

In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson

Recommended for Grades 4-6

Book Summary: In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson

1947. Sixth Cousin, or Bandit, lives with her family in China. Just before the New Year, a letter arrives from her father who is overseas in America that upsets her grandparents and pleases her mother. When she is summoned by her grandmother, she discovers that her father has asked for her and her mother to come and live in American with him.

Sixth Cousin takes an American name and becomes known to her family as Shirley Temple Wong. Each chapter focuses on a single month in 1947, the Year of the Boar, as Shirley becomes accustomed to American life. She becomes passionate about baseball and her hero, Jackie Robinson.

[SPOILER] Shirley's mother tells her that she is China's ambassador to America and she takes it very seriously to the point where the other children dislike including her in their games. Shirley eventually makes friends with a girl who previously bullied her, her piano teacher and a new girl, Emily. Throughout the story, Shirley struggles with being too Chinese and later, worried that she is no longer Chinese enough to be recognized by her extended family. When she is to have a brother (or sister), she is determined to embrace both her Chinese and American identities by passing along both cultures to him.

Author Biography: Bette Bao Lord

Bette Bao Lord was born November 3, 1938 in Shanghai, China. When she was eight, she moved with her parents to the United States. She wrote about her experiences of moving in *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson*, which is considered her autobiographical story. In 1998, she was awarded the first Eleanor Roosevelt Award for Human Rights by President Clinton.

Her books have received several awards and translated into more than fifteen languages. She is married to Winston Lord, a former Chinese ambassador and they have one child, Lisa. They live in New York.



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Discussion Questions: In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson

1. When she is to leave for America, all Shirley's aunts gather to fuss over her and bring up several stereotypes of American life. Why do you think her aunts believe these things about America? Are any of them true? Can you think of any other stereotypes someone from another country might believe about America today?
2. On her first day in America, Shirley gets lost while on an errand for her father. Should her father have let her go by herself or was it important for Shirley to be independent?
3. Although Shirley's classmates are nice to her when she first joins them, they soon become annoyed by all her bowing and her limited vocabulary. If you had been in Shirley's class, would you have tried to befriend her? Why or why not? How would you feel if you were Shirley with no friends to play with?
4. Shirley's parents and the police try to get her to tell them the truth about her black eyes, but she is too afraid of Mable's threat to say anything. Should Shirley have told her parents what happened? Do you think Mable would not have become her friend if she'd told the truth? Why or why not? Should Shirley have told someone even after she and Mable became friends?
5. When Mable starts teaching Shirley stickball and how to skate, Shirley remembers the tale of Wispy Whiskers her grandfather used to tell her (at the end of chapter five). What do you think is the lesson of Wispy Whiskers?
7. In September, Shirley meets a new girl, Emily, and they instantly become friends. How is Shirley's friendship with Emily different than her friendship with Mable? How is it the same? Do you think one friendship is better than the other?
8. In the second half of the book, Shirley seems to be constantly listening to baseball. Why do you think baseball and Jackie Robinson are so important to her? Is there something in your life that is as important to you? Why?
9. At the end of the book, Shirley's mother tells her that she is going to have a baby. Shirley immediately starts thinking of the things she will teach her brother. Why do you think she finds it important to teach him both American and Chinese things? Is one more important than the other? Why or why not?



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