of Me’ by Priya SaratChandran (pp. 39–44)

- What was it like for SaratChandran growing up in Keilor in the 1970s?
- ‘In Danny, there was a glimpse of something else, a reminder not to predetermine the outcome, not to prejudge the characters and their motives, to always follow the evidence, avoid generalisation and, above all, keep an open mind’ (p. 42). What does SaratChandran mean here?
- Compare and contrast SaratChandran’s experiences within school to her experiences within her Indian community.
- Why does SaratChandran question everything?
- What is the significance of Memsahib Marple as a metaphor in this story?

‘Feeling Free in Kings Cross’ by Hardeep Dhanoa (pp. 45–48)

- What are some examples of internalised racism in this story?

- What are the expectations placed on Dhanoa as a Punjabi Indian girl compared to the expectations placed on boys?
- How does Dhanoa navigate living between two worlds?
- ‘It was a weird kind of assimilation’ (p. 47). What does Dhanoa mean by this?
- Why does Dhanoa feel as if she is ‘free in Kings Cross’?

‘The Kala Pani’ by Sunil Badami (pp. 49–63)

- What does the term ‘kala pani’ mean for Hindus who have left India?
- Why does Badami feel like an outcast in Australia?
- ‘Caste’ was used to racially discriminate against First Nations peoples in Australia and the word is now recognised as a racial slur. What are the similarities and differences between the Hindu caste system and how ‘caste’ was used in Australia?
- What are Badami’s experiences of different types of prejudice as he is growing up?
- In what ways do Badami’s children help him to reconcile identity and loss?

‘How I Happened’ by Tasneem Chopra (pp. 64–73)

- What was Chopra’s childhood like in rural Victoria in the 1980s?
- How did Chopra’s parents ensure that their children retained their Muslim identities?
- As a child, which identity was Chopra most conscious about and why?
- What inspired Chopra’s activism and why?
- How did attending Muslim camp impact Chopra’s sense of identity?

‘A Tangle of Tenses’ by Preeti Maharaj (pp. 74–77)

- What does Maharaj remember as she is being racially abused on the train?
- What does Maharaj mean when she writes that her life is ‘a tangle of tenses that exist simultaneously’ (p. 75)?
- What impact does intergenerational trauma have on Maharaj and her family?
- How does this incident on the train shape who Maharaj becomes as an adult and why?
- Why is the sharing of stories with her students important to Maharaj?

‘An Incomplete Guide to Every Type of Brown Guy in the West’ by

Kishor Napier-Raman (pp. 78–83)

- What are some examples of internalised racism displayed by the ‘types of brown guy’ in this story?
- What factors could have contributed to their internalised racism?
- Why does Napier-Raman’s title state that the guide is incomplete?
- Compare and contrast the various ‘types of brown guy’ in this story.
- What aspects of identity and belonging does Napier-Raman explore through the tropes in this story?
- Does this story succeed in its attempts to counter stereotypes?

‘Practising Yoga’ by Kavita Bedford (pp. 84–90)

- What is cultural appropriation and how is it relevant to this story?
- Why does Bedford find the yoga teachers in Bali problematic? Is this a fair assessment?

- Why does Bedford find herself reacting angrily to people who are not Indian embracing India and its customs?
- What is it that Bedford is afraid of when she chants ‘I am scared’ (pp. 89–90)?
- Why does Bedford decide to become a yoga teacher by the end of this story?

‘Painted’ by Shreya Tekumalla (pp. 91–103)

- In what ways is eight-year-old Tekumalla different to seventeen-year-old Tekumalla?
- ‘So, the way it makes most sense to me is that I was a girl who, instead of growing up into a woman, grew up into a man’ (p. 100). What do we learn about Tekumalla’s changing identity as a twenty-year-old in conversation with his eight-year-old and seventeen-year-old selves?
- The author describes his parents as ‘two of the best ones I could have asked for: ones who loved us more than the legacy of their culture’ (p. 102)? What does this mean?
- What do we learn about Tekumalla’s changing relationship with Baharat Mata/ Mother India as he grows up?
- What messages about self-acceptance can we glean through the various versions of Tekumalla in this story?

