

## The Dancer

By Asha Parekh

Illustrated by Becca Quant

Curriculum developed by Andrew Ramirez



### OVERVIEW

#### Quick-Glance 10 Points for Usage Guide

<b>Student Population</b>	
Age/Grade-Level Appropriateness	* 15+/10th+
Genre/s	* Fiction * Short story * Gay/lesbian * Coming of age
Length	* 2,197 words (15-minute read)
Content Advisories	* Consenting sexuality (kissing, touching) between two girls, artfully

	described
One-Sentence Summary	A charming, mysterious dancer in town for only one night stays with a local girl, whose curiosity she captures and whose eyes she opens to a new inner emotional complexity.
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	
Topics & Key Themes Overview	<p><b>Topics:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Dance industry</li> <li>* Indian dance</li> <li>* Indian cooking</li> <li>* Indian lifestyle and culture</li> <li>* Nature</li> <li>* Boredom</li> <li>* Physical beauty</li> </ul> <p><b>Themes:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Adolescent awakening</li> <li>* Expectation vs. reality</li> <li>* Beauty standards</li> <li>* Loneliness</li> <li>* Bitterness</li> <li>* Superiority/inferiority complex</li> <li>* Sexual power dynamics</li> <li>* Daydreaming/fantasizing</li> <li>* Emotional distance from adults</li> </ul>
Historic Events/Time Period for Study	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Present-day Indian culture</li> <li>* Traditional Indian cuisine</li> <li>* Traditional Indian dance</li> </ul>
Complementary Text	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>* Video: "Manpreet and Naina @ Warrior Bhangra 2014" (<a href="https://bit.ly/2VQY6D4">https://bit.ly/2VQY6D4</a>)</li> <li>* Movie clip: <i>Call Me By Your Name</i> directed by Luca Guadagnino: <a href="https://bit.ly/2JQMSw7">https://bit.ly/2JQMSw7</a></li> <li>* Book: <i>Call Me By Your Name</i> by André Aciman</li> </ul>
Author & Artist Information	<p><b>Asha Parekh</b> is a social worker based in Salt Lake City.  <b>Becca Quant</b> is an illustrator based in Glendale.</p>
Key Common Core Standards (found in detail following the curriculum)	<p>Grade 9-10 Common Core Standards:</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.C          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7          CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1</p>

	<p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4</p> <p>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2 CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.C CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5</p> <p>* Note: Questions recommended for assessment are marked with two asterisks.</p>
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### Author Biography

**Asha Parekh** is a licensed clinical social worker who devotes her time to improving Utah’s refugee systems to be welcoming and effective in facilitating refugee integration. She lives in Salt Lake City, Utah.

### Artist Biography

**Becca Quant** is an illustrator based in Glendale. She enjoys working in many different art mediums, such as oil paints, acrylics, watercolors and gouache, ink, clay, and paper cutting. She finds daily inspiration in children’s films and animation and has always been fascinated by fairytales, folklore, and mythology. After graduating in 2014 with a BFA in studio art from Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, she moved to Glendale, where she has been working as an independent artist and showing her work at nearby galleries, art fairs, and local conventions.

### SYNOPSIS

Ten-year-old Kavita’s quiet life is interrupted when a dance troupe moves in with her family for one night. Kavita meets Renuka, a talented dancer who travels with the troupe. The two girls are around the same age and share a pleasant afternoon together. After everyone retires for an afternoon nap, the girls “pretend” to be adults—kissing each other on the couch. That night, Kavita attends Renuka’s show and feels tremendous sadness and, eventually, bitterness toward Renuka. The story masterfully illuminates teenage boredom and intense adolescent anxiety through the lens of a young woman who is learning what it means to be herself.

### CURRICULUM

#### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

##### Topic

Google Image search “traditional Indian dance.” What catches your eye about the images you see? What type of clothing do you notice? What about the jewelry and makeup? How are the dancers posed? Do they look comfortable and happy or unnatural and overly posed?

Five-Minute Quick Write:

Write down 10 descriptive words you experience from these images (for example, strength, confidence, beauty, skill, talent). Compare what you wrote with a partner. What similarities and/or differences do you notice between your words?

