

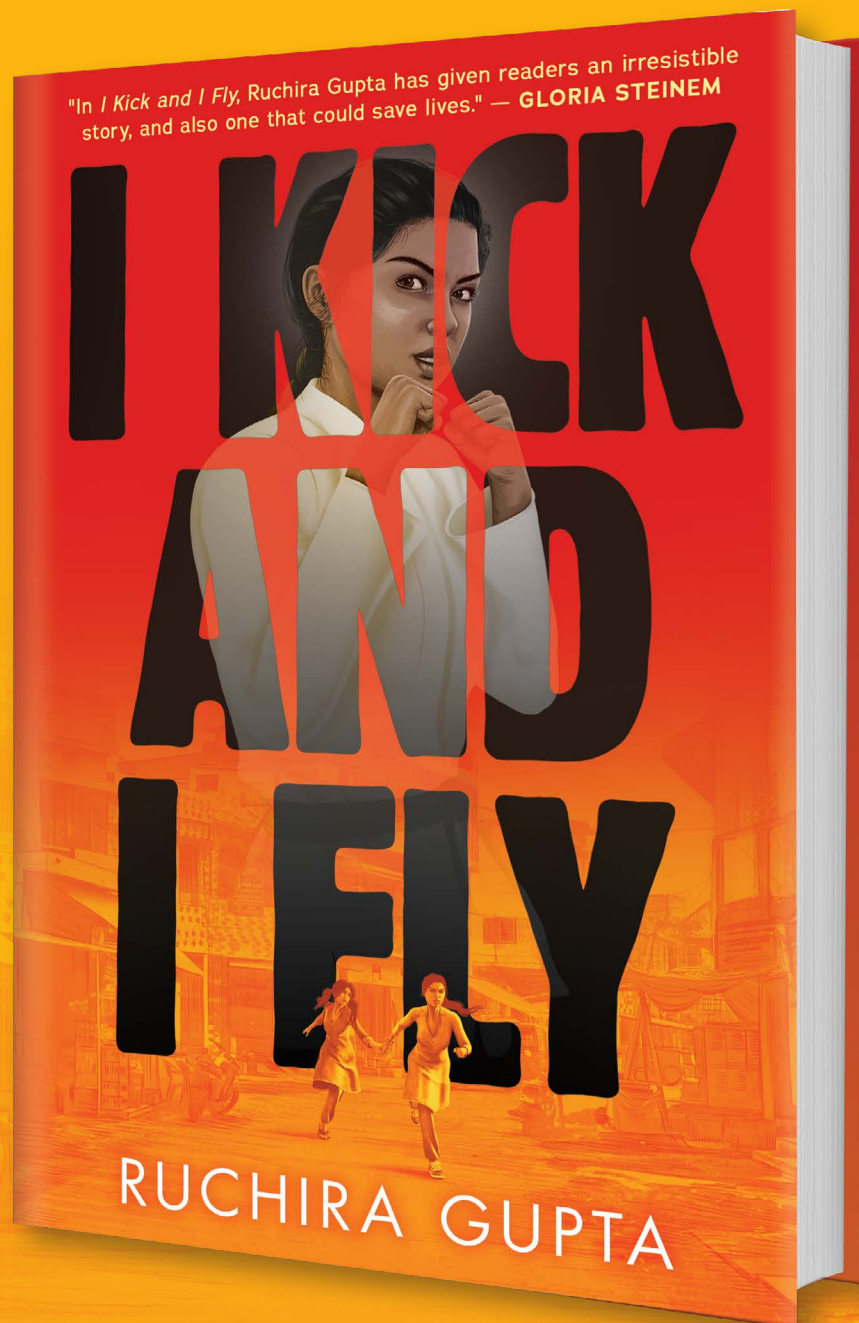
# DISCUSSION GUIDE

# I KICK AND I FLY

BY RUCHIRA GUPTA

AGES  
12 & UP  
GRADES  
7 & UP

Includes  
resources for  
younger and  
older readers



The  
Power  
of Story

Building Equitable  
Bookshelves

 SCHOLASTIC

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

Dear Reader,

I started writing this story when a fourteen-year-old girl just like Heera won a gold medal in a karate competition in Forbesganj. She was being groomed for prostitution along with other girls in her lane. A lane just like Girls Bazaar.

An annual cattle fair used to claim girls from that lane every year. When my NGO, Apne Aap, opened a community center and hostel there, we were constantly attacked by men like Gainul and Ravi Lala. They would stalk the mothers, their daughters, and me, hurling abuses, throwing stones, stealing from our offices and even kidnapping girls.

We built higher walls around the hostel to prevent traffickers from jumping over. I posted guards outside my home, hired lawyers, filed police complaints and cases in court. Just like Mai, some mothers in the lane disobeyed their husbands, even though they were beaten up. Their daughters were the first batch of girls in our hostel.