‘Dual Identities Down Under’ by Shamna Sanam (pp. 104–107)

- In what ways did Sanam try to ‘abandon [her] culture’ (p. 104)?
- How does Sanam begin to accept her dual identity at sixteen?
- What was Sanam’s experience of migration?
- What does Sanam learn about ‘mateship’?
- What messages does Sanam have for readers about identity, belonging and acceptance?

‘My Other Mother’ by Rachael Jacobs (pp. 108–112)

- Who or what is the ‘other mother’ in this story and why is she important?
- What does Jacobs learn from her ‘other mother’ when she is eight years old?
- Compare Jacobs’ life in Australia with her visit to India.
- Why does Jacobs feel guilty and how does this guilt influence her life?
- How does South Asian dance shape Jacobs’ life?

‘Walking the Wire’ by Mia Pandey Gordon (pp. 113–118)

- Why is Gordon’s family always trying to have clothes tailored for her?
- What are the expectations that exist for Gordon to be a ‘refined Indian girl’ (p. 114)?
- What is the alternative reality of India from which Gordon’s family try to shield her?
- Which reality of India does Gordon identify with and why?
- What is the wire a metaphor for in this story?

‘Bushy Eyebrows’ by Daizy Maan (pp. 119–124)

- Why does Maan feel she ‘would always be lesser than the Italians and Australians’ (p. 119)?
- Why does Maan end up on a flight to India on her own in Year 8?
- How do Maan’s feelings about visiting her nani change over time and why?

- Why does Maan refuse to admit she misses her mother and home?
- In what ways does living in Delhi help Maan understand her mother?

‘My Name Is Not’ by Sneha Lees (pp. 125–138)

- Why did Lees write her book and what were the repercussions?
- Why does Lees finally open herself up to ‘secretly long-held interests’ in the creative arts (p. 130)?
- How does Lees eventually try to reconcile with her parents?
- Why does Lees eventually embrace her name publicly?
- What does Lees plan to share with her daughter about ‘wrestling’?

‘The Dance Performance’ by Swagata Bapat (pp. 139–143)

- How does dressing for the dance performance transform Bapat?
- What does dancing represent for Bapat?
- How does Bapat describe the version of herself that exists at school?
- What do we learn about Bapat’s family in this story?
- What do we learn about the relationships and dynamics between people in the community hall?

‘Annette’ by Jessica Joseph (pp. 144–155)

- In what ways is Joseph’s life in Western Australia ‘saturated with India’ (p. 144)?
- What happens to Joseph’s sense of identity when she finally visits India and why does this happen?
- How does this sense of being an ‘alien’ continue for Joseph when she is at school?
- What impact does internalised racism have on Joseph as she goes through puberty?
- What does Joseph learn from her ‘brown friends’ and their approach to life about self-acceptance?

‘Andaaz Se: By Feel’ by Meenal Khare (pp. 156–168)

- How does Khare’s life in Melbourne differ from her life in Taree?
- How does Khare navigate the multiple worlds she inhabits as a child?
- What role does Khare’s sister play in her life?
- How do Khare’s parents try to make their children’s lives in Australia easier?
- What does Khare learn about herself and her cultural identities during her time living and working in India?

‘Car-crash Flowers’ by Joseph Jude (pp. 169–177)

- What does the car represent for Jude?
- Why is shopping such a fraught and symbolic exercise for Jude?
- Why does Jude reveal his inability to stay in places that are three or four storeys high?
- Why does Jude choose not to ‘say a word to anyone’ (p. 174)?
- What does Jude mean when he writes, ‘An ordinary lie about going to the movies which ended with my brother moving up one spot; taking over from me’ (p. 177)?