Optional: Write a flash fiction piece (no more than 10 sentences) about anything you want. Just be sure to include all 10 words you selected.

### Main Ideas

Journaling:

In a ten-minute journal entry, respond to the following prompt:

Starting now, you must spend all of eternity in one of the following places: a deserted island in the middle of nowhere or Times Square on New Year's Eve. Pick only one place and explain your reasoning.

Share your writing with a partner.

### Passage-Specific Themes

Small-Group and Class Discussion:

Read the following passage from "The Dancer." Discuss the questions below in small groups, then share your ideas with the class:

I just lay on that dilapidated couch on the verandah remembering Renuka in all her dancing glory as she moved her feet across the stage with the skill and precision of a magician's hands. I imagined her sitting in her spectacular purple and gold dance outfit, her made-up face with all the jewelry adorning it, looking out of the window of the van moving farther and farther away from me.

Question One: Without knowing anything about the story, what do you think it means to compare someone to a "magician"? What does a magician do figuratively? Do you think Renuka is trustworthy?

Question Two: Imagine you are the narrator daydreaming on the couch. What words would you use to describe how you are feeling? Are you angry, sad, confused, or happy? Explain your reasoning.

Optional: Illustrate the imagery described in this passage. It can either be literal (and include the jewelry, beautiful clothes, etc.) or it can be abstract and communicate the "feeling" of this passage in a different way. Draw for 10 minutes and present your work to the class.

### Universal Themes

Option One: Would you prefer to meet someone you really like in a romantic way for just one afternoon and never see them again, or would you prefer to never meet them at all? Why? Does your answer change if you replace romance with friendship only? Why or why not? Discuss.

Option Two: Research the name Kavita. What does it mean? Now, look up the meaning of the name Renuka. (Hint: They're both Sanskrit words.)

Write two short character descriptions of two people who have these names. What do they each like to do, and what do they each hate doing? Are they social, reclusive, smart, or quiet? Do you think these two characters would be friends, enemies, or somewhere in the middle? Use telling details and descriptive language so the characters come to life. Share your character descriptions with a partner.

## Key Vocabulary

Definitions are context-dependent. Make sure any definitions you look up or work from are the ones that most correctly fit in the context of the story.

Level One	Level Two	Level Three
slew	troupe	intermingled
keen	resonate	jacaranda tree
hastily	solitude	verandah
caress	siro	dilapidated
feigned	puris	reverberated
fused	rotli	basking
	stealthily	buffet (v.)
	intermingled	
	fretting	

## Vocabulary Activity Options

1. Look up a few “foodie” pictures of siro, puris, and rotli. (A basic Google search will do, but Instagram has some of the best pictures.)

What kind of adjectives do these foods—sweet siro, puris, and rotli—call to mind? Are they appetizers, desserts, or main courses? In your opinion, do these foods complement the overall tone of the story or contradict it? Discuss with the class.

Optional: Research Indian cuisine and create a menu of food for the entire dance troupe to eat that night. Write the entrees on a posterboard menu, and include an hand-drawn illustration or photo of the food.

Suggested materials: Computers with Internet access, poster board, plain white printer paper, and pens or colored pencils

2. Research and learn about contemporary Indian dance troupes. Here is a YouTube video to get you started: <https://bit.ly/2VQY6D4>

How would you describe the style of dance and music? What do the dance and costumes say about Indian culture? Discuss in small groups or with a partner.

Next, research another dance tradition from a different culture, like folklorico dance. Spend about five minutes clicking through different countries and learning about their dance troupes. Now, select the dance troupe you find the most interesting. Compare it with the traditional Indian dance troupe mentioned in the story. How are the costumes similar and/or different? What words would you use to describe each style of dance? Discuss.

3. Google Image search the jacaranda tree. This beautiful, colorful tree is incredibly resilient, requiring very little water and thriving in semi-arid climates like South Africa and Australia's.

Who do you think most resembles the jacaranda tree, Kavita or Renuka? Consider each girl's personality and character rather than her physical appearance. Share your ideas with the class.