A lot happens over the course of this book—abduction, escape, competition, feuds, the complicated relationships between friends and family members . . . between male and female roles, between people of different castes. You will see an entire community change, characters transform, and the impossible is achieved. I actually saw this happen. I end the book with what has happened.

The change was both internal and external. We turned red-light areas into non-red-light areas across the country, put traffickers in jail and children in school. We started karate and kung fu classes for the girls to help them rediscover their bodies. They began to break burning tiles and win championships. They gained the respect of the town and their families and found new confidence in themselves. Women have taken over the huts and turned them into real homes and small businesses. Seventy of the seventy-two brothels in the lane this story takes place in are now closed.

The truth is that there is not one, but many Heeras. Girls Bazaars still exist in many parts of our world, including the US. I wrote this story because I wanted to share with you that someone somewhere of your age fought back and won. I wanted you to know that change is possible. I have witnessed it in my own lifetime.

Heera's story is a story of hope in spite of great odds. It's about our bodies—who they belong to and the command they can give us. It is the story of a community that resolves to make change contagious and succeeds. I hope you find a friend in Heera who will give you some clues to making the changes you would like in your own life.

The martial arts classes continue in Forbesganj.

Yours sincerely,  
Ruchira





## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (Continued)

9. 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?
10. 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?
11. 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 marginalized castes and those of marginalized groups in the United States?
12. 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?
13. 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?
14. 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?
15. 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?
16. 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?
17. 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?
18. 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?

## EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. 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.
2. In small groups, research information about sex trafficking in the US and globally. Start by watching Ruchira Gupta's documentary, *The Selling of Innocents*, and reviewing the resources from the back of the book. From your compiled research and notes, create a tool to educate the public about this issue and to tell them how to get involved, take action, and support the work of advocacy organizations. The tool could be a pamphlet, presentation, Instagram post, TikTok video, podcast episode, or something else.
3. 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.
4. 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.
5. 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.

# EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES

**Ruchira Gupta** | Resources [ruchiragupta.com/resources](http://ruchiragupta.com/resources)

**Ruchira Gupta** | *The Selling of Innocents* Documentary [vimeo.com/761128163](https://vimeo.com/761128163)

**Nouvelle ELA** | Teaching Social Justice with Literature Circles [teachnouvelle.com/teaching-social-justice](http://teachnouvelle.com/teaching-social-justice)

**National Education Association (NEA)** | How Schools and Educators Can Combat Human Trafficking [nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/how-schools-and-educators-can-combat-human-trafficking](http://nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/how-schools-and-educators-can-combat-human-trafficking)

**Baylor University** | How to Talk About Human Trafficking with Children and Adolescents [onlinegrad.baylor.edu/resources/conversations-human-trafficking-children-teens](http://onlinegrad.baylor.edu/resources/conversations-human-trafficking-children-teens)

**United Nations Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC)** | Secondary Teaching Guide: Human Trafficking [unodc.org/e4j/zh/secondary/teaching-guide-human-trafficking/index.html](http://unodc.org/e4j/zh/secondary/teaching-guide-human-trafficking/index.html)

**The NO Project** | Lesson Plans: Human Trafficking and Modern Slavery [thenoproject.org/lesson-plans](http://thenoproject.org/lesson-plans)

**United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)** | Child Trafficking: A Middle School Unit [unicefusa.org/sites/default/files/6-8\\_Child\\_Trafficking\\_MS\\_2016.pdf](http://unicefusa.org/sites/default/files/6-8_Child_Trafficking_MS_2016.pdf)

**United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF)** | Child Trafficking: A High School Unit [unicefusa.org/sites/default/files/9-12\\_Child\\_Trafficking\\_HS\\_2016.pdf](http://unicefusa.org/sites/default/files/9-12_Child_Trafficking_HS_2016.pdf)

## FURTHER READING

### FICTION

*Internment* by Samira Ahmed (Ages 12 & up; Grades 7 & up)

*Monday's Not Coming* by Tiffany D. Jackson (Ages 13 & up; Grades 8 & up)

*Sold* by Patricia McCormick (Ages 10–14; Grades 5–9)

*Traffick* by Ellen Hopkins (Ages 14 & up; Grades 9 & up)

*The Life I'm In* by Sharon G. Flake (Ages 14 & up; Grades 9 & up)

### NONFICTION

*Girls Like Us: Fighting for a World Where Girls Are Not for Sale: A Memoir* by Rachel Lloyd (Adult)

*Hidden Girl: The True Story of a Modern-Day Child Slave* by Shyima Hall (Ages 14 & up; Grades 9 & up)

*We Are Displaced: My Journey and Stories from Refugee Girls Around the World* by Malala Yousafzai (Ages 14 & up; Grades 9 & up)