‘Light Refracts’ by Kavita Ivy Nandan (pp. 178–184)

- Why does Nandan feel she cannot celebrate Diwali successfully in Sydney?
- Why is Nandan neither ‘typically Indian nor typically Fiji-Indian’ (p. 179)?
- What role does language play in revealing parts of Nandan’s ‘concealed’ identity?
- What does being Indian mean to Nandan?
- ‘I can be a palimpsest ... as a living, breathing archive’ (pp. 183–184). What does Nandan mean by this?

‘Gurdwara Day’ by Sukhjit Kaur Khalsa (pp. 185–190)

- Why does this family moment in the park catch Khalsa off guard?
- What were Khalsa’s two homes and how did they protect her?
- How does Khalsa’s attitude to the Gurdwara change as she becomes a teenager?
- What does Khalsa learn when she moves to Melbourne?
- Why does Khalsa want to take her partner to the Gurdwara?

‘Synagogue, Spices and Searching for Home’ by Elana Benjamin (pp. 191–199)

- In what ways does Benjamin feel a ‘deep connection to [her] parents’ homeland’ (p. 191)?
- What was life like for Benjamin’s parents growing up in India, compared with their children’s lives in Australia?
- How does Benjamin’s Jewish identity differ from the wider Sydney Jewish community?
- Why does Benjamin ‘still struggle to claim India as [her] own’ (p. 197)?
- What makes Benjamin feel connected to her Jewish-Indian identity and gives her a sense of belonging?

‘The Generational Journey: A Conversation’ by Zoya Patel & Ikebal Patel (pp. 200–211)

- What is the ‘constant contradiction’ that Zoya Patel feels growing up (p. 201)?
- How does her father’s advice to ‘be good, be kind’ influence Zoya Patel (p. 200)?
- Is Ikebal Patel’s experience of migration positive or negative?
- How does Ikebal Patel ensure that he creates a sense of community for his family?
- What do we learn about the generational and cultural gap in this conversation between the two Patels?

‘A Brahmin’s Crossroads’ by Tejas Bhat (pp. 212–221)

- How did religion shape Bhat’s life growing up?
- What is the significance of the ritual Bhat undergoes when he is ten?
- In what ways does Bhat’s friendship with Andrew challenge his faith?
- What impact does the recurring pain from Bhat’s spinal cord injury have on his faith?
- How does Bhat’s family respond to his atheism?

‘Navratri’ by Rakhee Ghelani (pp. 222–225)

- Why does Ghelani feel so uncomfortable in the saree?
- Why does Ghelani endure wearing the saree anyway?
- In what ways does Ghelani find herself repeating the past with her daughter?
- How does Ghelani attempt to make life easier for her daughter?
- Why is wearing cultural attire so important in this story?

‘Brown and Out’ by Nicholas Brown (pp. 226–238)

- What does Brown reveal he hopes to achieve for gay families in his letter to his publicist?
- In what ways did Brown’s family contribute to his internalised racism?
- How did his family’s treatment of Uncle Percy shape Brown’s views of his own sexuality?
- Why did Brown feel comfortable being an ‘anti-racism activist’ when he ‘wasn’t ready to be a gay rights warrior’ (p. 237)?
- What message does Brown have for young queer brown people?

‘The Composition of Curry’ by Shaheen De Souza Hughes (pp. 239–256)

- What are four themes Hughes explores with the extended metaphor of curry in the poem?
- Compare and contrast Hughes’ experiences of growing up Indian in Australia with her son’s experiences.
- In what ways and by whom is food used as an expression of love throughout Hughes’ life?
- What role has colonisation played in the (food) history of Hughes’ life?
- How does Hughes reclaim the word ‘curry’ as a powerful force in her family’s history and future?

Section C

Learning activities

Themes

THE IMPACTS OF RACISM

Growing Up Indian in Australia explores the systemic and institutional nature of racism. The stories in this collection reflect on experiences of being isolated from, and in some cases actively harmed by, places that are supposed to be safe, like schools, workplaces and public spaces.