### Post-Reading Class Discussion Options

1. Do you think Kavita really wants Renuka to die at the end of the story? Why or why not? Discuss.
2. In "The Dancer," it might seem like Kavita is envious of Renuka. Given Renuka's nomadic lifestyle, in what ways might Renuka be jealous of Kavita? Do you think Renuka might be even more jealous than is Kavita? Why or why not?
3. What do you make of the "do what real moms and dads do at night" scene? While it appears to be a first for Kavita, do you think this is the first time Renuka has done this? Why or why not?
4. Do you think Renuka and Kavita will ever speak again? Why or why not? Discuss.

### \*\* Text-Dependent Question Options

1. How does Kavita feel about her relationship with the adults in the story? Does she feel close to them or distant from them? Cite the text.
2. How does Kavita's perception of Renuka change while watching her perform at the end of the story? Do you think Kavita prefers the on-stage or the off-stage Renuka? Cite the text.
3. Re-read the following excerpt from "The Dancer":

"I followed my new friend and instant idol around till we sat down to eat. I paid more close attention to Renuka than to what was on my plate. I stole glances at her while she wasn't looking."

In literature, tone is the author or narrator's attitude. How does Kavita's perception of Renuka shift into a more jaded and aggressive tone? What is the cause of this anger? Do you think it all has to do with Renuka? Refer to the text to support your analysis.

4. Look at the story's art. Why do you think artist Becca Quant chose to focus on Renuka's hands? What do Renu's hands tell us about her character? Cite the story and the artwork.

### Writing Exercises

#### Narrative

In "The Dancer," expectations differ from reality. These expectations reveal truths about the character who is assuming. The fact that Kavita thinks Renuka will be stuck up, for example, might signal Kavita's fear of being looked down upon.

With this in mind, write about a moment in your life when a person or place turned out to be completely different from your expectations. How did it make you feel when you found out you were wrong? Write whatever comes to your mind; it doesn't have to be perfect.

Aim for two pages. Share your essay with a partner.

### **Descriptive**

In the story, Parekh's descriptive language not only shows us how characters look, but also reveals how they feel. Notice how Renuka's character seems to change based on how she looks. With this in mind, it's worth considering not only how this makes Renuka feel, but also how it makes Kavita feel.

Now, in one page, describe a moment when you either met someone for the first time or had to say goodbye to someone. Instead of describing what you said to the person, only write about what the person was wearing and how it made you feel. Use telling details and sensory language.

### **\*\* Analysis**

Write a two- to three-page analysis in response to following questions:

- What effect does Renuka's occupation have on Kavita? Why do you think Parekh chooses to make Renuka a dancer rather than a ventriloquist, magician, or singer?
- What about dancing puts a spell on Kavita, and how is this highlighted in the final scene, when Kavita imagines Renuka's death?

In literature, everything happens for a reason. When you structure your analysis, step inside Parekh's mind as if you were the writer.

### **Complementary Text Option**

Consider this short excerpt from American writer André Aciman's novel, *Call Me By Your Name*, a story about an affair between two young men and its effect on their lives for years to come:

He came. He left. Nothing else had changed. I had not changed. The world hadn't changed. Yet nothing would be the same. All that remains is dream-making and strange remembrance.

Optional: After reading the excerpt, watch this scene from the film adaptation of *Call Me By Your Name*: <https://bit.ly/2JQMSw7>

### **Writing Exercise**

According to this excerpt, our memories serve as dreams we create in our minds over time. We over-remember certain parts and forget others. In many ways, our memories are like movie clips we replay in our heads, zooming in to certain frames and adding artistic flair. With this in mind, think of yourself as the director of your own memory.

Journaling:

Think about a moment you can remember like it was yesterday. Spend exactly three minutes writing, without taking the pen off the paper, about that moment. Write with descriptive details and sensory language so your reader can visualize your memory. It's okay if some parts don't make sense or if some words are misspelled. What matters most is you keep writing for three minutes straight.

When you're done, stretch your hand. Then, look at what you wrote. Analyze it. Is there anything you didn't expect to write? Do you find yourself focusing more on setting or on characters? Share your writing with a partner.

## Activity Options

### Classroom Activity One

Divide the class into three groups. All groups will present their findings to the class after they spend about 17-20 minutes researching the following topics:

Group 1: These students are in charge of studying the foods mentioned in “The Dancer.” Ask them to pay specific attention to how the foods are made, when they are traditionally served, and what they symbolize.

