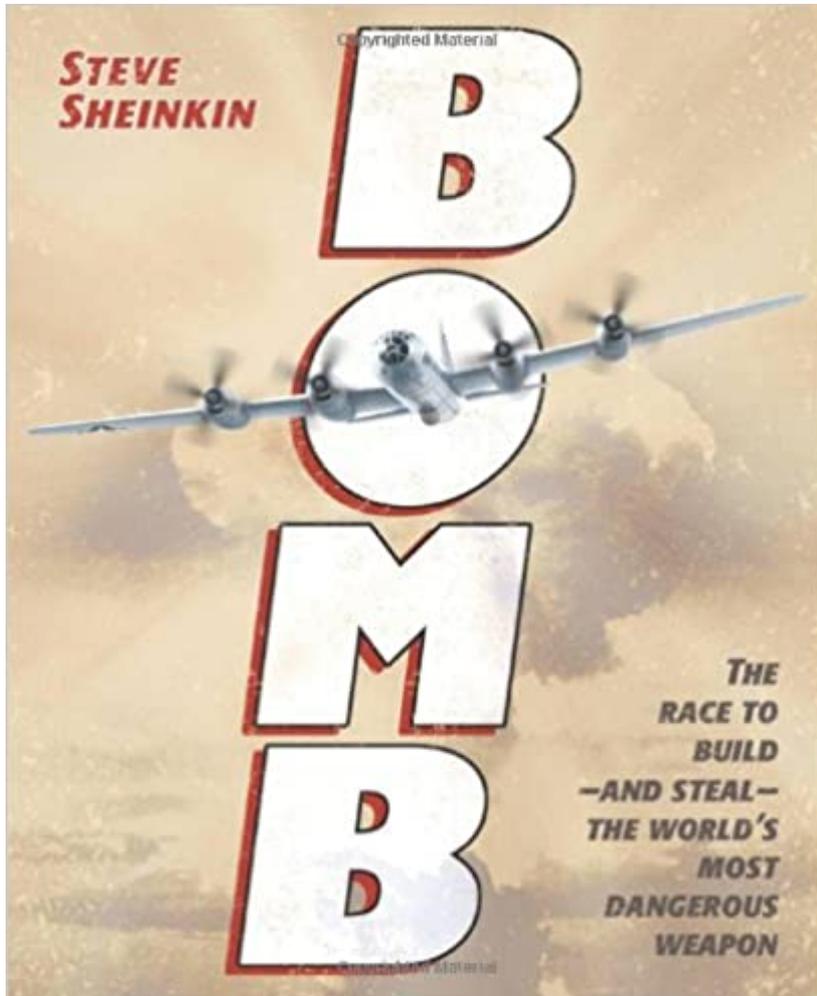


**Book review by KidsMustRead.com  
- Bomb: The Race to Build - and  
Steal - the World's Most  
Dangerous Weapon by Steve  
Sheinkin**



**Bomb: The Race to Build - and Steal - the World's Most Dangerous Weapon by Steve Sheinkin**

*"You must reckon", he (Wilson) said, "that the Germans will in no circumstances take any prisoners." It was not normal procedure to give commandos this kind of information, but Wilson wanted the men going in with no illusions. "You have a fifty-fifty chance of doing the job," Wilson said, "and only a fair chance of escaping."*

August 15, 2020 marks 75 years since the ending of World War 2, and 'Bomb' written by Steve Sheinkin is the perfect book to read on this historic occasion. This work of nonfiction is a page-turner in every sense of the word. Just as a kaleidoscope changes patterns, the spotlight of this book shifts from history to science, spy-thriller to tragedy - and the amazing thing is that all of it is true!

