



Book Title: *The Light Within You*

Author: Namita Moolani Mehra

Illustrator: Kamala Nair

Ages: 4–8 years

Identities/Lived Experiences/Themes in This Book

- Community
- Feelings
- South Asian/Middle Eastern American
- Immigration/Migration
- Multigenerational Relationships
- Religion/Faith

Anti-Bias Education

- **Empathy and Understanding**
- **Healthy Complex Identities**
- **Respect Across Differences**
- Notice, Name, and Reject Bias
- Responsiveness and Action

Social-Emotional Learning

- **Self-Awareness**
- Self-Management
- **Social Awareness**
- **Relationship Skills**
- Responsible Decision-Making

Persona Doll Guide Units

- Creating Safety and Belonging
- **Understanding You and Me**
- **Valuing Families**
- **Building a Community**

Persona Doll Connections

- **Practices Hinduism and has family in India**
 - All About Leela – p. 22
 - Leela celebrates Diwali – p. 80
 - Leela’s family has a neighborhood cookout – p. 116

**Background Information for Educators**

Children celebrate a variety of holidays based on their culture and religious beliefs. Schools often neglect to highlight the holidays and celebrations outside of the Western Christian calendar.

This book shares the story of the holiday Diwali, known as the Festival of Lights. It is a five-day-long Hindu celebration that is India's largest and most important holiday. The overall theme of Diwali is triumphing over adversity, light prevailing over darkness. Diwali is a time to start anew, and it is celebrated by the exchanging of gifts and the worship of the gods, Ganesh and Lakshmi.

The Light Within You features a young girl named Diya [dee-uh]. Diya is also the name for an oil lamp, which symbolizes prosperity, enlightenment, and the triumph of good over evil. Diya grew up celebrating Diwali in her native India, with her beloved Grandmother, Nani. When Diya moves to the United States, her classmates don't know what Diwali is about, and Diya feels worried about losing her connection to her culture.

Be sure to read the **Author's Note** at the back of the book to learn more about Diwali and reference the **Glossary** for key vocabulary.

Reflection Questions for Educators

1. What background knowledge do you have about faiths or cultures different from your own? How can you educate yourself about different cultural holidays?
2. Growing up, how did you and your family view cultural holidays or traditions that were different from yours? Have these views changed?
3. As an educator, have you ever struggled to understand a student's culture or religion?
 - a. What steps have you taken to create classroom communities that celebrate and affirm all cultures and religions?
4. How do you create opportunities for kids to learn about each other's cultures, families, and religions?

Book Summary: Read this to children before reading the book

This is a book about a special holiday called Diwali. Diwali is a special holiday celebrated by Hindus, and it is called the Festival of Lights. Raise your hand if you celebrate Diwali. Diya [Dee-uh] is a girl from India who moved to the United States. She loves to celebrate Diwali with her grandmother, Nani. As you listen to this book, think about your favorite holiday and what makes it special.

Discussion Questions

1. What is a holiday that you celebrate at home?
 - a. What do you do on this special holiday?
 - b. What special foods do you eat?
2. Diya misses her grandmother very much. Do you have someone special in your life who lives far away?
 - a. What do you do when you miss someone?
3. What special things did Diya and Nani do together to prepare for Diwali?
4. How did Diya celebrate Diwali? Let's look at the pages with the beautiful saris, food, and lanterns.
 - a. How does this remind you of any other holiday?
5. Do we all celebrate the same holidays in our class? How can we share our special holidays with our friends at school or in our neighborhood?
6. What can we learn about some of the different holidays we don't celebrate? What questions can we ask friends about their special holidays?
7. In this book, Diya worries about leaving India, her grandmother, and her special feelings about Diwali.
 - a. How does her grandmother help her feel better?
 - b. What helps you feel better when you are worried or miss someone?

Extension Activities**1. Cooking connection - Diwali treats**

Diwali is celebrated by cooking and eating delicious food. Let's pick one treat from India to cook and share! Fruit custard is a delicious, creamy dessert made with custard powder or cornstarch, milk, and fresh fruit. Served chilled, this tasty treat can be prepared by the teacher ahead of time or as a demonstration, and students can add the fruit. (Be aware of allergies; many recipes call for nuts that can be omitted.) [Click here a for recipe](#), or use the QR code.

**2. Holiday List**

Using a large sheet of chart paper, make a list of as many holidays as you can! Remember, some holidays are based on a religion (Christmas, Ramadan) and others are related to a region or government (4th of July) or celebration of a person (Martin Luther King Day, Mother's Day). Let the students think of all the holidays they can. Point out that some holidays are celebrated with family and some at school (Earth Day, 100th day of school, Valentine's Day). Emphasize that not everyone celebrates every holiday, and that's ok! Invite students to stand and share their favorite parts of a holiday their family celebrates at home.

3. Diwali Affirmation Poem

At the back of the book, *The Light Within You*, there is a poem called "Diya's Diwali Affirmation Poem." Read the poem aloud to the class and then create a movement or motion to go with each line. Read the poem together each morning for a week to practice fluency and provide an opportunity for affirmation.

Ex: I am the light that shines strong and bright. (make a muscle, move arms overhead like the sun).