Group 2: This group is tasked with researching the different costumes and jewelry members of an Indian dance troupe might wear. These students will also research different dance styles and the specific time of year when a certain dance might be performed. (For example, in ballet, the Nutcracker is performed during Christmas.)

Group 3: These students will focus on “The Dancer’s” natural setting. In the story, Parekh references different trees and shrubs, as well as the weather. Can the group identify where the story takes place? Refer to the text. Then, name one type of tree, plant, and bird that is native to the area.

Follow-up Discussion:

- What do the topics your class researched have in common?
- In what ways might the author have paired these aspects of culture to have a certain effect upon the reader?
- If this story had taken place in a different setting and/or culture, do you think it would have a similar or different effect? Why?

### Classroom Activity Two

Gather students into groups of four. The students will engage in a collaborative storytelling activity, in which they flip the point of view and write a new account of the events from Renuka’s perspective.

Here’s how it works: each student will write one sentence, and the student to their left will write the next sentence.

Each student contributes one sentence to each category, for a total of four sentences written by each student and a 16-sentence-long story:

- Renuka thinking about what Kavita’s home will be like
- Renuka meeting Kavita for the first time
- Renuka playing “mommy and daddy” with Kavita
- Renuka dancing for Kavita at the end of the story

Ask each group to read its collaborative short story aloud to the class.

### Home Activity

Write a letter to a friend you haven’t spoken to in at least two years. Tell the person a little bit about what you remember from the last time you spoke to them. Update them on your life, as well, including what you’ve done lately and what’s changed the most about you. After you write the letter, read it over.

Do you still want to send it? Show it to your teacher for credit. Then, if you're brave enough, put the letter in the mailbox.

Note: You don't have to write to someone with whom you've been romantically involved.

### Guest Speaker

Option One: Invite the author, Asha Parekh, to speak to the class about her story and her experience serving refugees as a social worker. Ask her to lead a writing workshop.

Option Two: Invite the artist, Becca Quant, to speak about her inspiration for creating the story's artwork, as well as her experience studying studio art at Cal Poly. Ask her to lead an art workshop.

Option Three: Invite members of the local Indian dance troupe, The Haseen Dance Company, to talk to the class while wearing their dance costumes. Ask them to perform or simply discuss why they dance.

Please contact The Haseen Dance Company at 213.290.9379 to arrange a classroom visit.

Note: *Literature for Life* helps coordinate and facilitate author and artist visits.

### Field Trip

Visit the Los Angeles County Arboretum and Botanic Gardens (301 N. Baldwin Avenue, Arcadia). There, you'll be able to experience much of the natural beauty depicted in "The Dancer." Jacaranda trees and hibiscus shrubs line the gardens and transport you to a colorful world of purple and acacia.

Onsite Writing Activity:

Find a comfortable place to sit. In a 15- to 20-minute journal entry, respond to the following prompt(s):

- How does being in a natural setting similar to that of "The Dancer" change your experience of the story?
- Optional: Consider how the food complements the story's setting. Consider the texture of the food, its taste, and whether or not it matches the setting.

Optional: Order rotli, puris, and siro from a local Indian restaurant to enjoy at the park. While eating, ask students to share some of their creative writing from earlier parts of the curriculum.

## COMMON CORE STANDARDS REFERENCE

***This story and its exercises are appropriate for 10th grade and above. Ninth- and tenth-grade standards are cited.***

### Pre-Reading & Themes Activity Options

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B: Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.C: Spell correctly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

### **Vocabulary Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.9: Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.1.B: Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, absolute) and clauses (independent, dependent; noun, relative, adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2.C: Spell correctly.

### **Post-Reading Class Discussion Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3: Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Text-Dependent Question Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.B: Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience's knowledge level and concerns.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1.C: Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.2: Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.4.A: Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word's position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.5: Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.

**Writing Exercise Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.A: Engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation, or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view, and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.E: Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed, or resolved over the course of the narrative.

**Complementary Reading Text (Comparative Writing Exercise)**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.C: Use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

**Activity Options**

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.3.D: Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.7: Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.2: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.4: Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning and the organization, development, substance, and style are appropriate to purpose, audience, and task.