

ANUJA

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DISCUSSION GUIDE



A COMPANION DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR THE
OSCAR®-NOMINATED SHORT FILM ANUJA

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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

This companion discussion guide is meant to accompany the short film *Anuja*, written and directed by Adam J. Graves and produced in association with the nonprofit media company Shine Global, a nonprofit that improves children's lives by telling powerful stories that raise awareness, promote action, and inspire change.



INTRODUCTION

Anuja is a live-action short film written and directed by Adam J. Graves that tells the story of a remarkably bright nine-year-old orphan who works with her 17-year-old sister, Palak, in a back-alley garment factory. When a teacher arrives with a life-changing opportunity for Anuja to attend an elite boarding school, she must confront both external challenges and an inner conflict. As the sisters face these obstacles together, their resourcefulness and unbreakable bond take center stage. The story captures their ingenuity and love, leaving Anuja - and the audience - grappling with a profound choice that echoes the difficult decisions faced by countless young girls around the world every day.

Anuja was researched and filmed in partnership with the Salaam Baalak Trust (SBT), a nonprofit founded by the family of acclaimed director Mira Nair (*Monsoon Wedding*, *Salaam Bombay!*). SBT provides food, shelter, and education to thousands of street and working children. The lead role of Anuja is played by Sajda Pathan, who resides in a SBT home for girls who were formerly living on the streets of Delhi. *Anuja* was produced in association with the Academy Award-winning media company, Shine Global, which tells stories that highlight the resilience of children in the face of adversity. Their past projects include *War/Dance* (2007 Oscar Nominee, Emmy Award Best Documentary) and *Inocente* (2013 Oscar for Best Documentary Short). Additional producers include Mindy Kaling, Guneet Monga Kapoor, and Executive Producer Priyanka Chopra Jonas.



DIRECTOR'S STATEMENT: ADAM J. GRAVES

I was in the early stages of developing a coming-of-age film, when Suchitra, my wife and producing partner, happened upon an unsettling statistic: globally, nearly one in ten children under the age of fifteen is subject to child labor (i.e., labor that is detrimental to one's health, development, and education). The figure seemed very real to us. Our own children were about that age, and they (through my wife's side of the family) are descendants of indentured laborers from the state of Uttar Pradesh. It was disquieting to think that this ancestral past was a living present for over one hundred and sixty million children around the world.

We wondered why so few coming-of-age films feature the lives of working children. There was an important story here, or rather an entire universe of stories, waiting to be told. So, I dove headlong into the research on child labor, paying particular attention to sectors known for exporting products to wealthier nations. Given my longstanding ties to South Asia—where I've studied, conducted research, and worked with several nonprofits—I was lucky to have a plethora of personal contacts to draw on. I was eventually put in touch with NGOs that fight to end child labor, such as the Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation, and Work: No Child's Business. This led me to visit the Salaam Baalak Trust and Save the Children, where I met with working (and formerly working) children, visiting their homes, observing their work, and meeting their families. Many of these children, mostly young girls, left school at a young age in order to help support their families.

Despite facing difficult circumstances, the girls I met were resilient, gifted, and inspiring. It was impossible not to be moved by their ability to find and to create joy amidst harsh realities. I felt it was important to make a film that was true to their experiences, but was also something they would want to watch and discuss themselves—one that drew from reality, but without focusing excessively on the doom-and-gloom. I wanted to capture that wondrous combination of magic and emotion, of innocence and mischief, which is part of childhood itself—these are kids after all, not statistics.

Though every film is collaborative, this one was much more so than most. Were it not for the talent and support of the children of the Salaam Baalak Trust (especially our brilliant star, Sajda Pathan), we never could have brought this important story to the screen.



HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS

Our goal is to provide you with flexibility to begin discussing the issues presented in the film, depending upon your needs and interests, and those of your participants. With these materials, we hope to encourage the exploration of some difficult questions about our global labor system and promote the development of new ideas.

The materials are divided into six parts.

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUES

This section provides background information, including key terms, that could be helpful for an audience to understand before seeing or discussing the film. We have left the method of imparting this information to the individual discussion leader, depending on your intention, time, and audience.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

A deep dive into the film. A comprehensive list of questions is provided, and we expect the leader will select certain questions based on time and the interests and backgrounds of the participants.

