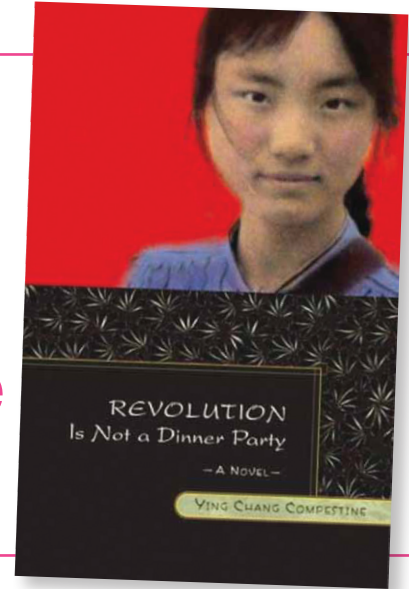


REVOLUTION IS NOT A DINNER PARTY

by Ying Chang Compestine

Walker Books
(Lower secondary)



A powerful story of a girl who comes of age during China's Cultural Revolution (1966-1969). Nine-year-old Ling leads a happy life with her parents, both dedicated doctors. Comrade Li, one of Mao's political officers, moves into their apartment and creates an atmosphere of increasing mistrust in which Ling begins to fear for her family's safety. Over four years, and despite witnessing many horrors, Ling not only survives, but blooms.

BACKGROUND

Mao Zedong, the leader of China's Communist party, tried to boost his power by attacking the culture of pre-Communist China. Millions of intellectuals, professionals and opposition leaders were imprisoned or killed.

Students were encouraged to inform on their teachers and even parents. The economy ground to a halt and many goods including food were severely rationed. The worst years were up to 1969 but the suspicion and accusations continued until Mao's death in 1976.



QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What are some of the first signs of change for Ling and her family? **Possible answers:** Comrade Li's first visit when he takes the books, Comrade Li moves in, her parents' powerlessness when Li takes books and food, no heat/hot water, letters being opened, having to speak in whispers, arrest of undercover enemy
2. What rights are Ling and others deprived of during the Cultural Revolution? **Possible answers:** Right to an education, right to family life (families broken up like the Wongs and Changs), right to privacy (letters being opened/ conversations being whispered/ homes and possessions being wrecked), right to express your opinions and ideas (fate of anti-revolutionary writer), right to access to media (listening to radio in secret/radio smashed), right not to be arrested for no reason, right to a fair trial
3. Why do you think Niu acted as he did when he came to arrest father? Did you feel at all sorry for him? **Possible answers:** His parents had been taken away, he had been sent to labour camp, his escape attempt had failed, he had been 'interrogated' all night by the Red Guards
4. Some people tried to stand up for what they believed. Can you think of examples? **Possible answers:** Father defended Mrs Wong when Li was condemning her, father rescued and fed the anti-revolutionary writer even though it later got him arrested, Ling fought back when Gao and other students called her father an American spy and tried to cut her hair, gardener Zong carried messages secretly to father.

UNIVERSAL DECLARATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Article 3: We all have the right to life, and to live in freedom and safety.

Article 9: Nobody has the right to put us in prison without a good reason, to keep us there or to send us away from our country.

Article 10: If we are put on trial, this should be in public. The people who try us should not let anyone tell them what to do.

Article 12: Nobody should try to harm our good name. Nobody has the right to come into our home, open our letters, or bother us or our family without a good reason.

Article 19: We all have the right to make up our own minds, to think what we like, to say what we think, and to share our ideas with other people.

Article 26: We all have a right to education and to finish primary school which should be free. We should be able to learn a career or make use of all our skills. Our parents have the right to choose how and what we learn. We should learn about the United Nations and about how to get on with other people and to respect their rights.

FOLLOW UP WORK

Invite students to research propaganda posters. Show examples of posters made by the Chinese communists. Ask students to examine the techniques used, and then to create their own poster on an issue they feel strongly about.

FIND OUT MORE

Further resources for teaching around human rights can be found at: www.amnesty.org.uk/education