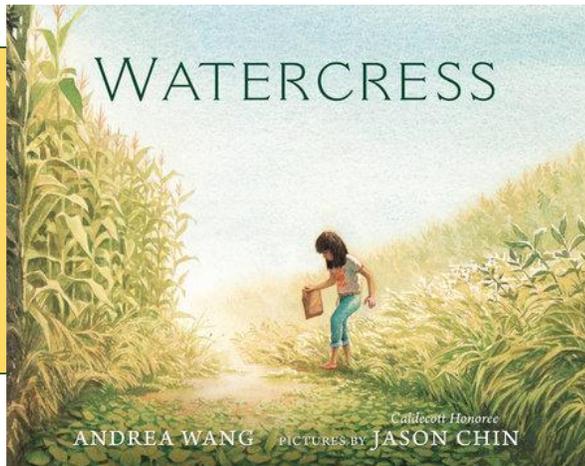


HOLIDAY HOUSE | EDUCATOR'S GUIDE



WATERCRESS by Andrea Wang illustrated by Jason Chin

NEAL PORTER BOOKS

HC: 97808234462479 • E-Book: 9780823450541 • Ages 4–8

A Junior Library Guild Gold Standard Selection

About the Book

Gathering watercress by the side of the road brings a girl closer to her family's Chinese Heritage.

Andrea Wang tells a moving autobiographical story of a child of immigrants discovering and connecting with her heritage, illustrated by award winning author and artist Jason Chin, working in an entirely new style, inspired by Chinese painting techniques. An author's note in the back shares Andrea's childhood experience with her parents.

For Classroom Discussion

- How do the front cover and the first page of the book reveal the main character? First person point of view means that the main character is telling the story. What one word on the first page of text reveals the point of view?
- Setting is when and where a story takes place. Discuss the two settings in this book. Take a close look at the third double-page spread. How does the text and the illustration reveal the two settings? How do you know that China is but a memory? Describe the dreamlike quality of the illustrations of China. How are memories similar to a dream?
- The girl is caught between two cultures. How does she feel different? What is the first hint that she wants to belong in Ohio? Explain how her parents' cutting watercress by the side of the road embarrasses her. Discuss how this is a typical feeling of someone who feels like an outsider.



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- What is the main character’s attitude toward watercress? Her mother explains that it is “free.” How does this reveal that the girl’s parents are struggling to survive in their new world? What does “free” mean to the girl?
- Define famine. Study the illustration of Mom’s family during the great famine in China. How do the darker, muted colors communicate starvation and poverty? What else in the illustration reveals how hungry the family was?
- Why do you think the girl’s mom never talks about her family in China? How does watercress bring back memories, and cause her to share her story with her children? Discuss how her mom’s memory causes the girl to change her mind, and eat the watercress. How does her mom’s story cause the girl to feel ashamed?
- The girl compares the taste of watercress and her mom’s memories as “delicate and slightly bitter.” Discuss whether the mother is “slightly bitter” about her previous life. How does this explain why her memories have been difficult to share?
- Take a close look at the illustrations of the family seated at the dinner table. Point out the things that represent the family’s Chinese culture.
- In the Author’s Note, Andrea Wang explains that the book is an “apology and a love letter to her parents.” Explain the apology. How is it a love letter?

Guide prepared by Pat Scales, retired school librarian and independent consultant, Greenville, South Carolina.

About the Creators



Andrea Wang is the award-winning author of *The Nian Monster* and *Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuku Ando*. She was inspired to write *Watercress* by her experience growing up in rural Ohio as a child of Chinese immigrants. Andrea holds an M.S. in Environmental Science and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing for Young People. She lives in Colorado with her family.



Jason Chin is a celebrated author and illustrator of children's books. His book *Grand Canyon* was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Sibert Honor, and the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award. He is the author and illustrator of *Your Place in the Universe*. He is also the illustrator of Miranda Paul's *Nine Months: Before a Baby is Born*, a *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Honor Book. He lives in Vermont with his wife and children.