We know how this book ends even before we start it. The dropping of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki made the world recoil in horror at the power that humanity wields, and firmly stamped America as the world's superpower post World War 2. 'Bomb' is a roller-coaster read that meticulously chronicles the domino effect of events that led to the horrific bombing: from the accidental discovery of the scientific principle behind the atomic bomb, the unfolding of World War 2 as a

grim backdrop to labs where scientists scattered across the globe raced to be the first to create the bomb, the stories of spies who played catalyst in a dangerous game, and finally, the politics behind the decision to drop the bomb. Tremendous research has gone into the novel and it *could* have been a dry recounting of facts. Instead, what makes it sparkle is that the author chooses to tell stories of people behind the events. The central protagonist of this story is Robert Oppenheimer, the brilliant American scientist, and patriot who was challenged, fascinated, and horrified by the Frankenstein he created. But along with his narrative, we hear the stories of the young people who became unlikely spies, the unbelievably brave soldiers, and the scientists who dedicated themselves to a cause with very little chance of success. Through this book, Sheinkin chronicles the spectrum of humanity - its capacity for genius to create impossible things like the atomic bomb, its capacity for ruthlessness as men hanker for power, and the short memory of humanity which is the reason that history repeats itself.

**For parents:** For this generation of children, for whom the seismic events of World War 2 belong to the pages of history, this Newbery Honour book that features black and white photographs of events and the people involved, humanizes the steady step-on-step build up to a climax of a war that seventy-five years later still shapes current politics. The story also gives the reader a sense that the peace we enjoy and take for granted is a fragile and precious thing that can be destroyed with one press of the nuclear button.

This book is a must-read for all middle schoolers to understand that they enjoy a peace that is hard-won at tremendous human cost, and that they are the true guardians of the future of humanity.

**Age Appropriateness: 11+ years**



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## From museum to mosque: the repurposing of The Hagia Sophia



Britannica

### What is The Hagia Sophia?

The Hagia Sophia museum, officially known as the 'Great Mosque of Ayasofya' is a structure situated in Istanbul Turkey. This architectural marvel was built around 1500 years ago and has remained an essential part of Turkey's history and culture. The Hagia Sophia consists of a magnificent dome along with 4 minarets that overlooks the Sea of Marmara, its grandeur and colossal size has earned it the title of a UNESCO world heritage site.

## **What is the tumultuous history of The Hagia Sophia?**

The Hagia Sophia was originally built in the 6th century as an Orthodox Christian cathedral during the reign of Byzantine emperor Justinian I. The domed structure was decorated with intricate religious mosaics, fine marble pillars, and gilded frescos, although most of these have been damaged after the numerous changes the iconic building has been subject to. The Hagia Sophia was situated in the city of Constantinople (Istanbul) which was an essential location for the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, therefore in 1453 when the Ottoman Turks seized control of the area, much of the church was altered to their liking. Islam was the official religion of the Ottoman Empire; hence the church was converted into a mosque, completely altering its original design and architecture. Minarets were added on each side of the structure, Orthodox symbols were stripped off the walls and covered up with Islamic calligraphy - in fact, it remained Istanbul's most important mosque for years.

In total, the Hagia Sophia served as a church for 916 years and as a mosque for 481 years! In 1935 after Turkey was officially a free country, the Turkish president Atatürk transformed the building into a museum. It is a site of great historical importance and this conversion has been a symbol of 'peaceful religious coexistence.' As if the Hagia Sophia hasn't witnessed enough political upheaval and change of guard, the current Turkish president plans on reconverting it back into a mosque.

## **Why is it being reconverted into a mosque?**

The Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has ordered the Hagia Sophia to be reclassified as a mosque. This transformation will take place on the 24th of July 2020 and will remain open to all visitors, regardless of their religious beliefs. On the same day of this announcement, the Turkish high court annulled the 1934 decree\* by ex-President Atatürk which enabled the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a museum. The reconversion of this iconic structure into a mosque was something Turkish Islamists had been hoping for, they believed that the conversion of the Hagia Sophia into a mosque wasn't a symbol of religious harmony but of losing itself to westernization. On this basis, observers have said that President Erdogan's plans to alter the Hagia Sophia are simply part of his political agenda to appease the Orthodox Turkish Muslims in hopes of receiving their undue political support. Erdogan suffered a major loss of face in 2019 after losing the municipal elections in Istanbul and this could be a clever means to obtain a loyal bloc of voters from the Muslim community. This strategy is known as vote-bank\*\* politics and is used by political leaders in numerous democratic countries.