ISSUES RAISED BY THE FILM

This section includes a brief list of some of the key underlying issues of the film, which may be used as a springboard for further inquiry.



HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS CONT.

SUGGESTED WAYS OF TAKING ACTION

This section offers practical steps individuals can take to address child labor, from supporting ethical businesses to advocating for policy changes, helping turn awareness into meaningful change.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Our goal here is to provide you with a sample list of additional lessons, organizations, and informational resources to assist in your further exploration of the issues introduced in *Anuja*. We have also provided a list of other films produced by Shine Global that tackle other social justice issues affecting children around the world. Visit shineglobal.org for more materials and to learn more.

There are many possible strategies to help leaders set up and support a discussion. Remember that participants may come from a wide range of situations that could affect their views on the issues and their comfort with participating. For example, they may have been subjected to child labor themselves or have family members who have. With these guidelines, we hope to avoid participants feeling singled out, vulnerable during discussions or activities, or exposed to potential negative comments. The goal is to acknowledge that we can all learn from each other.



HOW TO USE THESE MATERIALS CONT.

It is important for discussion leaders to follow some basic guidelines for these discussions, and to share them with the participants. Following are a few basic suggestions:

- **Acknowledging the issues:** It is important to communicate to the participants that the goal of this conversation is to create a non-judgmental space where people can actively listen, share thoughts, and ask questions. The facilitator may want to provide options for extra support or further discussion.
- **Ground Rules:** Remind the participants of any discussion guidelines or ground rules that have already been established, or set up some basic expectations for the group, such as:
 - Listen respectfully, without interrupting
 - Listen actively, with the goal of understanding other's views
 - Use positive and appropriate language
 - Be aware of possible assumptions and generalizations
 - Consider including a guideline to allow participants to pass or take a break by stepping out of the room or turning off their camera in a virtual setting.
- **Room Setup:** If possible, set up the room in a way that everyone can see each other and speak to the whole group. In a virtual setting, the leader may ask everyone to turn on their cameras and include their names on screen.
- **Participation Strategies:** Consider a variety of ways to join in the discussion, making sure that different voices are heard. Participants might:
 - Raise hands or use the hand raising tool in a virtual setting;
 - Go around the circle or use the chat feature or other interactive presentation to “check in” with a one-word feeling or respond to another short-answer question;
 - Briefly write a response to a question before the discussion, or jot down thoughts during the discussion; or
 - Briefly share ideas within pairs (one or two minutes).
 - However, do not assume that everyone will want to participate verbally. Avoid singling anyone out, as they may feel “on display” in front of their community members.
- **Building the Ideas:** To promote continuity of the discussion, introduce some useful phrases such as:
 - Tell me more about that.
 - I agree (or disagree) because . . . , and I would like to add . . .
 - That makes me think (or realize) . . .



BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUES

Child labor refers to work that deprives children of their childhood, harms their physical and mental development, and interferes with their education. It includes work that is dangerous or excessively demanding.

Global Scale: Nearly 1 in 10 children worldwide is engaged in child labor. After years of decline, child labor has increased since 2016, impacting 160 million children by 2020—almost half in hazardous conditions.

Where It Happens: Child labor exists in every region, including the richest countries in the world, but it is most prevalent in sub-Saharan Africa, which has more child laborers than the rest of the world combined. India and Bangladesh also have significant child labor populations.

Industries Involved: Child labor is common in many supply chains, including agriculture (70% of cases), mining (mica and cobalt), chocolate production, garment factories, and domestic work.

Causes: Key drivers include poverty, lack of access to education, discrimination, and forced displacement due to conflict or climate disasters. Families struggling to survive often rely on child labor for income.

Anuja explores themes of child labor and girls' education:

- 1 in 10 children worldwide is in child labor,
- In the beginning of 2020, a total of 160 million children were in child labour – an increase for the first time in 20 years
- 79 million children were in hazardous work that directly endangers their health, safety and moral development.
- Worldwide, 129 million girls are out of school.
- When we invest in girls' secondary education:
 - The lifetime earnings of girls dramatically increase
 - National growth rates rise
 - Child marriage rates decline
 - Child mortality rates fall
 - Maternal mortality rates fall
 - Child stunting drops

Source: UNICEF

BACKGROUND ON THE ISSUES CONT.



