

## Closet Ghosts

written by Uma Krishnaswami  
illustrated by Shiraz Bhabha

### About the Book

**Genre:** Fiction

**Format:** Paperback, 32 pages

**ISBN:** 9780892394678

**Reading Level:** Grade 3–4

**Interest Level:** Grades 1–3

**Guided Reading Level:** O

**Accelerated Reader® Level/Points:**  
3.3/0.5

**Lexile™ Measure:** N/A

\*Reading level based on the ATOS Readability Formula

**Themes:** Identity, Self Esteem and Confidence, Religion and Spiritual (Hinduism), Overcoming Obstacles, School stories, Ghosts and Spirits, Moving to a new area and school, Immigration, Imagination, Home, Holidays and Traditions, Friendship, Families, Cultural Diversity, Conflict resolution, Childhood experiences, Courage, Religious Diversity, India, Asian/Asian American Interest

**Resources on the web:**

[leeandlow.com/books/the-closet-ghosts](http://leeandlow.com/books/the-closet-ghosts)

### SYNOPSIS

Moving to a new place is hard enough without finding a bunch of mean, nasty ghosts in your closet. This looks like a job for Hanuman, the Hindu monkey god, who can change shape in the blink of an eye and chase goblins and demons away with his thundering voice. When Hanuman answers Anu's plea for help, Anu rejoices-until she realizes that those pesky ghosts don't seem to be going anywhere.

Uma Krishnaswami effortlessly weaves motifs from Indian mythology into this bubbly story of ultimately finding comfort in a new place, and Shiraz Bhabha's exquisitely detailed acrylic paintings glow on the page. *The Closet Ghosts* is a treat that will delight and amaze any child who has faced a big change. . . or had ghosts in her closet.

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.

## BACKGROUND

### Hanuman

Hanuman is a Hindu god whose form is half-human and half-monkey. He is a key figure in Hindu stories and artwork. He is known for using his abilities in the service of others, and is often called "the perfect Hindu" for his selflessness. For more information about the story of Hanuman, see <https://www.durham.ac.uk/things-to-do/media/things-to-do/learn/online-resources/secondary-school-resources/The-Story-of-Hanuman.pdf>

### More about Hanuman (From the Author's Note):

Although Anu and her family and friends are made up characters, I didn't make Hanuman up. He is an important figure in the Hindu mythology of India. Stories about him have been told for thousands of years. When families like Anu's come to America, they bring these stories with them. Hanuman is bold and brave. He can change his size, from tiny to giant, in the blink of an eye. He is a loyal friend and servant to the god prince Ram, or Rama, and his family. He is thought to protect people from wicked ghosts and goblins.

A fourteenth-century poet named Tulsidas wrote a simple, beautiful poem about Hanuman. It's called the Hanuman Chaaleesa for its forty stanzas—"chaalees" in Hindi means "forty." Hanuman's line in my made up story, "Ghosts and demons come not near," is a translation of a line from this poem.

## BEFORE READING

### Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

- Have you ever moved to a new place? How did you feel? Or, how do you think someone might feel who has to move somewhere new?
- When you're feeling sad, what helps you?
- What are ghosts? What do you think you know about ghosts?

You may want to chart student responses questions so that you can refer back to them during or after reading. You could also have students journal their responses to these questions or pose the final question as a KWL discussion and chart so that you can refer back to it throughout and after the reading of the book to further their thinking on the topic(s).

## Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1; Craft & Structure, Strand 5; and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)  
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

**Book Title Exploration:** Talk about the title of the book, *The Closet Ghosts*. Ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? Do they think this will be a story or an informational book? What makes them think that?

**Book Walk:** Display the book and analyze the cover. What do students notice in the illustration? Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, dedication, author's note, and illustrations.

**Read Author's and Illustrator's Biographies:** Read the author's and illustrator's biographies in the book or at the end of this guide. What do you think the process is like to write a book for young readers? Why do you think these creators made this book for young readers?

**Discuss the Author's Note:** Depending on students' background knowledge, it may be helpful to read the author's note and/or talk about "what is a god?" Ask students to make connections to god(s) they've heard about in their families or in other stories in a way that feels appropriate for your school and classroom. You may wish to offer a generic description of "god" for the purpose of comprehending this book, such as: "A god is something that a person or group believe in that's special to their beliefs or culture. Different religions and cultures have different ideas about gods. Often, people believe a god has certain special powers. In this book, the main character has a special statue of a Hindu god, Hanuman. Hinduism is one type of religion."

## Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out:

- Why does this story have such an interesting title, "The Closet Ghosts?"
- How does Anu, the main character, solve a problem in this story?

Encourage students to consider why the author would want to share this story with young people.

## VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below.

Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

### Content Specific

ghosts, hangers, statue, Hanuman, god, "drive away," ledge, demons, marbles, rollercoaster, peep, "hall closet," bouquet, ankle bells

### Academic

echoes, shiver, toppled, howls, growls, swished, respectfully, clever, panic, stirring, racket, original, scattered, bubbled, simmered, polished, burst, silence, quiver, scurried, mumbles, vanished, faintest, trace

## AFTER READING

### Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses. **To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite textual evidence with their answers.**

### Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who is in this story?
2. What changes has Anu recently experienced?
3. What does Anu think about her new house? How does her mom react?
4. What does Anu think about her new school? What happens on her first day?
5. How does Anu describe the ghosts in her closet? What does she say to her statue?
6. What happens in the morning? What does Anu do?
7. When Anu and her family go shopping, what do they get? What does Anu decide to do?
8. What happens when Anu builds the marble rollercoaster?
9. What happens when Anu wakes up in the night to use the bathroom? What does she say to herself? What does she think?
10. What happens on the next day of school? What does Anu do at recess?
11. What's Anu's first idea about dealing with the ghosts? Does she try it out? Why not?
12. What's Anu's next idea about dealing with the ghosts? What does she do? What happens?
13. What do Anu and Hanuman say to each other when he leaves?
14. How does the story end?

### Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. How does Anu feel when she first moves? How do the illustrations and text help you know?
2. How do Anu's parents react to Anu's comments about the ghosts and about Hanuman? What might they be thinking? What makes you say that?
3. Do you think any parts of this story were in Anu's imagination? Which parts and why do you think that?
4. How do Anu's thoughts change once Hanuman arrives? How do her reactions to challenges change?
5. How do Anu's feelings about school change? What do you think makes them change?
6. Why do you think Anu's idea to sing and dance the ghosts away worked?
7. Did Hanuman help Anu? How?
8. Why do you think the author decided to end the story the way she did?
9. Which part of this book did you enjoy imagining most? What words did the author use that helped you?
10. What did you notice about the illustrator's choices? How did the illustrations help you understand and enjoy the story?
11. Why do you think the author wanted to share this story with young people?

### Reader's Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's response journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. Why do you think the author chose to write this story? What do you think the author's message to the reader is?
2. Have students make a text-to-self connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to your own life? How is Anu similar or different to you?
3. Have students make a text-to-text connection. Did you think of any other books while you read *The Closet Ghosts*? Why did you make those connections?
4. Have students make a text-to-world connection. What kind of connections did you make from this book to what you have seen in the world or on the news? Why did *The Closet Ghosts* make you think of that?
5. What is one big thought that you have after reading this book? Think about different character changes, the setting, and the relationships. What did you learn from reading *The Closet Ghosts*?
6. Choose a page you enjoyed imagining. Make a list of things you imagined as you read this page and looked at the illustration.

7. How do the author and illustrator help readers understand Anu's feelings? List at least two ways the text or illustrations helped you and include a specific example for each one.
8. Think more about Hanuman and his role in the story. What skills or qualities does Hanuman bring to Anu's problems? How does Hanuman's presence change how Anu tackles her problems?
9. Think about the choices the author gives readers of this story about what to believe. Make a two column list for "real" and "imaginary." Add details or events from the book to each column. Share your reasoning with a partner or in writing below your list.

### Multilingual Learner Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)  
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Learners and multilingual learners.

1. Assign ML students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students' level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
  - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
  - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about how they handled a situation that was hard for them. You might provide sentence frames to support sequential language, and/or a word bank of emotions vocabulary.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.
6. Additional resources to support multilingual students is: <https://www.multilinguallearning-toolkit.org/>.
7. Have students act out various scenes from the story to support comprehension.

### Social and Emotional Learning

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1-3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4-6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1-3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-2 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4-6)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 6)

Social and emotional learning involves being aware of and regulating emotions for healthy development. In addition to understanding one's own feelings, strong socio-emotional development allows individuals to develop empathy for others and to establish and maintain relationships.

Use the following prompts to help students study the socio-emotional aspects of this book.

1. What Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) skills does Anu exhibit over the course of the book? Some examples of SEL skills include problem-solving, grit and perseverance, self-regulation, and perspective taking. How does Anu demonstrate some of these skills?
2. Have students go on a Social and Emotional Learning scavenger hunt in the text, looking for evidence in the details from the book. Assign students to relevant Social and Emotional Learning themes, such as: empathy, problem-solving, perspective taking, perseverance, and recognizing and managing emotions.
3. Choose an emotion that interests you: happiness, sadness, fear, anxiety, frustration, hope, perseverance and so on. Illustrate or act out what that emotion looks like in *The Closet Ghosts*.
4. Study examples of how Anu uses self-talk to help herself in challenging situations. As a class or in partners, have students mark or list what she says, what the situation is, and how the self-talk helps her.
5. Do you think the author wants Anu to be a role model for young people or an example of caution? Why or why not?
6. Imagine and act out a conversation between Anu's parents to practice perspective-taking. Pretend they're talking about Anu's adjustment to her new home and school, and saying what they think about her comments about the ghosts and Hanuman. How might they describe the situation from their perspective?

## INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

### English/Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1-3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4-6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7-9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Have students practice retelling this story across their fingers, with the prompts “First, next, then, then, finally.”**
- **Read other stories about children who have to move and/or say goodbye to a friend, such as *Xochitl and the Flowers* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/xochitl-and-the-flowers-xochitl-la-nina-de-las-flores>) or *Juna’s Jar* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/juna-s-jar>).** Make connections between texts.
- **Read other stories that include ghosts, such as *Ghosts for Breakfast* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/ghosts-for-breakfast>).** Make connections between texts, especially about the themes the ghosts represent.
- **Read another title by the same author, *The Happiest Tree: A Yoga Story* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/the-happiest-tree>).** Make connections between two texts, in particular about how they both tell the story of a character growing and changing.
- **Have children imagine that Hanuman sent Anu a letter while spending time helping Anu’s friend Mira.** How might Hanuman help Mira? What reminders or additional advice would Hanuman give Anu, based on what he did and said in the story?
- **Have children design their own helpful statue, either by drawing it or creating it with clay or recycled materials.** Invite them to write about the qualities of the statue’s character that make it helpful, and imagine examples of how it could help them or what it could teach them.

### Social Studies

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 7–9, Range of Reading of Text Complexity, Strand 10)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4 and 6, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Model learning more about Hanuman’s significance and origins by reading and discussing this text or a similar one together:** <https://www.durham.ac.uk/things-to-do/media/things-to-do/learn/online-resources/secondary-school-resources/The-Story-of-Hanuman.pdf>. Then have students each choose a god from Hinduism or another religion or culture to research. Create shared research questions or categories to help them organize their information.

### Art/Music

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7–9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4–6)

- **Look at paintings and statues of Hanuman.** (Use art museum website photos, such as this statue from the Denver Art Museum: <https://www.denverartmuseum.org/en/object/1991.1012>). Make connections between the artwork and the book illustrations. Talk about the stylistic choices the illustrator made to represent Hanuman in *The Closet Ghosts*. Have students create their own drawings, paintings, or clay statues of Hanuman.



## The Closet Ghosts

Teacher's Guide [leeandlow.com/books/the-closet-ghosts](https://leeandlow.com/books/the-closet-ghosts)

- **Try out singing or chanting the made-up songs included in the text.** Add bells, drums, or other instruments if you wish. Talk about how the lines should sound to best reflect Anu's feelings in the story. Have students act out being Anu and the scared ghosts retreating. As an extension, notice the rhyming words in the song. Brainstorm possible other lines of the song that would fit with the story.
- **Have children design their own helpful statue, either by drawing it or creating it with clay or recycled materials.** Invite them to write about the qualities of the statue's character that make it helpful, and imagine examples of how it could help them or what it could teach them.

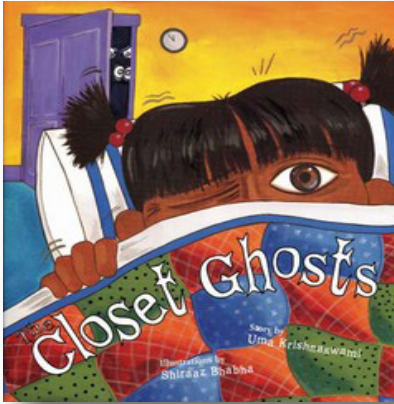
### School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1-3, Production & Distribution of Writing, Strand 4, and Research to Build & Present Knowledge, Strands 7-9, Range of Writing, Strand 10)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1-3, Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 4-6)

- **Work as a class to write a summary of *The Closet Ghosts* for students to share with someone at home.** Then generate interview questions students can ask someone at home or in their community about moving. For instance: "Have you ever had to move to a new home before? What was exciting? What was hard? What helped you get settled?" Share and compare responses at school.



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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Uma Krishnaswami** is the author of more than twenty books for young readers. She teaches in the low-residency MFA program in Writing for Children and Young Adults, Vermont College of Fine Arts. Born in New Delhi, India, Krishnaswami now lives and writes in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada. Visit her online at [umakrishnaswami.com](https://umakrishnaswami.com)

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

**Shiraz Bhabha** was born and raised in India, and now lives in California. A gifted fine artist and website designer, Shiraz had her first major show of paintings in Berkeley, California, in September of 2004. Her paintings blend Eastern and Western themes, techniques, and motifs. This is her first book for children.

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