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\*An official order from somebody in a position of power

\*\* A political strategy wherein a certain religious group/sect/cast is appeased simply for the sake of votes.



**Zara Shroff** is a 17 year old who loves writing and singing. She enjoys writing and is a student at the **Ecole Mondiale World School**.

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## Be Brave!

Here's a call to be brave at this time when the world is struggling with COVID, lockdowns, unequal access to school and learning devices, inadequate testing, medication, #BlackLivesMatter, the Citizenship Amendment Bill, and strife all over the world.

**Zoe & Urgen are talented young artists who were part of an Indian reality show, The Stage, a couple of years ago. They have this to say:**

*It's not crazy to think that people do go through spirals of self doubt and negative thoughts during these morose times. Keeping that in mind, letting people know that they need to embrace the beauty in them Zoe & Urgen Collaborated with 18 other 'The Stage 3' artists including their vocal coach on an uplifting cover to spread positivity.*

*They wanted to bring everyone back in one video, to showcase all of the musical talent and versatility of the musicians across India! Recording all the voices through the phone without the use of any recording equipment, home-made, Completely self-made video to spread positivity and love.*

*"Working with 21 voices was a mammoth task that took one and a half months, but it was so much fun and we are really proud of the result!"*

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## Taylor Swift has a new album out!

She's done it again! Taylor Swift spent the last few months in isolation, and she dropped a new album last Friday, a mere 11 months after her last one.

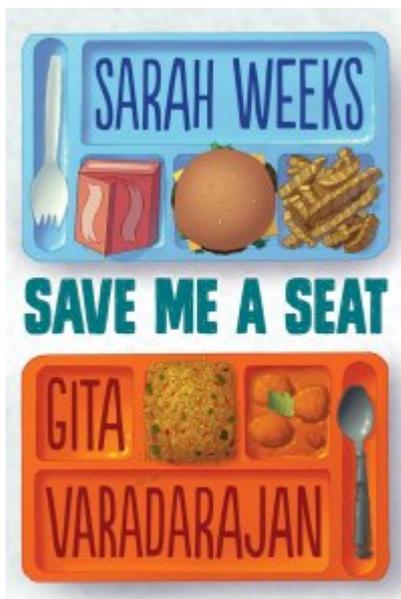
It sold 1.3 million copies in 24 hours, plus racked up insane streaming numbers on Spotify and Apple Music. Spotify said that the album, 'Folklore', was streamed 80.6 million times in the first 24 hours, a new record! Apple Music said the album was streamed 35.47 million times in the same timeframe on its platform, breaking another record.

She collaborated remotely with a handful of people, and also managed to make a video for one of the songs, 'cardigan', with a very small crew, to maintain safety for everyone at this time of the coronavirus.

Here's the video - check it out, and happy listening!

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## Book review by KidsMustRead.com: Save Me a Seat



**'Save Me a Seat'** written by Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan, is an absorbing middle-school story that showcases the character development of its main characters set against the backdrop of cultural differences in an American public school.

Ravi Suryanarayanan and Joe Sylvester go to the same school - Albert Einstein Elementary School in New Jersey in America - but they could not be more different people. Ravi is the new fifth-grade kid, whose family has just moved to America while Joe is a veteran of the school. Ravi may be new but he brims with confidence about his proficiency in academics and sports and wants to be noticed. On the other hand, Joe, who has a problem processing things when there are loud noises, tries his best to appear invisible even though he is good at academics. Ravi recognizes that Dillon, a fellow Indian, is the most popular boy in class and wants to be his friend, while Joe, who has been at the receiving end of Dillon's bullying, wants to steer clear of him. Prejudices, culture, misunderstandings, the older generation, and even food drive a wedge between the boys. When Dillon Samreen decides to have some 'fun' at Ravi's expense, will Ravi finally see Dillon for who he is? Will the two boys ever be friends? Read the book to find out.

