

THE YEAR OF THE DOG & THE YEAR OF THE RAT



By Grace Lin

Thematic connections

- ❖ Friendship
- ❖ Self-Esteem
- ❖ Multiculturalism
- ❖ Self-Expression

Ages 8 – 12

Two classic novels about growing up and the bumps you encounter along the way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (*The Year of the Dog*)

1. When does Chinese New Year (Lunar New Year) occur? Is it the same day every year? How is Chinese New Year different from New Year's Day (January 1)?
2. What are some of Pacy's family traditions? Why are these traditions important to Pacy and her parents? Does your family have any special traditions?
3. Pacy and Melody quickly become best friends. Do you think this is because they are both Taiwanese-American? How do their similar backgrounds help them become such good friends?
4. Pacy and Melody thought that their science fair project proved that plants prefer soda over water, milk, and orange juice, but Mr. McKnealy pointed out that their experiment was flawed because the plants were not kept in a controlled environment. Have you ever thought you made an important discovery, only to be proved wrong? Did Pacy and Melody learn anything from their experiment, even though it was flawed?
5. Pacy's mom tells her that the Year of the Dog is the year that people are supposed to find themselves. Pacy spends the whole year trying to discover her talent. It is not until she wins a prize for her book that she realizes she wants to be an author/illustrator when she grows up. Do you think she would have still discovered that if she had not won a prize?
6. Pacy is excited to try out for the part of Dorothy in the school play, until one of her classmates tells her that there can't be a Chinese Dorothy. Pacy is very discouraged and doesn't try out at all. Do you agree that Pacy shouldn't be Dorothy just because she is Asian? How would this make you feel if you were Pacy?
7. Pacy's mom tells her many stories from her childhood. How was her childhood different from Pacy's? Ask your parents about their childhoods. How are they different from yours?
8. Pacy is quite interested in the symbolism of the Year of the Dog. Because dogs are loyal, true, and friendly, the Year of the Dog is a good year for friends, family, and being "true to yourself." Find out what year you were born according to the lunar calendar. What are the characteristics of that year? Do these words describe you well?
9. Pacy is made fun of because she can't speak Chinese or Taiwanese. Why do you think the girls made fun of her? Do you think this was right? How would you feel if you were Pacy?



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (*The Year of the Rat*)

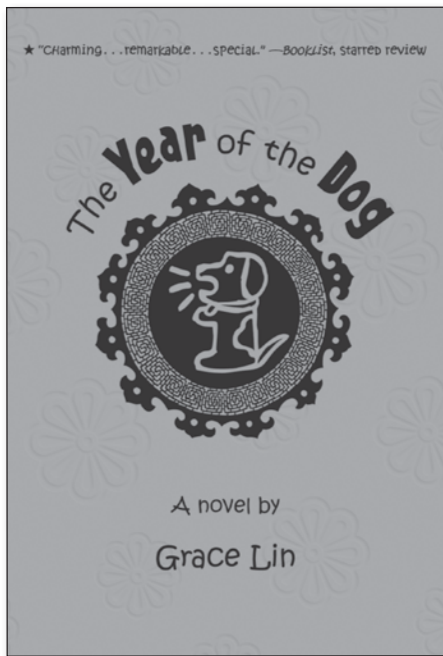
1. When company comes or they visit each other's homes, Melody and Pacy are expected to be polite and to use their manners. If and when their parents are present, they obey their wishes. How do Melody and Pacy act when their parents' backs are turned? Why do they "lose" their manners when their parents aren't looking?
2. What is the definition of superstition? What are superstitions associated with the Chinese New Year? What items are used in the celebration and what are their symbolic meanings?
3. What is the difference between a wish and a resolution? Do any of the resolutions/wishes on Melody and Pacy's lists come true? How could they have made their resolutions happen?
4. At Max's birthday party, he selects his destiny from a variety of items placed on a tray. What items would be placed on a tray for Pacy? What would she select?
5. When Melody learns she is moving to California, why does she have such a difficult time being "resigned to her fate?"
6. When Melody and Pacy make the plan to share books by mailing them back and forth, why don't their mothers think the plan a wise one? Why is the plan so important to Melody and Pacy?
7. Why is Pacy so unwilling to befriend Dun-Wei at school? How could she have helped him adjust? What finally occurs to change her attitude toward him?
8. Pacy's mother tells her that people "fresh off the boat need understanding because it's easy to make mistakes, and it's hard to fit in." What mistakes does Dun-Wei make? Pacy isn't "fresh off the boat," but she also makes mistakes. What are some of her mistakes?
9. Pacy feels so isolated after Melody moves to California; she doesn't fit in with anybody. How has her close friendship with Melody impacted her relationships with others before Melody moved to New Hartford? How do her relationships with others change after Melody moves?
10. After the play on Pacy's birthday, Charlotte and Becky match up the kids in their class based on looks. Why does Pacy feel angry when they match her with Dun-Wei instead of Sam Mercer?
11. When Pacy receives a "C" on her Viking project, why is her mother so upset? How does Pacy react to her mother's concern?
12. Pacy feels left out of Clifford's wedding until he asks her to jump on the bed. Why is this simple act so important to Pacy?
13. What is the "cold door?" Why is Pacy so worried she is going to experience life beyond the "cold door?" What and/or who finally convinces Pacy that her career choice does not have to be a negative life experience?
14. What does Pacy learn about herself in the Year of the Rat? How does she change?
15. The Year of the Rat is a time to make a fresh start and change situations in life. What changes occur in Pacy's life in this year? How do destiny and fate play a role in Pacy's life? In Melody's life?

