

**CYRM Resource Book
Middle School/
Junior High Nominees
(Grades 6-8)
2011-2012**

Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel

by Ying Chang Compestine

Henry Holt, 2007

Waiting for Normal

by Leslie Conner

Katherine Tegen Books, 2008

Every Soul a Star

by Wendy Mass,

Little, Brown & Co., 2008



Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel by Ying Chang Compestine



Synopsis

Ling is nine years old. She lives in a comfortable apartment with her parents who are both doctors in the best hospital in Wuhan, China. It is 1972 and the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao is taking over the country. A room in her apartment is turned into living quarters for Comrade Li. It is his job to identify people who are not following the Mao policies.

This story takes place over a four year period and documents the many changes and restrictions that happen in the lives of Ying and her family, friends and neighbors. It is a very dangerous time for those who are not politically correct. They are all affected by the Cultural Revolution, but they survive it with hope and humor.

The story is based on the author's childhood experiences growing up in China during this time.



Hooks

- Can you imagine having a stranger living in your house whose job it is to spy on you and your family?
- Can you imagine having your daily needs rationed – and oftentimes unavailable?
- Can you imagine having secrets in your life that would be dangerous if they were to be found out?
- What do you know about the Red Guard and the Cultural Revolution?

Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel

Meet the Author—Ying Chang Compestine



Ying Chang Compestine was born in 1963 in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. Growing up in such a tumultuous time, she valued sharing and reading books with friends. After attending school in China, she continued her education in the United States. She currently lives in California. She has written cookbooks, picture books, and novels for children, in addition to writing numerous magazine articles. While she loves the two places that shaped her—China and America—her greatest passion is children. *Revolution is Not a Dinner Party* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007) received numerous awards, including Parent's Choice Silver Honor in 2007, ALA Notable Children's Book designation in 2007, ALA Best Books for Young Adults designation in 2007, among others.

For more information, see:
<http://www.yingc.com>

Other notable books by Ying Chang Compestine:
The Runaway Rice Cake (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001)

The Real Story of Stone Soup (New York: Dutton, 2007)

The Singing Wok (New York: Dutton, 2009)

"Ying Chang Compestine." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2008. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.



Chinese Cultural Revolution

Jiang, Ji-Li. *Red Scarf Girl: a Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*. Perfection Learning, 1998.

Li-Marcus, Moying. *Snow Falling in Spring: Coming of Age in China during the Cultural Revolution*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008.

Online information:

http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/cu/Cultural_Revolution

Provides a good synopsis of the events of the Cultural Revolution.

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/china/cultural.html>

Provides an excellent historical panorama of China, with a special focus on the Cultural Revolution and China's current cultural status.

Living with Totalitarianism

Sis, Peter. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Park, Linda Sue. *When My Name was Keoko*. Clarion Books, 2002.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2006.

Oppression & Transcendence

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Chains*. Atheneum, 2008.

Appelt, Kathi and illustrated by David Small. *The Underneath*. Atheneum, 2008.

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*



- Why do you think Ying Chang Compestine selected the phrase “revolution is not a dinner party” from Mao’s teaching about class struggle for the title of her book?
- Is a revolution ever a good thing? What about the American Revolution? Couldn’t the English government have described the American Revolution as “an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another?” What makes the American Revolution different from the Chinese Cultural Revolution?
- One of the first things Comrade Li says to Ling is, “You need to grow outside your greenhouse, little flower.” What do you think Li means when he says this? Do you think he means to give Ling a compliment when he calls her “little flower”? Why do you think he is trying to make Ling think he is her friend?
- When Ling hears her neighbor singing a song about how Chairman Mao is “more dear than our mother and father” she wonders how anyone could be “more dear” than her own father. Why would the leaders of the Revolution want children to believe that Chairman Mao loved them and that they should in return love and honor him above their own parents?
- Have you ever traded things like baseball cards with your friends? Would it be just as exciting to trade cards if they were of just one person? How excited would you be to trade buttons with only pictures of President Obama on them? How would you feel if every day you had to wear a button with the President’s face on it? Try to write a song about President Obama and remember it has to be about how *wonderful* he is.
- What do you think bourgeois means? At first Ling thinks that bourgeois means “evil things from the old days” and doesn’t understand why her doll, long hair, or flowered blouse are thought of as evil. Chairman Mao taught his followers that the bourgeois were the people who owned most of the wealth and took advantage of the working class. Ling’s parents were not what you could consider wealthy and her father believed in treating all patients equally, so why did the Red Guard target them as being bourgeois?
- When Dr. Chang begins burning all the things he believes might be considered bourgeois why can’t he bring himself to burn the picture of the Golden Gate Bridge? Why does he hide it even though doing so puts him and his family in danger? What does the picture represent?

Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*



- How old do you think the members of the Red Guard were? Did you realize that the Red Guard was made up of young people not much older than high school students? Why do you think such young boys were chosen to become members of the Red Guard?
- After the Red Guard raids the Changs' apartment for the first time, Ling asks her mother why the family has to paste so many small portraits of Chairman Mao in every room. What does her mother mean when she replies, "It's like the incense we burn in the summer to keep the mosquitoes away?" How would you feel if you had to have a picture of the President in every room of your house, even your bedroom?
- What does it mean to "draw a class line?" Why do you think Niu Wong draws a class line and denounces his parents and Ling's family? Is Ling right to hate him? What do you think will happen to him?
- When one of Ling's classmates threatens to cut off her long hair, Ling threatens to kill the boy. When Ling's mother wants her to apologize to the boy to avoid trouble, Ling refuses. Do you think Ling should have followed her mother's wish to bend like "bamboo in the wind" or was staying an "angry tiger" the right thing to do?
- When Ling stands up to her classmates she is acting very much like her father who often stood up for what he believed. Still, what do you think Ling's father would have wanted Ling to do if he had been home? Do you think he would have wanted her to apologize? Why or why not? What would you have done if you had been pushed around and threatened like Ling?
- Just as Comrade Li suggests, Ling does spend four years growing outside her "greenhouse." By the end of the four years she is definitely not a "little flower" but in what ways do you think she has grown and maybe even blossomed?