**For Parents:** The standout aspect of this book is that authors, Sarah Weeks and Gita Varadarajan, have written this book in co-operation. Gita Varadarajan writes Ravi's story while Sarah Weeks writes Joe's story and the resulting organic alternating point of view narrative brings authenticity to the voice of the story, the cultural practices, and challenges faced by the

characters. Ravi's evolution from a cocky and eager-to-stand-out child to one who realizes his mistakes is a great example of character development. Ravi, the 'popular' boy in his school in India, casually makes fun of another child but realizes that it's not fun when the shoe is on the other foot and he is the one being made fun of in America. Joe, who likes to keep to himself, learns to form a friendship by bridging cultural divides and overlooking his father's prejudices.

**Recommended age:** This book is a must-read for children 9+ years.

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## How does one get to run for President of the United States anyway?



Credit: YouTube

**Kanye West is an extremely successful American rapper, singer, songwriter, and music producer, and is also a designer. He is married to reality TV star Kim Kardashian. He is releasing a new album called 'God's Country' soon. On Saturday, July 4, Kanye also tweeted the following;**

**"We must now realize the promise of America by trusting God, unifying our vision and building our future. I am running for president of the United States! [#2020VISION](#)."**

**Could this be true? Is Kanye West running for President?** Nobody is really sure what he is upto. He could be, or it could be a stunt to generate some publicity for himself and his new album.

**But it begs the question: Can absolutely anyone run for the Office of the President of the United States?**

People have checked if Kanye has registered his name with the Federal Election Commission (FEC), a body that monitors campaign finance. Essentially a campaign requires quite a lot of money. The candidate and his or her advisors and staff move around the country, talking to citizens, understanding their issues, and discussing how these concerns will be addressed. All this to win the vote. All of this is expensive, so the candidates raise money through donors (individuals and companies) who want that candidate to win the election because they feel that he or she is the one who is most closely aligned with what is important to them. The FEC keeps track of how each campaign is raising money and from whom. So it's a quick check to see if people are serious about running for President.

Anyway, Kanye's name is not on the FEC list, but apparently there is a registration for Kanye Deez Nutz West, at the address: '1977 Golddigger Avenue, Suite Yeezus!' Catchy! But no money has been raised for this registered account.

**So back to the election then. How does someone run for President?** The election this year is on November 3, 2020. In India, we vote for a political party, and the political party decides which party member will be Prime Minister of the country. **Here is a quick recap of how General Elections work in India.** <http://currentkids.in/politics/your-guide-to-the-indian-general-elections/>

In America, people vote for a person to be President, and there is a different system of election. Here's a 2 minute video that

describes the process:

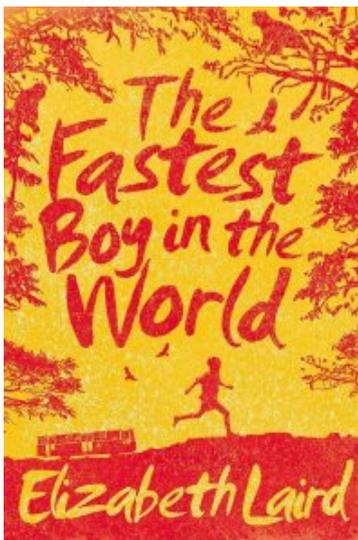
**Got it! So what about Kanye?** Hmm... we will have to wait and see what he says next. Stay tuned!