Why It Persists: Despite global wealth, economic inequality and weak labor protections allow child labor to continue. Even where laws exist, enforcement is often inadequate.

Girls Education: Girls affected by child labor often face additional barriers to education, as they are more likely to be pulled from school for domestic work, caregiving, or early marriage, limiting their future opportunities.

Solutions: Ending child labor requires free quality education, social protections like child benefits, and stronger legal enforcement. Individuals can help by advocating for policy changes and making ethical purchasing choices.

KEY TERMS

Child Labor – Work that harms children’s development, education, or well-being.

Hazardous Work – Jobs that expose children to physical, mental, or moral dangers.

Fair Trade – A social movement and certification system that ensures producers in developing countries are paid fair wages, work under safe conditions, and have access to sustainable practices, while also promoting ethical business practices and environmental responsibility.

Forced Labor – Work performed under coercion, often involving threats or debt bondage.

Supply Chain – The process of producing and delivering goods, from raw materials to the final product, where child labor may be used at various stages. For example, child labor may be used in the sewing of clothes, even if not seen when you are purchasing at the store.

ILO (International Labour Organization) – UN agency leading efforts to eliminate child labor.

Mica & Cobalt Mining – Industries notorious for using child labor to extract minerals for cosmetics and electronics.

Agricultural Child Labor – The most common sector, where children work in fields to pick the food we all eat

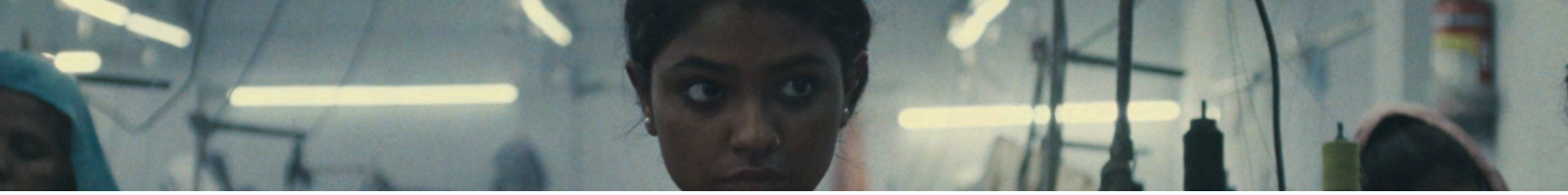
Child Trafficking – The recruitment and exploitation of children for forced labor or illegal activities.





DISCUSSION PROMPTS

- What is one part of the film that stood out to you? How did it make you feel?
- Was there any part of Anuja's or Palak's experience that you can relate to? What are the similarities and differences between you?
- What did you learn from the film?
- Anuja solves a math problem that not only highlights her intelligence but also subtly reveals the harsh realities of her working conditions—low wages, long hours, and a short break. How does this scene deepen our understanding of her situation, and what does it say about the hidden strengths and potential of child laborers?
- Writer/Director Adam J. Graves has a varied background, from a PhD in philosophy and working as a philosophy professor to various studies within South Asian culture and language. How do you think this affected the filmmaking process?
- While Anuja highlights the reality of child labor, it also portrays moments of joy and a balance between resilience and struggle. Why do you think the filmmakers chose to include this contrast, and how does it impact the story?
- *Anuja* explores both resilience and choice—Anuja's strength in the face of hardship and the difficult decisions she must make. How do these themes interact in the film? Do you think resilience always leads to choice, or are some choices out of reach despite resilience?



DISCUSSION PROMPTS CONT.

