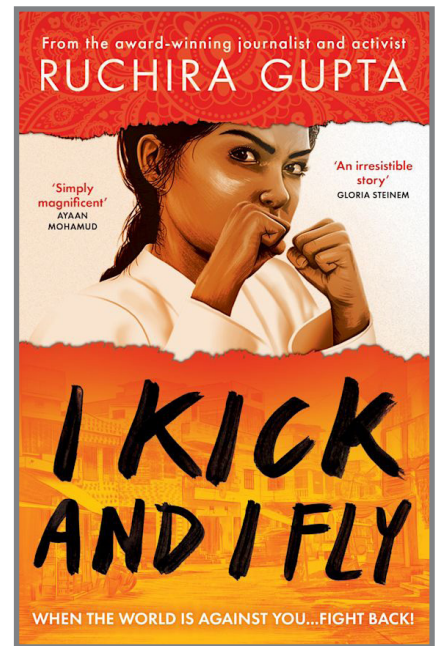


I Kick and I Fly

AUTHOR

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Upper Secondary
(Sexual Content)

SYNOPSIS

On the outskirts of the red-light district in Bihar, India, fourteen-year-old Heera is living on borrowed time. Her father plans to sell her into the sex trade to repay a loan. After a run-in with a bully at school, Heera meets Rini Di, a kung fu instructor who runs a hostel for at-risk girls. Seeing the future she faces, Rini Di pays her family's debt, takes her in and teaches her. Through the practice of martial arts, Heera starts to understand that her body isn't an object to be commodified, but something that can protect her and those around her. So when Heera discovers the whereabouts of her missing school friend, Rosy, she decides to embark on a daring rescue mission in New York to save her.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruchira Gupta is a writer, feminist campaigner, professor at New York University and founder of the anti-sex-trafficking organisation, Apne Aap Women Worldwide. She won the Clinton Global Citizen award in 2009, the Sera Bangali Award in 2012 and an Emmy for outstanding investigative journalism in 1996. She has helped more than twenty thousand girls and women in India exit prostitution systems. She has also edited *As If Women Matter*, an anthology of Gloria Steinem's essays, and written manuals on human trafficking for the UN Office for Drugs and Crime. Ruchira divides her time between Delhi and New York. *I Kick and I Fly* is her debut novel.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF NOTES

Anastasia Collins, MA, MLIS, is a librarian, youth literature scholar and anti-oppression educator.

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NOTE

I Kick and I Fly addresses the heavy subjects of sexual exploitation, sex trafficking, familial and intracommunity violence, anti-indigenous violence, poverty, severe food and housing insecurity, violence against women and girls, and more. Taking time to confront and counter your own biases, consulting with your school counselor or social worker, and building flexible options into your lesson planning are great ways to promote psychological safety and support students' engagement with the material.

STUDY NOTES

WRITING STYLE

- In Chapter One, Heera says that her 'full stomach is a heavy burden to bear' (p 7) after eating the school lunch. What