The stories:

- reference the ongoing impacts of colonisation for First Nations peoples and the Indian diaspora
- explore the enduring effects of racist stereotypes on individuals' self-esteem and confidence
- depict the corrosive impacts of normative, white ideals of beauty for young people of Indian descent
- explore experiences of isolation and fear in a school setting

The anthology explores interpersonal experiences of racism as well as the impacts of internalised racism. Contributors wrestle with the impacts of racism on both their personal sense of self and their identities as members of families, communities and the broader Australian society.

The stories:

- explore the importance of names to our sense of identity and belonging, and interrogate the reluctance of some parts of Australian society to show respect by addressing people by their names
- reference formative experiences with racist insults either directed at the authors or used by members of their own community towards other communities or one another
- delve into the role of caste in Hinduism and how the authors navigate these expectations

GENERATIONAL GAPS

Numerous stories in *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reflect on the gaps that can form between generations of families due to shifting cultural and societal norms.

The stories:

- reflect the difficulties that children may have understanding the experiences of their parents upon arriving in Australia and vice versa

- explore the inability of parents to understand their children’s lives
- show the difficulty that some families face negotiating and understanding their children’s relationships to their cultural heritage
- explore the process of forging one’s own identity through rebellion
- explore the resilience of families
- contemplate the impacts of intergenerational trauma

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Many writers in *Growing Up Indian in Australia* struggle with developing their sense of identity and negotiating how to belong in Australia.

The stories:

- explore the disconnection between the idealised version of Australia held by many migrants and the often fraught reality that they experience upon settling in the country
- reflect on how beauty norms can act as barriers to developing a clear sense of identity and belonging
- remind us of the nuances that exist within communities that are often stereotyped by external powers
- show the strength that is required to develop a clear sense of identity and belonging in the face of racism
- celebrate the role that the diaspora community can have in developing an individual’s sense of belonging
- explore the difficulties that can come from having an identity that sits at odds with one’s parents

Extended analytical responses

Students may be asked to respond analytically to the stories in *Growing Up Indian in Australia*. Some possible essay questions are:

- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reflects the ongoing struggles with racism in Australia today. Discuss.
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* demonstrates the generational and cultural gaps that can form between immigrants and their children. Do you agree?
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reveals the dangers of normative beauty standards. Discuss.
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* explores the lengths that people will go to assimilate. Discuss.
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reveals the racism experienced by people of Indian descent in Australia. Discuss.
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reveals the difficulty of existing as a person of Indian descent in Australia. Discuss.
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reflects the complexity of challenging racism in Australia. Do you agree?
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* suggests that ultimately the sacrifice of the first generation of Indian migrants has created a better life for future generations. Discuss.

- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* suggests that there is no end point to establishing a sense of identity and belonging. Do you agree?
- *Growing Up Indian in Australia* reveals the complex impacts of migration. Discuss.
- To what extent are the writers in *Growing Up Indian in Australia* impacted by the sacrifices of past generations?

Further Resources

- Australian Human Rights Commission for Teachers
<https://humanrights.gov.au/education/teachers>
- Racism. No Way!
<http://www.racismnoway.com.au/>
- Respect, Relationships, Reconciliation
<http://rrr.edu.au/>

Preeti Maharaj is an English and Humanities teacher and school leader who has worked in government secondary schools across Victoria for over two decades. She has led teachers in the development of curriculum, student voice and agency, and worked to improve instructional practice, literacy and numeracy across curriculum areas. She has also worked for the Victorian Department of Education as a senior policy officer, advising on anti-racist policies and implementation in schools. She is currently pursuing her PhD, focusing on how teachers navigate their identities, students' identities and educational institution identities when engaging in anti-racist practices and policies in schools. She is also a contributor to *Growing Up Indian in Australia*, having finally given herself permission to pursue a life in the creative arts in middle age.