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**SOUTH ASIA BOOK AWARD**  
for Children's and Young Adult Literature  
Lesson plan for  
*Bombay Blues* by Tanuja Desai Hidier


## *Bombay Blues*



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English and Social Studies

Grades 9-12

- CCSS ELA Reading: Literature Standard 2
  - CCSS ELA Writing Standard 7
  - C3 Framework Dimensions 1-4 (D2.Geo.6.9-12 and D2.Psy.9.9-12)
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## Overview

This lesson is appropriate for use in the high school or undergraduate classroom. It is aligned with Common Core ELA Reading Literature Standard 2 (development of theme), Common Core ELA Writing Standard 7 (research to answer a question), and the National Council for the Social Studies' College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework's Dimension 2 pathway for Geography and Psychology. The lesson would also work well as an introductory activity for World History or any course where the curriculum encompasses making connections between students' lives and the place(s) they come from.

Students will closely read excerpts from Tanuja Desai Hidier's novel *Bombay Blues*. Their task will be to evaluate what the meaning of "home" is – how does it integrate ideas related to both place and their own identities? In addition to practicing high school level close reading, students will use multi-disciplinary concepts to critically examine their own thinking about the seemingly simple concept of home. Finally, students will communicate the insights they have gained through this analysis.

## Objectives

- Students will identify the theme of the text and analyze how the theme is developed throughout each excerpt.
- Students will consider how best to use the concept of "home" to answer the question "How do place and identity shape each other?"
- Students will utilize concepts from different disciplines (Geography and Psychology) to evaluate the connection between place and identity as described in the text.
- Students will communicate the ways in which their own identities are tied to and shaped by place.

## Bell-Ringer

When class begins, ask students to individually consider the meaning of the word "home". This can be done as a quick-write, discussion in groups, or as a class brainstorming session. Isolate common components of students' definitions, especially looking for elements that reflect either place or identity.

## Close Reading (Three Levels of Questioning): Excerpt 1

Introduce the excerpt by telling students that they will be reading the prologue to a novel. Their task is to determine what the guiding theme of the novel will be. In an English classroom, this is a good opportunity to discuss the purpose and construction of prologues.

Once students have read the prologue, have them respond to the following prompts individually, in groups, or as a class:

1. Where will the narrator be traveling?  
**Bombay**
2. What do you think this novel will be about?

## Materials

- *Bombay Blues* by Tanuja Desai Hidier (PUSH, an imprint of Scholastic Press, 2014)
- UNESCO's World Heritage List: Chattrapati Shivaji Terminus Gallery (<http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/945>)

## Other Resources

- Interviews with the author: <http://thisistanuja.com/interviews-features/>

*Bombay Blues* follows Dimple, a college student, as she travels to Bombay. Her paternal grandfather (*Dadaji*) has recently died. Bombay is the city where her parents met and married and represents home in some ways – but not in others. Dimple grew up in the United States and isn't entirely sure what "home" should mean for her, but she wants to find it.

3. *Jugalbandi* is a Hindi-Urdu word meaning roughly "entwined twins" – it refers to the fusion of two things (like musical instruments when musicians from differing styles perform together). How might the word *jugalbandi* apply to the concept of "home"?

## Information-Gathering

Students should gather three pieces of information in order to contextualize the next excerpt and the discussion that follows.

1. Where is Bombay?  
Use atlases/your textbook or a projected map to ensure that students can locate Bombay on a map. Note that Bombay is the British colonial name of the city that was officially re-named Mumbai in 1995.
2. What do geographers mean when they use the concept "place"?  
Students should use the internet or other classroom resources to determine that when geographers say "place", they are talking about all of the things that make a particular location unique. The concept encompasses physical characteristics like mountains or climate and human characteristics like structures or languages spoken.
3. What do psychologists mean when they use the concept "identity"?  
Students should use the internet or other classroom resources to determine that when psychologists say "identity", they are talking about all of the patterns of thought and behavior that make an individual unique.

## Close Reading (Arguments and Evidence): Excerpt 2

Show students photos of the scene this chapter is set in: the Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. If possible, have a photo projected as they read.

Before reading, familiarize yourself and your students with the 2008 Mumbai terrorist attacks to the extent you think necessary:

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in\\_depth/south\\_asia/2008/mumbai\\_attacks/default.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/in_depth/south_asia/2008/mumbai_attacks/default.stm)

Give students Chapter 21: "Superdensecrushload" from *Bombay Blues*. As they read, they should evaluate how Tanuja Desai Hidier uses this chapter to develop her theme and how an encounter between Dimple and a fellow photographer allows the characters to attempt to answer the question "Does place determine your identity?" Students should be able to state Dimple's answer to that question at this point in the novel and should be able to provide textual evidence to support their analysis.

## Application and Evaluation

To complete the lesson, students should extend their thinking about the text into their own lives. What do place and identity have to do with each other? Where is home? Do they agree with Dimple's conclusions in Chapter 21?

In order to demonstrate their textual analysis and create extension of those ideas into

their own lives, students should choose one of the following quotations from the novel and respond by creating a letter, short essay, illustration, song, or poem that can be shared with the class, at a parent night, or with their families at “home”:

- “I hadn’t realized before this trip just how much my geographical historical coordinates were tied in to those of my parents, a twisting twirling umbilically bound compass you could spend a lifetime trying to detach. Or hang on to” (Chapter 17).
- “Whoever you want to be is who you are, just waiting to happen” (Chapter 27).
- “There’s no place like home, because *home is not a place*” (Chapter 44).