- do you think she means by this?
- The red-light district where Heera lives isn't far from several of her classmates' homes, yet their home lives are starkly different. In what ways do Heera's classmates and their families distance themselves from the suffering that awaits girls like Heera? What are some reasons that community members might distance themselves from the brothels, rather than intervene? Use specific examples from the text to support your answer.
- After Chotu's death, Heera nearly resigns herself to giving up school and to being sold into the sex trade if it means her family will have enough money to afford more food and better shelter. What do you think of her reasoning? What eventually changes her mind?
- Consider the meaning of womanhood in India, in the Nat community, and in Heera's life specifically. What is her relationship with the concept of womanhood, both as it relates to physical changes and as it represents a role in her community?
- Over and over, prostitution and the violence that comes with it are described as Nat girls' destiny or fate. Where does this idea of inevitability come from? Who stands to benefit from this notion? How is it enforced, or what other beliefs or structures enable it? How does Heera push back against this fate and create other choices and paths forward for herself?
- When she first visits Rini Di, Heera notices a photo with a caption that says 'Courage Is Contagious' (p 51). What does this mean? How is courage contagious in *I Kick and I Fly*? Use specific examples from the text as evidence.
- Describe the relationships Heera has with the adult women in her life. Are they positive? Negative? What role does each woman play in Heera's growth and development as a character? Use evidence from the text to support your thinking.
- Rini Di tells Heera that 'Self-esteem is essential to any battle. You have to know you are worth fighting for' (p 53). What do you think of this statement? In what ways does Heera know she's worth fighting for? When does that certainty falter, and how does she reclaim it?
- What is control? Define it in your own words. What does control look like in Heera's life? In what ways does Heera have or take control?
- Choose two of the Bruce Lee quotes included in *I Kick and I Fly*. Describe what you think each quote means in your own words. How does each quote connect to Heera as a character, or to her story? How might you connect each quote to your own world and life?
- Discuss what you know about the caste system in India from the text—research it further for more information. How does the caste system impact Heera's life and story? What parallels can you draw between the experiences of marginalised castes and those of marginalised groups in the United States?
- In Chapter 18, as she prepares for her second kung fu competition, Heera says both that 'she is not a Nat girl' (p 199) and that her excellent balance and flexibility are 'attributes we learned as Nat babies' (p 200). What do you think of these two seemingly contradictory statements? How does Heera reconcile the ways in which her identity as a Nat girl confines her with the ways in which it empowers her?
- Why do you think Mira Di refuses the same help that she so strongly encourages Heera to take? What differences does Mira Di see between herself and her cousins?
- What do you think of Heera's plan to rescue Rosy? Why does she confide in Azra and ask for her help, but not Rini Di? Do you agree with her choices and reasoning? Why or why not?
- Trust is a major theme in Heera's story. What is needed for trust to develop between people? How does Heera begin developing trust, and with whom? How does Heera's life change once she finds people she trusts?
- After Heera performs in the final competition in the US, Master Yi tells her that her greatest opponent has always been herself. What does he mean by this? How does the statement apply to more than Heera's journey with kung fu?
- What would justice look like for girls like Heera, Mira Di, Azra and Rosy? Is there justice for them over the course of the events in *I Kick and I Fly*? Why or why not?
- In the Letter from the Author at the back of the book, Ruchira Gupta says she wanted to 'share with you that someone somewhere of your age fought back and won.' What is something from Heera's story that you don't want to forget? How can you build on what you've learned reading the novel? What are some ways to 'fight back' and/or 'win' in your own life?

- Choose a conversation between Heera and another character and rewrite the scene from the other character's point of view. Consider their relationship with Heera and how they might regard her at different points in her story. Consider the ways that Heera grows over the course of the story and how others' reactions to her might change as a result.
- Every past and present social justice movement has relied on youth activism. The global movements to end sex trafficking and human trafficking are no different. Choose a social justice issue that interests you and research youth activism in that movement. Share your findings in a presentation or report.
- Heera encounters the concept of mindfulness in her kung fu training and in Bruce Lee's book. Research some ways to practice mindfulness and grounding. Choose a practice or practices that interest you and try to do them every day for a week. Record your observations and notes about the experience in a mindfulness journal.
- Ruchira Gupta wrote a letter to readers at the end of *I Kick and I Fly* to share the real-life inspiration for Heera's story and the author's own anti-sex-trafficking advocacy. Write her a letter in return. Consider what you've learned about Heera as a character, about her story and experiences, and about her culture. What connections might you make between Heera and yourself, your life, and your culture—both positive and negative? What can you share about the social justice issues you care about, or the experiences and stories you want to uplift as an activist or creator? End the letter by describing a concrete action you plan to take in support of an issue you care about.

AUTHOR OF NOTES

ANASTASIA COLLINS, MA, MLIS