

# TIGER BOY

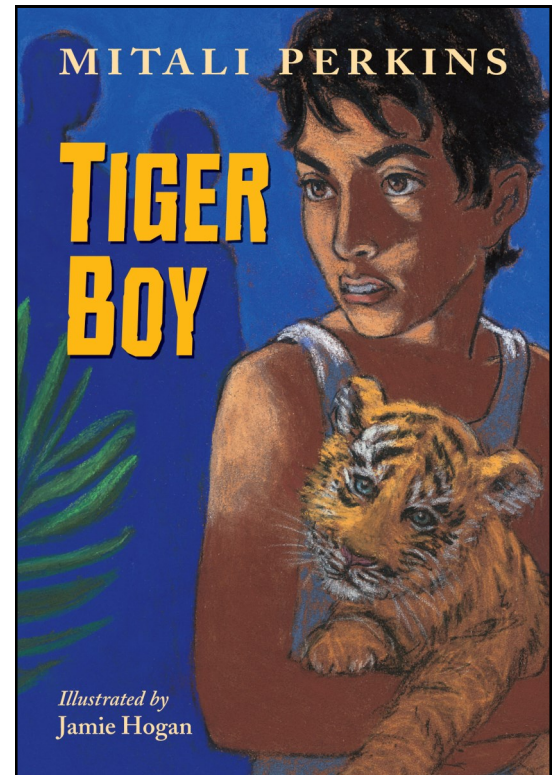
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**Discussion & Activity Guide Developed by Charlesbridge**

Neel, a young Bengali boy, lives with his parents and sister in an island village neighboring a dangerous tiger reserve. When a female tiger cub escapes from the reserve and is loose on the island, Neel and his older sister, Rupa, decide to search for the cub themselves before wealthy Mr. Gupta can capture the cub to sell on the black market.

Neel's experience searching for the cub leads him to a change of heart. He comes to realize what is truly important in his life and what he must do to protect it.



978-1-58089-660-3 HC \$14.95

Also available in e-book editions

Ages 7–10 • 6 x 8 3/4 • 144 pages

## After Reading Tiger Boy . . .

- ◆ How would you describe Neel?
- ◆ What did you like best about him?
- ◆ Discuss the friendship shared among Ajay, Viju, and Neel. How are the dynamics between each boy different? What clues to their friendship are we given during the opening scene at the pond?
- ◆ Ajay's father is a teacher at the boys' school. How do you think this makes Ajay feel, especially since Ajay is stronger in athletics than he is in academics?
- ◆ Describe Gupta. How would you feel about Gupta if you lived in the Sunderbans?
- ◆ Who is Headmaster? If you were Neel, how would you feel about Headmaster? If you could be honest with Headmaster and give him advice on how to interact with others, what would you say?
- ◆ "Anything could happen to a young creature far from home" (page 14). This line could have dual meaning in this story. Discuss the different ways to interpret this line.
- ◆ In the beginning of the story, Neel did not want to win the scholarship and therefore he simply "went through the motions" when studying for the math portion. Discuss a time when you purposely didn't give your best effort on something. Why did you do that, and how did it make you feel? If you were in Neel's place, would you be honest with your parents about your feelings towards the scholarship opportunity?

- ◆ Baba, Ma, and Rupa want Neel to get a good education in Kolkata so that he can get a good job and help provide for his family. This is a lot of pressure to place on someone. Have you ever been in a situation in which a lot of pressure was placed on you by others? How did this make you feel, and how did you handle the pressure?
- ◆ In the Sunderbans, many girls do not make it to Class Five and are pulled out of school to earn money for their families in the city, or to help out in the home. Discuss ways in which boys and girls are treated differently from one another in today's society. If your family is made up of brothers and sisters, are the responsibilities of each different?
- ◆ Neel struggles very much in math, but has the "ability to absorb the meaning of words, sentences, stories, books . . ." (page 39). Are you good at both math and English, or does one subject come to you more quickly than the other? How have your strengths and/or weaknesses influenced what you plan to do in the future? Do you have a career goal in mind?
- ◆ Neel has a fitful sleep worrying about the tiger cub's whereabouts (page 43). To get back to sleep he uses his relaxation trick of mapping out his island home bit-by-bit. What do you think makes this exercise relaxing? Do you have relaxation tricks that you use?
- ◆ Neel and Rupa take a great risk by searching for the tiger cub in secret, while their father also searches on behalf of greedy Gupta. Would you do what they did and keep such a secret from your parents? Talk about the decision process you'd go through and the pros and cons you'd weigh if you were in Neel and Rupa's position.
- ◆ When Gupta's men catch up to Rupa and Neel fleeing with the baby cub, Rupa trips and tells Neel to keep running. Rupa plans to stall the men so that Neel has more time to reach his father's *nauka* and row the cub to safety. Have you ever had to cover for a loved one? How did it make you feel?
- ◆ "*Many things in life are worth more than money,*" Neel said (page 97). Discuss this statement with your class. What do you think this means to Neel? Could this statement relate to your own life? What types of things are worth more than money to you?
- ◆ When Neel and Baba are approaching the tiger reserve to return the cub, Baba begins singing. Rumor had it that singing kept the tigers from attacking. When around animals, what methods of safety do you follow? For example, when approaching a dog you've never met, how should you behave?
- ◆ Kushal, one of the rangers at the tiger reserve, gives Neel the privilege of naming the tiger cub, since he was the one who rescued her. Neel chooses the name Sundari, meaning "Little beauty." What would you name the cub if you had rescued her?
- ◆ The intense experience that Neel went through to rescue the tiger cub changed his feelings toward the scholarship exam and his outlook on his future in general. Have you ever gone through an experience that changed your opinion on something, or altered the way you approached the future?

