

The Year of the Dog

Recommended for Grades 4-8

Book Summary: The Year of the Dog

In *The Year of the Dog*, Pacy thinks she will be very lucky since this was her birth year. At school she meets another Taiwanese American, Melody, who quickly becomes one of her best friends. Through the year, Pacy continually seeks to discover sources of luck for herself and to figure out what she will do when she's older.

Near the end of the school year, her teacher announces that they will have the chance to try for a young writer's award and need to come up with original ideas for a book. Pacy struggles on her idea, while thrilled to try out for the part of Dorothy in her school play of *The Wizard of Oz*. When Melody tells her she can't be Dorothy because she is Taiwanese, Pacy reluctantly gives up her dream. When she is selected instead to be the munchkin who presents Dorothy with the gift, she frets that people will notice her.

[Spoiler]

Pacy's mother tells her a story of when she was embarrassed to be different and encourages Pacy to go for the munchkin role, which earns her applause from the audience. Her teacher encourages her to use her own story as the basis for a book, since it will be so unique. Melody convinces her to go to Taiwanese Camp and Pacy enjoys it until Melody leaves and she is confronted by girls who claim that she has become too Americanized and forgotten her own culture. Pacy's mother reassures her that she has the best of both cultures.

Pacy's book wins fourth place in the contest and she decides that her future career is writing enough books to fill a bookshelf.

Author Biography: Grace Lin

Grace Lin was born May 17, 1974 in New Hartford, New York. While her sisters excelled in science, Grace Lin proved to have an aptitude for art. She graduated from the Rhode Island School of Design and soon after published her first book, *The Ugly Vegetables*, which received positive recognition. In 2007, she received an honorable mention from the Asian/Pacific American Awards for Literature as well as a Newbery honor for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* in 2009. She has written more than two dozen children's books.

She currently lives in Somerville, Massachusetts with her husband, Robert Mercer, and daughter.



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Discussion Questions: The Year of the Dog

1. Think about the New Year's traditions that Pacy's family has. Are their traditions primarily Taiwanese or Taiwanese-American? Why? How are their traditions different from the ones your family has?
2. When Becky asks Pacy about the Year of the Dog, she suggests there should be a Unicorn Day. What kind of holiday would you create? Why? What would you want this new holiday to do?
3. Pacy has two different names- her real name and the one she goes by in school. Is having two names a good or bad thing? Why? If you were Pacy, would you want two names? Why or why not?
4. Pacy discovers that she doesn't like dinner at the Ling house. Why did she doubt that they were having real Chinese food? Is one way of preparing the food more authentic than the other? Why or why not?
5. Why do you think the Taiwanese culture presented in the book revolves so much around food?
6. Pacy's mother told a story about how she would practice piano on both a real piano and a paper one. Did you think the paper piano was a good way to practice? Why or why not? What are some creative ways you learned to practice something?
7. How did Melody and Pacy fail their science experiment? Did luck have anything to do with why their classmates won? Why or why not?
8. Melody tells Pacy she can't be Dorothy because Dorothy isn't Taiwanese. Should Pacy have tried out for the role anyway? Why or why not? If you were Pacy, would you have tried?
9. Pacy complains that there is no representation of real Taiwanese people in books. Do books today do a good job at representing different cultural groups? Why or why not? What could authors and publishers do better to fix this?
10. At TAC camp, another girl tells Pacy that "when you're Americanized, you don't have any culture." Why would the girl think this? Do you agree or disagree? Why?
11. How was the Year of the Dog a lucky year for Pacy? Do you think the Year of the Pig will be lucky for her sister? How? What would you consider to be your lucky year?



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