- Although *Anuja* is set in India, child labor is a global issue affecting millions of children in different countries and industries. How does the film's story reflect the broader reality of child labor worldwide, and why is it important to recognize this as a global problem rather than a localized one?
- The factory owner receives a phone call from Mr. Adam, which highlights the pressures of the global supply chain on local businesses. How does this scene shed light on the complex relationship between consumer demand, corporate responsibility, and the exploitation of child labor? What role do you think consumers play in addressing these issues?
- The story of the mongoose in the film is rooted in an Indian folktale that has been passed down for generations and shared across cultures. Why do you think this story was included in the film?
- The ending of *Anuja* leaves her final choice unresolved, allowing the audience to interpret what happens next. Why do you think the filmmakers chose this ambiguous ending? How does it affect your understanding of Anuja's situation, and what emotions or questions does it leave you with?
- What do you hope Anuja chooses and why. Why might she make a different choice?
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasizes the right to education, protection from exploitation, and the right to a childhood free from labor. How does *Anuja* reflect these rights, and in what ways does the film highlight the failure to uphold them for millions of children around the world?
Note to facilitators: you can use the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child as a handout or use this as a follow up project Download at <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text> and a shorter version at <https://www.unicef.org/child-rights-convention/convention-text-childrens-version>
- *Anuja* shares thematic and visual elements with Suchitra Mattai's visual art practice, which often addresses issues of identity, exploitation, and women's labor. How do you see the film's portrayal of child labor and resilience aligning with Mattai's broader artistic vision, and how does her work deepen the impact of the film's message? (You can learn more about her art at her website <https://suchitramattaiart.com/>)



ISSUES RAISED BY THE FILM

Anuja sheds light on the complex realities of child labor, exploring the difficult choices faced by children trapped in exploitative work. The film not only highlights the economic and social forces that drive child labor but also examines issues of education access, systemic inequality, and global supply chain pressures. The story also raises critical questions about opportunity, agency, and the role of individuals, corporations, and governments in ending child labor.

- **Child Labor** – The film highlights the harsh realities of children working long hours in poor conditions instead of attending school.
- **Education Access** – Anuja’s intelligence contrasts with her lack of formal education, showing the lost potential of child laborers.
- **Low Wages & Exploitation** – The film reveals how child workers are severely underpaid and overworked, with little time for rest.
- **Resilience & Agency** – Despite her circumstances, Anuja demonstrates strength and resourcefulness, raising questions about choice and survival.
- **Systemic Inequality** – Poverty and social structures trap children in labor, making it difficult for families to break the cycle.
- **Global Connection** – While set in India, child labor exists worldwide, often hidden in supply chains.



WAYS TO TAKE ACTION

Watching *Anuja* is just the beginning—the next step is turning awareness into action. Child labor is a global issue that requires collective efforts from individuals, corporations, and policymakers to create real change. By making informed choices, supporting ethical practices, and advocating for stronger protections, we can help ensure that children like Anuja have the opportunity to learn, grow, and build a better future.

- **Educate Yourself** – Learn more about the global issue of child labor and the industries where it is most prevalent.
- **Support Ethical Brands** – Choose to buy from companies that have transparent, fair labor practices and commit to ending child labor in their supply chains.
- **Advocate for Policy Change** – Support and promote policies that strengthen child labor laws, improve education access, and ensure better working conditions for children.
- **Raise Awareness** – Share *Anuja* with others to spark conversations about the impact of child labor and the importance of protecting children’s rights.
- **Volunteer or Donate** – Get involved with organizations that work to combat child labor, support education initiatives, and provide aid to children in need.
 - The film has partnered with **Salaam Balaak Trust** as one such organization that helps children like Anuja.
- **Engage with Local Government** – Encourage your local representatives to prioritize policies that address poverty, education, and child labor prevention.
- **Support Child Education Initiatives** – Advocate for and contribute to programs that provide free, quality education to children in under-resourced communities.
- **Boycott Exploitative Products** – Refuse to buy products made using exploitative child labor, and call for greater accountability from brands.



ADDITIONAL EDUCATIONAL MATERIAL AND SOURCES

Teacher's Guides, Handouts, etc

Children Who Labor – Teacher's Guide ([Museum of Tolerance](https://www.museumoftolerance.com/assets/documents/children-who-labor-teachers-guide.pdf)) – A guide for educators to teach students about child labor, its history, and its impact on children's rights.
<https://www.museumoftolerance.com/assets/documents/children-who-labor-teachers-guide.pdf>

Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) ([Download Here](#) or [Child-Friendly Version](#)) – A legally binding international agreement that outlines children's rights, including protection from exploitation and access to education.

