

## HOW TO START YOUR OWN BOOK CLUB

Think it would be hard to start your own book club? Think again!

All you need is a little bit of organization and some friends who are as excited about the books they read as you are.

### HERE ARE A FEW TIPS TO GET YOU STARTED:

**The best way to find people to be in your reading group is to ask your friends.**

Think of all the people you know who like to read, and ask them to join. If you still don't feel like you have enough people, ask each of your friends to bring someone else. You can usually get a good discussion going with 6–8 people, but any number that is comfortable for you will work. If you're having trouble finding enough cool people to form your reading group, check with your school, local library, or bookstore to see if there's a group that you can join.

**Figure out when and where you want to meet.**

Some groups meet once a month, some meet every other month. You could get together at someone's house, in a park, on the beach, or in your school's library. If it sounds too official and overwhelming to decide all the “wheres” and “whens” right now, don't worry! It's YOUR group and so YOU get to make all the decisions. All you have to do is get together once, and you can work out the rest of the details later.

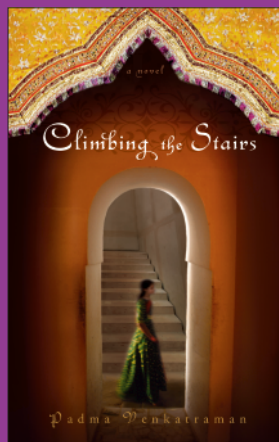
**Decide how you will choose books, and how the discussions will be run.**

This is another one that sounds a little scary but totally isn't. Maybe you have a favorite author that you and your friends would like to focus on. Or maybe you want to take turns picking your favorite book. Maybe one person likes to talk and would like to lead the discussion, or maybe you would rather just get together and talk about the books you are reading. If you get stuck, you can often find discussion questions online (try the publisher's website) or at your local library or bookstore.

**The most important thing to remember is that there's no right or wrong way to have a reading group. Do what you're comfortable with and always have fun, and your group will be a success!**

For more discussion guides to get your group going, visit

[www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians](http://www.penguin.com/teachersandlibrarians)



### Climbing the Stairs

by Padma Venkatraman

ISBN: 978-0-399-2474-6 (HC)  
Ages 12 up • Grades 7 up • \$16.99

A remarkable debut novel set in India that shows one girl's struggle for independence. *Climbing the Stairs* is a powerful story about love and loss set against a fascinating historical backdrop.