# Language Arts

## Descriptive Language

Neal describes the sensations that he associates with home:

*“Home for him was the hiss of his father’s boat as it slipped through the deltas, golpata branches swaying in the monsoon rains, and the evening smell of jasmine flowers near his house mingling with green chilies and fresh ilish fish simmering in mustard-seed oil”* (page 3).



- ♦ Close your eyes and picture yourself at home. What do you hear? Smell? How does it make you feel? Write a paragraph that captures these things that trigger a feeling of home for you.

## Journal entry

Pretend that you are an older boy or father living in the Sunderbans after the cyclone hit. Fishing is scarce, income is lacking, and you are forced to make the decision to work for Gupta or leave your family to find work in faraway cities. Write a journal entry about this decision process—what you are considering, and how it does it make you feel?

## English Expressions

Headmaster often switched between speaking Bangla and speaking English, often messing up English proverbs and expressions. For example, Headmaster said “murder two birds with the same rock” when he really meant “Kill two birds with one stone.”

- ♦ Draw two columns on a piece of paper. On one side, make a list of common expressions that you know. On the other side, “translate” the expression to show how you think Headmaster would say it.

# Science

## Tigers

Make a list of everything you know about tigers—their physical appearance, where they’re found, how they behave, what they eat, etc.

Now using your school library, the internet, and the resources listed in the back of *Tiger Boy*, conduct further research on tigers. Present what you’ve learned to the class. Include information on tiger reserves from around the world. What facts surprised you most?



## Cyclones

Just before this story takes place, Neel’s island was ravaged by a cyclone, tearing up bushes and trees and damaging the shoreline.

- ♦ Conduct research on cyclones—what are they caused by? What type of damage do they cause? How can people prepare for cyclones so that damage is minimized and people stay safe? Pick an historically significant cyclone to research. Prepare a two-minute presentation to give to your classmates about this cyclone and its aftermath.

## Land deterioration

The islands in the Sunderbans are shrinking, due to cyclones, erosion, and deforestation.

- ♦ Conduct research on deforestation—what is it, what causes it, and what areas of the world are most affected by it. Pick an area that suffers from the effects of deforestation and discuss it further with the class. How long has the problem been happening? What is being done to combat the issue? Is anything being done on a global scale to help? How could your class or community get involved?



## Mathematics

Before setting out on his search for the tiger cub with Rupa, Neel draws a map of his island to scale, using graph paper, a protractor, ruler, and compass.

- ◆ Draw a map of your neighborhood in as much detail as you can. Create a scale for the map (for example: one inch = 20 ft.). Include any important landmarks or distinguishing features that you think would be important when conducting a search through your neighborhood.

Baba builds Headmaster a beautiful desk and chair out of *sundari* wood. Headmaster then says that he might hire Baba to build furniture for the entire school, if Headmaster can raise the sufficient funds.

- ◆ As a class, create a mock woodworking business. Conduct research by contacting local lumber yards to determine the cost of different types of wood. Inquire with furniture mills about how much wood might go into the creation of a school desk and chair. Using these figures, draw up the proposal and price quote for building desks and chairs for a school. Use your own school as the model to figure out how many classrooms you'd need to fill, and with how many desks and chairs.

## Social Studies

Headmaster says "It's so blazing hot for January. I'll sweat to death, I'm sure. Our climate is changing due to the rest of the world, and we're the ones who suffer" (page 23).

- ◆ As a class, discuss what you know about climate change. What is causing it, and what is happening in nature as a result? Is there anything you can do in your daily life that would help to slow the effects of climate change? Is climate change a concern in all parts of the world? What do other countries do to combat climate change?

*"We named you after my favorite color, Neel," Ma often said, pointing at the horizon where the blue of the sky met the blue of the water" (page 5).*

- ◆ What is the story behind your name? Interview your family members to learn about the history of your name. Were you named after a relative? Does your name mean something in another language? Write a brief essay explaining the origin of your own name.