ILO Q&A on Child Labour ([Download Here](https://www.ilo.org/media/313766/download)) – A detailed resource answering key questions about child labor, its causes, and solutions.
<https://www.ilo.org/media/313766/download>

Library of Congress – Child Labor in America ([View Here](https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/child-labor-in-america/)) – A historical resource exploring child labor in the U.S. through photographs, documents, and lesson plans.
<https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/child-labor-in-america/>

Stop Child Labor – 10 Facts About Women and Girls (2024) ([Read Here](#)) – A resource highlighting how child labor disproportionately affects girls and women.

Documentary Films about Child Labor in Africa and United States

The Dark Side of Chocolate (2010, Dir. Miki Mistrati & U. Roberto Romano) – A documentary exposing child labor and trafficking in the cocoa industry, particularly in West Africa, and how major chocolate companies are linked to these exploitative practices.

The Harvest (La Cosecha) (2010, Dir. U. Roberto Romano) – A documentary following the lives of child migrant farmworkers in the United States, highlighting their struggles, sacrifices, and the harsh realities of agricultural labor. Produced by Shine Global.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, CONT.

Organizations where you can learn more

Fairtrade International – A global organization that certifies fair trade products and works to ensure ethical labor practices in supply chains.

<https://www.fairtrade.net/en.html>

International Labour Organization (ILO) – A UN agency that sets international labor standards and leads efforts to eliminate child labor worldwide.

<https://www.ilo.org/topics-and-sectors/child-labour>

Kailash Satyarthi Children's Foundation – Founded by Nobel laureate Kailash Satyarthi, this organization works to end child labor and ensure children's rights to education and freedom.

<https://satyarthi-us.org/>

<https://satyarthi.org.in/>

Save the Children – A nonprofit dedicated to improving the lives of children worldwide through education, health care, and child protection programs.

<https://www.savethechildren.org/>

UNICEF – The United Nations Children's Fund advocates for children's rights, including access to education and protection from exploitation.

<https://www.unicef.org/>

U.S. Department of Labor's List of Goods Produced by Child Labor or Forced Labor – A government resource identifying products and industries linked to child labor, helping consumers and companies make ethical choices.

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/reports/child-labor/list-of-goods>

World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) – A global network that promotes fair trade principles and supports businesses committed to ethical labor practices.

<https://wfto.com/>



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, CONT.

Shine Global is a non-profit media company that improves children's lives by telling powerful stories that raise awareness, promote action, and inspire change. Discussion guides and curricula are available for all these films to help your audience address social justice issues.

- **1 WAY UP in 3D** (2014) is the story of two teenage boys on the road to the BMX World Championships. They hope to escape one of the toughest gang neighborhoods in London with the only thing they have - a bike.
- **COMEDY AGAINST THE ODDS** (2024) 10-year-old Austin has autism. He's also an aspiring stand-up comic. This short documentary spotlights the struggle of growing up with labels, and how Austin uses comedy to embrace and overcome them.
- **DANCING IN JAFFA** (2013) is an award-winning film that follows Palestinian dance instructor Pierre Dulaine as he returns home to Jaffa, Israel to partner Jewish, Muslim, and Christian children in a dance competition.
- **THE EAGLE HUNTRESS** (2016) is a spellbinding documentary film that follows Aisholpan, a 13-year-old nomad girl, as she prepares to take on the all-male, all-grown-up world of Eagle Hunters at the annual festival in the snow-capped Altai Mountains of North West Mongolia.
- **THE HARVEST (LA COSECHA)** (2011), with Executive Producer Eva Longoria, follows 3 of the estimated 400,000 children who labor as migrant farmworkers to help their families survive. This award-winning documentary provides an intimate glimpse into the lives of these children who struggle to dream while working 12 to 14 hours a day, 7 days a week to feed America.
- **INOCENTE** (2012), an Academy Award®-winning short documentary, is an inspiring coming-of-age story of a 15-year old girl in California. Though homeless and undocumented, she refuses to give up on her dream of being an artist, proving that her circumstances do not define her - her dreams do.
- **LIYANA** (2017) introduces us to a talented group of orphaned children in the Kingdom of Swaziland as they confront past trauma through the creation of a fictional character, a young girl named Liyana. The world that they imagine for her is brought to life in a unique style of animation.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES, CONT.

