

Watercress

Written by Andrea Wang
Illustrated by Jason Chin

Andrea Wang based her book on an experience from her childhood. The story takes place in Ohio in the 1970s. It also takes place in China in the 1950s-60s.

Watercress was published in 2021. It has won several awards and honors. Jason Chin, the illustrator won the Caldecott Medal in 2022. The book was also named a Newberry Honor title - an honor not often given to picture books.

Listen to the story for comprehension.

Introduce yourself. Tell your group if this book reminds you of anything in your life.

The author uses a variety of adjectives and descriptive words in this book. As you read the book with your group:

* Make a list of words that are related to water or being wet.

* Pay attention to the illustrations.

* The author often writes descriptions in groups of three. For example, on the first page, she describes how the paint of the car became faded: “by years of glinting Ohio sun, pelting rain, and biting snow.” Notice other times when her writing follows this pattern.

Discussion questions:

1. What is your impression of the art? How does the art help to tell the story? Do you have a favorite illustration?

2. Discuss the meaning of these phrases and sentences:

“The paper is soaked and I am half afraid half hopeful that the bottom will split, sending all the plants back down into the muck.”

“Our original destination is long forgotten, a memory of something unfinished.”

“It is delicate and slightly bitter, like Mom’s memories of home.”

3. Why does the girl say that “free is bad”?

4. Why do you think the girl’s mother had not shared the story about her brother before? How did knowing the story change the girl’s attitude?

5. What are the main ideas of the story?

6. Did your parents try to protect you from sad or difficult family stories?

7. The author uses the word “bite” several times, but the meaning is not always the same. Explain the different uses of the word “bite” or “biting.”

8. If you are raising children in the United States, have you experienced a similar situation with your children? Is it difficult for them to be caught between two cultures?

9. Is this a book you would share with a child? Why or why not?

10. The author said that her brother does not remember the time their parents stopped the car to pick watercress, even though it is an important memory for her. Have you had this kind of experience - of remembering something very well, but the people who were with you do not remember?