

Dear Reader,

Kids are complex and courageous. I know I was. Growing up, I grappled with big things—my racial identity, my sexual identity, anxiety and obsessive-compulsive behaviors, perfectionism—all with a pretty large smile on my face.

At twelve I didn't know I was *dealing* with these things. They just were. I certainly didn't have the language to talk about them. And no one around me was talking about these issues either.

As a kid, I also devoured stories: in television, movies, and books. I loved storytelling so much that at the age of five I announced to my parents that I wanted to be an actor. But I never saw *my* story in the TV shows I watched, the movies we went to, or the books I read. There were virtually zero brown characters and even fewer gay characters.

And, while things have gotten better, there is still a long way to go.

As an actor, I've come to understand just how important representation is. How necessary it is to see yourself reflected back. How not having that experience can make you question your very existence. Or worse, decide that finding your place in the world requires you to be someone other than who you are.

I'm reminded of that importance every time a brown person or an LGBTQIA+ person tells me just how meaningful it is to them to see me on TV. Or when a parent says how grateful they are that their kids get to watch *Sanjay and Craig*, where I play a mixed-race cartoon character of Indian descent.

It's why I was so excited to write this book. I wanted to give voice to that kid out there who is just like I was: grappling with complex issues using his brain, his guts, a trusty best friend by his side, and an eternal sense of optimism. Who also happens to be Indian American and discovering that he's gay.

I hope that *The Best at It* will find a home in the heart of any kid who's ever thought they needed to be "better" than they are simply to exist, when they are already perfect just as they are.

Sincerely,
Maulik Pancholy

