



TO HER OWN BEAT

BY BRINDA SHAH

A heartfelt middle-grade novel-in-verse about a young dancer finding her voice, challenging beauty standards, and learning to love the body she's in.

ISBN: 9781797241463 ❁ Hardcover ❁ \$18.99 ❁ Ages 10-14, Grades 5-9
Juvenile Fiction / Stories In Verse ❁ Juvenile Fiction / Social Themes / Self-Esteem & Self-Reliance ❁ Juvenile Fiction / Asian American & Pacific Islander

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brinda Shah is an avid reader, perpetual thinker, and former pharmacist who lives in Dallas, Texas, with her family. Her writing is at the intersection of culture, identity, and humanity. She is inspired by her Indian heritage, the whimsy required to raise a child, and observations of the world around her. When she isn't writing, you can find Brinda collecting stamps in her passport, baking, hiking through national parks, or riding her bike. *To Her Own Beat* is her debut novel. Find her online at brindasbookshelf.com.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. This story is about different relationships. Sumati's relationship with her mom is not the same as her relationship with her dad. Compare and contrast the two. Which adults are less supportive of her?
2. Early in the story, Pranesh says something hurtful without knowing, but Sumati says nothing, "because I'm a good girl. I am Su-mati." This is a refrain throughout the book. Why does Sumati originally think it's better to say nothing in these situations? Are there other people in Sumati's life who react similarly or differently than she does in these situations? How do her opinions and reactions change over the course of the story?
3. Sumati finds joy in dancing Bharatanatyam and dreads playing soccer. What does she like and dislike about each activity?
4. Whenever Sumati describes Bharatanatyam, she uses all her senses. Write a poem that describes your favorite activity using all five senses.
5. Sumati loves both art (in her dance and poetry) and science (in her interest in the rock cycle). How are these two passions related?



6. Do you have a teacher, coach, or other mentor in your life who has stood up for you, taught you an important life lesson, or done something special to make you feel like Sumati's dance guru makes her feel? What happened? Write them a thank-you letter. Bonus points if you actually give or send them the letter!
7. Sumati gets to travel to India with her family, and she seems to have mixed feelings about her visit there. Why were parts of the visit hard for her? How did her family help her find joy in the trip?
8. Our words matter. Sumati's mom often throws microaggressions toward Sumati as a way to "protect" her. Do you agree or disagree with Mumma's behavior? How does the conversation Sumati overhears between Kaki and Mumma begin to help shift Mumma's perspective?
9. On page 270, the women of Sumati's family talk about generational trauma and the hurtful words that Sumati has been experiencing throughout the book. What is generational trauma? How do we see it play out between Sumati and her mother? What did you take away from the conversation in the book?
10. Many of the poems in this book use different forms to help you feel Sumati's emotions—such as putting the text in different places on the page, setting the text in different sizes, and even including more blank space on the page. Find one example of this in the book and talk about what emotions it makes you feel.
11. Some of Sumati's poetry includes homonyms (words that have similar spellings or pronunciations but different meanings) and contronyms (words that have two opposite meanings)—like the poems on page 54 and page 241. Can you think of other words that fall into either category?
12. At the end of the novel, Sumati has a revelation in which she goes through scenarios about what she would say to people who are making comments about others' bodies. What other positive things do you think you might say if you were in Sumati's position?
13. Sumati's sense of self-worth does not rely on external validation. How do we see this in the book? How do we see the people who care about her reinforce this sense of confidence?

PRAISE

"Heartbreakingly honest and tender-hearted, *To Her Own Beat* is a call to all the good girls who've ever been afraid to talk back. Sumati's voice pours out of the page, and it was a joy to see her learn to take up the space she deserves. Brinda Shah is an author to watch."

—**ANDREA BEATRIZ ARANGO**, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Iveliz Explains It All*

"A poignant and uplifting book about believing in your inherent worth and beauty, no matter what others think. Shah's verses pulse with hope and heart."

—**ANDREA WANG**, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Watercress*