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Written by: Sunaina Murthy

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## Book review from KidsMustRead.com: The Fastest Boy in the World



Credit: amazon.in

**‘The Fastest Boy in the World’ written by British author Elizabeth Laird is a story that celebrates how a young child overcomes all odds when he runs twenty miles, a race against time, to save his grandfather.**

Young Solomon loves to run! But he knows that his dream of being part of the Olympic team alongside his heroes, the Ethiopian national running team, is just that - a dream. Who would give a chance to a poor boy who stays in the tiny town of Kidame? When his grandfather asks him to accompany him on a trip to Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia, Solomon is excited and worried - excited to get a chance to catch a glimpse of his heroes and worried that his grandfather can't handle the trip. But his grandfather has other plans up his sleeve, and they go very wrong when his grandfather falls unexpectedly ill. Eleven-year-old Solomon is all alone in a strange city and the only way to save his grandfather is to go back to his hometown for help. How can he make the 20 mile trip back home when he has no money and no one to help him? Read the book to find out.

**For parents:** Laird's obvious pride and affection for Ethiopia, its culture, and history shines through this uplifting sports themed story. It was interesting to observe how the grandfather who is almost a peripheral character in the beginning, becomes centre stage to the story; this gently points out that the elderly might have led interesting lives that youngsters can learn from. Solomon, a young child, takes up the challenge of getting help for his grandfather against considerable odds, and through his story will inspire young readers that they can achieve the seemingly impossible if they set their mind to it. A beautiful story about the love of a sport and friendship, this is a stand out read.

**Age appropriate for 8+ years.**



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# Poetry in the times of Covid.

## A Covid Tale

Once, in time of the deadly virus,  
humans disappeared from Mumbai,  
animals appeared out of nowhere!

The puffed-up peacock danced,  
the la-di-da hornbill claimed his kingdom,  
flamingos spread like cherry blossoms...

reminding of those days  
when Mumbai was Bombay,  
and we played on the streets.

While the present stifles, the past  
delights.  
Now past is becoming present  
and I pray for it to become our  
future.

**Anju Makhija**

currentkids

Source: [\*\*\*Hibiscus: poems that heal and empower\*\*\*](#)

Edited by Kiriti Sengupta | Anu Majumdar | Dustin Pickering

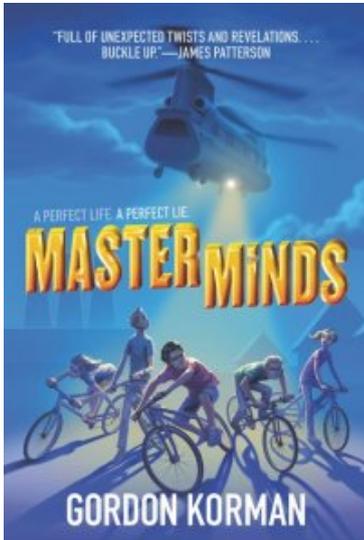
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Anju Makhija is a beautiful writer, and has penned a book of poems for children, called *Poems Grow With You*, available on Flipkart.

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## **Book                      Review                      by** **KidsMustRead.com:                      The** **Masterminds**



Credit: HarperCollins Publishers

**If you are between 9 and 11 years old, here is the perfect mini-series to read during these long summer / monsoon afternoons. The 'Masterminds' trilogy written by the New York Times bestseller author Gordon Korman, is a keep-you-on-the-edge-of-your-seat-novel with an echo of dystopian fiction.**

Masterminds is about five thirteen-year-old children who live in Serenity, a small town with 185 residents in New Mexico in America. Serenity is a great, almost utopian (perfect) place to live – there's zero crime, everyone is well to do, and parents are highly invested in their children. The three Essential Qualities of Serenity citizens – honesty, harmony, and contentment – are drilled into the children who are taught to trust and be truthful at all times. But there's something strange afoot. While Eli Frieden's friend, Randy, can leave town, Eli himself feels an inexplicable pain and severe nausea when he tries to step out of city limits. Amber Laska, who loves all things Serenity, stumbles upon a newspaper, USA Today, and is puzzled about why the negative things happening outside of Serenity are not covered in the local newspaper, Pax.