- **THROUGH OUR EYES: HOMEFRONT** (2021) follows three children of veteran families as they cope with the emotional impact of having a wounded parent, navigate the unique challenges of visible and invisible injuries sustained during military service, and together journey toward collective healing.
- **TRE MAISON DASAN** (2018) is an intimate view of childhood through the eyes of Tre, Maison and Dasan - three boys whose lives are complicated by having a parent in prison.
- **VIRTUALLY FREE** (2020) is a documentary about unlikely allies in Richmond, VA who partner to transform the juvenile justice system and stop mass incarceration.
- **WAR/DANCE** (2007), an Academy Award®-nominated documentary, introduces viewers to three compelling children – Dominic, Rose and Nancy— who live in the war zone of Northern Uganda. Despite their horrific experiences, they compete with joyful abandon in a national music and dance festival.
- **WAR/DANCE RETURNS** (2009), a 15-minute follow up documentary to *War/Dance*, reunites the filmmakers with the residents of Patongo for the first Ugandan screening of *War Dance*.
- **THE WRONG LIGHT** (2016) follows a charismatic activist who leads a globally-regarded non-governmental organization (NGO) that provides shelter and education for girls rescued from brothels in Northern Thailand. But as the filmmakers meet the girls and their families, discrepancies begin to emerge and the story takes an unexpected turn.
- **THE ELECTION EFFECT** (2018) is a series of five short documentaries each focusing what life as a young person is like in the wake of the polarizing 2016 election.
- **THE DIFFERENCE** (2018) is a short documentary web series that explores the powerful stories of children whose lives have positively – sometimes vitally – changed because of their relationship with a mentor.
- **ONYX FAMILY DINNER** (2021) Take a seat at the table and dive into topics like politics in sports and mental health in this web series featuring the popular YouTubers the Onyx Family. Pull up a chair with insightful guests including Jemele Hill, Emmanuel Acho, Faith Fennidy, Tiana Day of Youth Activists For Change, Kellie Brown, Diana Chao of Letters to Strangers, and urban gardener Ron Finley.

FILMMAKER BIOS

ADAM J. GRAVES (Writer/Director)

Adam J. Graves is a philosopher-turned-filmmaker, who holds a B.A. in South Asian studies and a Ph.D. in the Philosophy of Religion from the University of Pennsylvania. Adam is author of *The Phenomenology of Revelation* and a professor of philosophy at MSU Denver, where he teaches film & philosophy. He has lectured in over a dozen countries on the nature of freedom, agency and narrative identity, themes which figure prominently in his films and screenplays. Adam wrote, directed, and produced the award-winning short film *Cycle Vérité* (2021) and produced and edited the documentary short *The Other Side of the Sun* (2024). He is married to the acclaimed visual artist Suchitra Mattai (producer of *Anuja*).

SUCHITRA MATTAI (Producer):

Suchitra Mattai is a multi-disciplinary artist of South Asian descent, whose work celebrates the power of women, reimagines historical narratives, and explores her family's history of indentured labor. Suchitra received an MFA (studio art) and an MA in South Asian Studies (Art) from the University of Pennsylvania. She has had solos at the National Museum of Women in the Arts (DC), the ICA San Francisco, the Tampa Museum of Art, and Socrates Sculpture Park, NYC. Her works are represented in collections including Crystal Bridges Museum of Art, the Denver Art Museum, the MCA San Diego, and the Tampa Museum of Art.



CREDITS

GUIDE WRITTEN & EDITED BY

Alexandra Blaney

Additional Editing: Susan MacLaury

FILM CREDITS

PRODUCTION: Shine Global, Krushan Naik Films, Graves Films

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Adam J. Graves

PRODUCERS: Suchitra Mattai, Mindy Kaling, Guneet Monga Kapoor, Krushan Naik, Michael Graves, Aaron Kopp, Ksheetij Saini, Alexandra Blaney

EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Priyanka Chopra Jonas, Michael Christopher Graves, Anita Bhatia

CO-EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS: Archana M. Jain, Susan MacLaury, Albie Hecht

CO-PRODUCERS: Devananda Graves, Dhilan Graves

PRODUCED IN ASSOCIATION WITH: Shine Global

KEY CAST: Ananya Shanbhag (Palak), Sajda Pathan (Anuja), Nagesh Bhosle (Mr. Verma), Gulshan Walia (Mr. Mishra)





THANK YOU!

ANY QUESTIONS?



Contact us at info@shineglobal.org