Writing Activity

Have students read the stories within the story of *The Year of the Rat*. Then, have students follow the author's example of story telling: students should write a story about a beloved grandparent (page 55), an embarrassing moment (page 70), a time they were punished (page 98), a story about their infancy (page 120), or a story relating a school experience (page 141). Students should illustrate the story with pen and ink drawings and share them with their class.

THE YEAR OF THE DOG & THE YEAR OF THE RAT

about the books



When Pacy's Mom tells her that this is a good year for friends, family, and "finding herself," Pacy begins searching right away. As the year goes on, she struggles to find her talent, deals with disappointment, makes a new best friends, and discovers just why the Year of the Dog is a lucky one for her after all.

The Year of the Dog by Grace Lin

978-0-316-06000-4 HC • 978-0-316-06002-8 PB

• AR Level 4.2

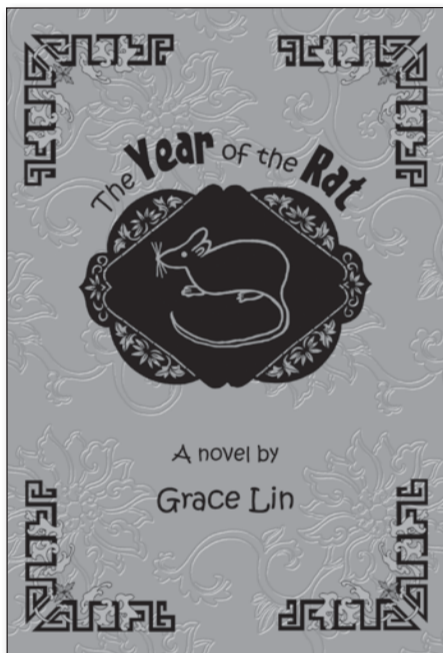
★ **"Remarkable."**

—Booklist starred review

"Comforting." —Kirkus Reviews

"Endearing." —Publishers Weekly

"A gentle tale full of humor." —The Horn Book



In this sequel to *The Year of the Dog*, Pacy has another big year in store for her: Pacy must deal with her best friend moving to California, find the courage to forge on with her dream of becoming a writer and illustrator, and learn to face some of her own flaws.

The Year of the Rat

By Grace Lin

978-0-316-11426-4 • AR Level 4.6

"Engaging."

—Kirkus Reviews

"Charming."

—Scholastic Instructor

about the author



Grace Lin is the award-winning author and illustrator of *The Year of the Dog*, as well as picture books such as *The Ugly Vegetables* and *Dim Sum for Everyone*. She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Massachusetts. Learn more about Grace at her web site, www.gracelin.com.