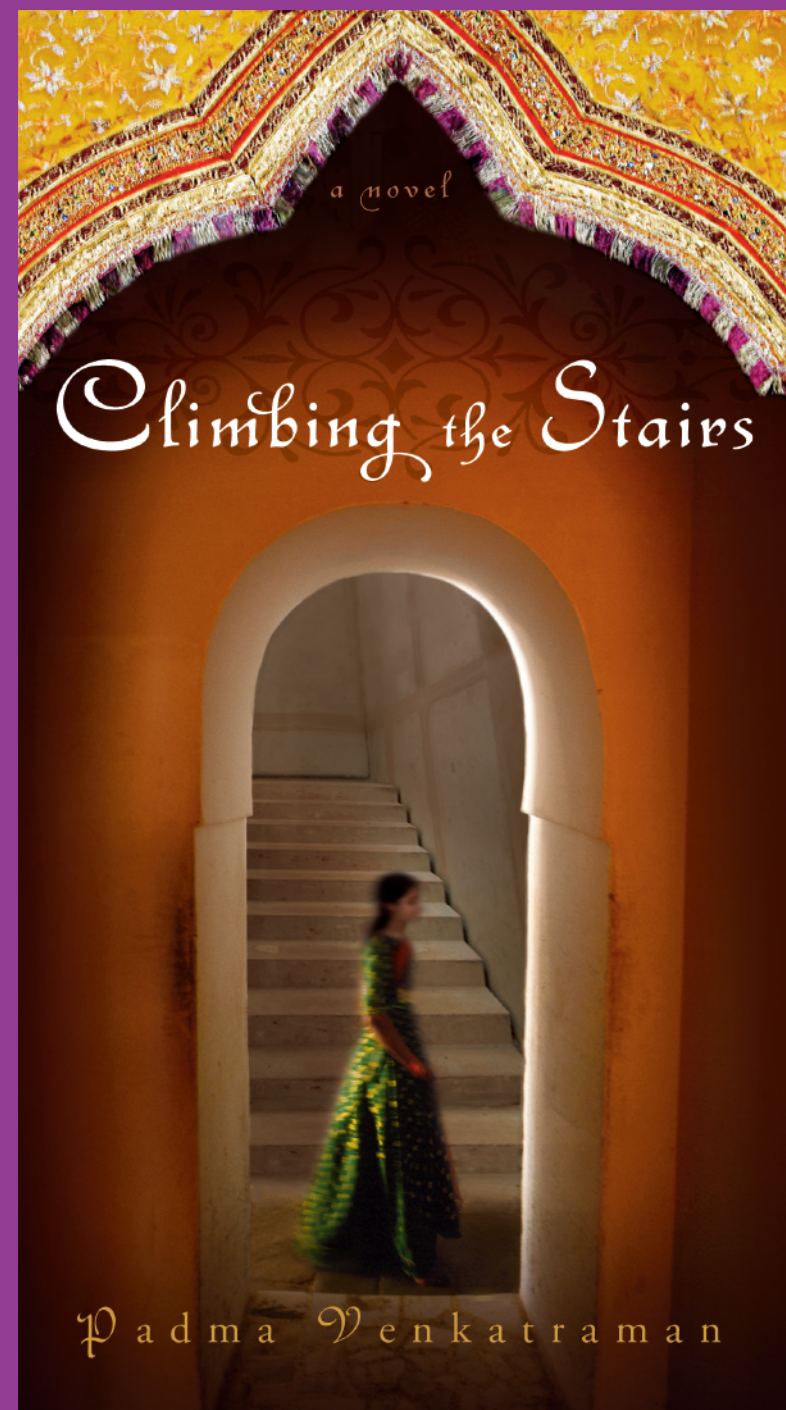


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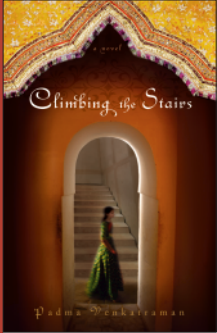
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## DISCUSSION GUIDE



## ABOUT THE BOOK



*Climbing the Stairs* is the story of fifteen-year-old Vidya: an intuitive and active young girl becoming a woman in British-occupied India during World War II. As classmates and friends of hers prepare themselves for men and marriage, Vidya dreams of going to college (an unusual proposition at such a time). But when tragedy strikes her family, Vidya and her brother Kitta must move into a traditional household with their father's extended family. In this new life, Vidya's only refuge is her grandfather's forbidden library, where she finds a friend in Raman, a boy also living in the house. But soon it is clear that Raman wants more than just friendship, and when Kitta makes a shocking choice the family cannot condone, Vidya's life becomes a whirlwind of personal and political complications. A perfect addition to any classroom unit on history and/or tradition, Vidya's story will resonate with young girls and boys alike.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Padma Venkatraman

This novel is loosely based on family stories about Padma's mother and father, who were both living in India during World War II. As an adolescent, Padma's mother spent her evenings in a library reading to her baby sister, much like Vidya does.

## COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- As Padma begins Vidya's story, how does she describe her home life?
- What about the descriptions is significant to the story's purpose and direction?
- As the novel begins, in what small ways does Vidya follow Indian tradition, and in what ways does she resist them?
- To Vidya, what does the game of chess symbolize, and why?
- In a few words, how would you describe the personality of periappa, especially during his visit to Vidya's house?
- How are some of the ways Vidya describes the protest march? (e.g. how does she use the five senses?) What is the significance of her descriptions?
- Above all else, what is it that Vidya internalizes about her experience during the protest march? What keeps her from expressing herself to her mother, brother and best friend?
- Moving into thatha's house is an adjustment for everyone in Vidya's family. Vidya and Kitta seem outraged; how does Amma react?
- What does this signify about traditional Indian gender roles, especially in relation to marriages?
- How does Vidya's new school and home differ from her old one? In what ways is Vidya's personal life and space violated?
- At school and in the women's rooms how does Vidya assert and respect herself, even in the slightest way, and even if no one else notices?
- Though Malati and Vidya have no interests in common, they do share similar character traits; what are they?
- What does the library provide for Vidya?
- What attracts Vidya to Raman? What makes him different than other boys, and what makes him similar?

- How does she stand up to Raman, and how does she stand up for Raman?
- Kitta's decision shakes the family dynamic inside the extended household. What do amma and Vidya think of Kitta? How does Kitta disagree?
- Although Vidya thinks Kitta is not right to enlist, how is she like her older brother, and less like her father?
- How does Raman disappoint Vidya upon her return from visiting Kitta?
- What realization about her relationship with Raman does Vidya come to? How is it affected by the transience of their lives?

## RESEARCH & WRITING ACTIVITIES

- Vidya's story is significant because of its timing and placement in history; how would such an experience change your life in today's world? Use specific examples and global issues to contribute to your story's authenticity.
- Imagine living in an extended family house such as Vidya's, and adhering to specific rules as Vidya does. According to your family tree, where would you and your family stand? Would you have to support and respect someone like periamma and periappa, or would you be in their authoritarian role? Write your family into this hierarchy. How would it affect your relationships?
- Reading and writing are simple tools we use every day in our lives, but they are looked down upon by Vidya's aunt and cousin. Imagine a world where women weren't expected, or even allowed, to read and write. Would there be any benefits? What would be the disadvantages?
- In the end, Vidya finds a potential husband, just as she didn't want to when the story began. What is different about Raman, and their plan for the future? Imagine having to plan marriages in advance as they did. How would our world be different with such stipulations?