Five children in Serenity – Eli, Amber, Malik, Hector, and Tori – realize that they are somehow different from their peers. As their haven begins to unravel, the children's questions fuel the answer that will take them on dangerous adventures they never dreamed of. How are the children different? Who is after the children? Will the children manage to break out of this seemingly utopian world? And if they do – what do they do next? Read the book to find out.

**For Parents:** Starting with the title that has more than one meaning in the context of the story, Masterminds is different from the run of the mill action thriller. Korman's style of writing is crisp and is more "show, than tell". For example, we get to know that Eli's friend Randy (who goads him to cross city limits) is leaving Serenity because, in the next chapter, one of the items on Amber's checklist is a reminder to make a farewell card for Randy. Told from the shifting points of view of the five children, it allows the reader to hear their varied voices shaped by their attitude to Serenity.

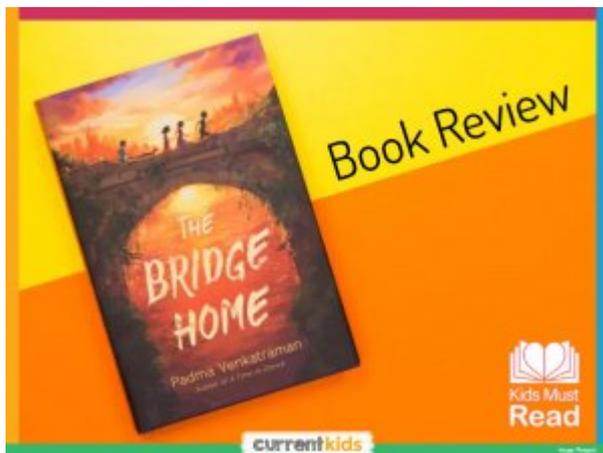
The series has an echo of the brilliant dystopian novel 'The Giver' written by Lois Lowry. It makes the reader think about the fundamental question – is nature more important or nurture more important in defining the personality of a child?

'Masterminds' is the first book in the series while 'Masterminds: Criminal Destiny' is the second book, and the third book that concludes the series is 'Masterminds: Payback'. The Mastermind series is a fabulous set of stories where the pace of action is maintained in the sequels that finally reach a satisfying ending.



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## KidsMustRead.com's Book Review: The Bridge Home



**'The Bridge Home' by Padma Venkatraman** is the beautiful story of eleven-year-old Viji and her sister, Rukku who run away to the city of Chennai to escape an angry, alcoholic father. Viji is aware that her younger sister, Rukku, is a child with special needs and is dependent on her. She feels the need to protect Rukku from harm and the ridicule of others. Adrift in a city that is dangerous for children, the two sisters find comfort, and a family of sorts when they befriend Muthi and Arul, orphaned street-smart kids who share their rudimentary shelter on an abandoned bridge with the sisters. The boys teach Viji and Rukku the basics of survival; food is scarce and the job's not great but the children love the freedom of being financially independent. Things come to a head when a fellow street dweller reveals a clue to their

shelter to a man who displays an unhealthy curiosity about the girls. The children know that they have to be alert for danger. Can the children escape from the man? How can Viji, who is a child herself, protect Rukku? How can she fulfil the dream of a better life? Read the book to find out.

While the vulnerability of runaway children, where they could fall prey to violence or abuse is not denied or ignored, the book touches on these issues with a gentle hand. The Tamil words used in the story are not over-explained but instead, the author invites the reader to arrive at their own conclusions as to their meaning. Padma Venkatraman's writing is peppered with poetic similes that add to the flavour of the book. ("His words felt like a warm ray of sunshine slipping through a rain-soaked sky."). Interestingly, the book is written in a frame narrative where one sister addresses the other directly, foretelling the possible unfolding of events. One will feel empathy for the plight of children who readers probably see through the partition of glass windows while sitting in their air-conditioned cars. It's a great book to discuss and understand why some children enjoy privileges while others don't. *'The Bridge Home'* is a book that tells the story of resilience and survival and will inspire readers that however bad the circumstances, one can always dream and plan for a better tomorrow.



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