## ANTI-TRAFFICKING ORGANIZATIONS

Dressember Foundation  
[dressember.org](http://dressember.org)

ECPAT-USA  
[ecpatusa.org](http://ecpatusa.org)

FAIR Girls  
[fairgirls.org](http://fairgirls.org)

Love146  
[love146.org](http://love146.org)

National Human Trafficking Hotline  
[humantraffickinghotline.org/en](http://humantraffickinghotline.org/en)

Polaris Project  
[polarisproject.org](http://polarisproject.org)

Rescue Foundation  
[rescuefoundation.net](http://rescuefoundation.net)

Safe House Project  
[safehouseproject.org](http://safehouseproject.org)

### Survivor and/or BIPOC-led Programs Supporting Sex Trafficking Survivors

Apne Aap (New York and India) [apneaap.org](http://apneaap.org)

Asian Women for Equality (Canada) [asianwomenequality.org](http://asianwomenequality.org)

Breaking Free (St. Paul, MN) [breakingfree.net](http://breakingfree.net)

Courtney's House (Washington, DC) [facebook.com/officialCourtneysHouse](https://facebook.com/officialCourtneysHouse)

EVA Center (Boston) [evacenter.org](http://evacenter.org)

GEMS (Girls Educational & Mentoring Services) (New York, NY) [gems-girls.org](http://gems-girls.org)

LIFT (Living in Freedom Together) (Worcester, MA) [liftworcester.org](http://liftworcester.org)

Mentari (Queens, NY) [mentariusa.org](http://mentariusa.org)

MISSEY (Oakland, CA) [misssey.org](http://misssey.org)

More Too Life, Inc. (Miami, FL) [moretoolife.org](http://moretoolife.org)

My Life My Choice (Boston, MA) [mylifemychoice.org](http://mylifemychoice.org)

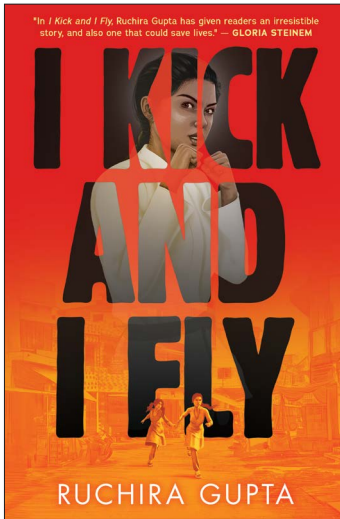
OPS (Organization for Prostitution Survivors) (Seattle, WA) [seattleops.org](http://seattleops.org)

Stop Trafficking Us (Maine) [stoptraffickingus.org](http://stoptraffickingus.org)

Thistle Farms (Nashville, TN) [thistlefarms.org](http://thistlefarms.org)

YouthSpark (Atlanta, GA) [youth-spark.org](http://youth-spark.org)

## PRAISE FOR *I KICK AND I FLY*



HC: 9781338825091 • \$18.99  
Ages 12 & up • Grades 7 & up  
Also available as an ebook and  
as an audio download

“Heera’s narration contains vivid sensory descriptions that, along with the Hindi words scattered throughout, bring the setting to life, quickly immersing readers in her world. The depth of the story’s details and its themes of bodily autonomy, community, and women’s empowerment reflect Gupta’s experience as the founder of Apne Aap, an NGO working to end sex trafficking. A triumphant debut.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

“Debut author Gupta renders Heera’s perseverance amid grueling circumstances via straightforward prose and imbues this searing tale with an ominous ambiance that complements its dark themes.”  
—*Publishers Weekly*

“In *I Kick and I Fly*, Ruchira Gupta has given young readers an irresistible story, and also one that could save lives. This book is a gift.”  
—**Gloria Steinem, Journalist and Social Political Activist**

“*I Kick and I Fly* is a powerhouse of a debut. Ruchira Gupta has crafted a page-turner of a read, steeped in place and full of indelible characters, managing to be at once propulsive and enlightening, infuriating and inspiring. But maybe most important, Heera’s story is a beacon of hope to a generation of young people trying to transform an unjust world.”  
—**Gayle Forman, New York Times bestselling author of *If I Stay* and *We Are Inevitable***

Watch author Ruchira Gupta introduce *I Kick and I Fly* at [bit.ly/IKickAndIFlyPreview](https://bit.ly/IKickAndIFlyPreview)



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ruchira Gupta is a writer, feminist campaigner, professor at New York University, and founder of the anti-sex-trafficking organization 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.

This guide was prepared by Anastasia Collins, MA, MLIS, librarian, youth literature scholar, anti-oppression educator. Follow her at [@DarkLiterata](https://twitter.com/DarkLiterata).

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