



Monthly Featured Book

Presented by ADL's Education Department

About the Monthly Featured Book: This collection of featured books is from Books Matter™: The Best Kid Lit on Bias, Diversity and Social Justice. The books teach about bias and prejudice, promote respect for diversity, encourage social action and reinforce themes addressed in education programs of [A World of Difference® Institute](#), ADL's international anti-bias education and diversity training provider. For educators, adult family members and other caregivers of children, reading the books listed on this site with your children and incorporating them into instruction are excellent ways to talk about these important concepts at home and in the classroom.

Watercress

Andrea Wang (Author), Jason Chin (Illustrator)

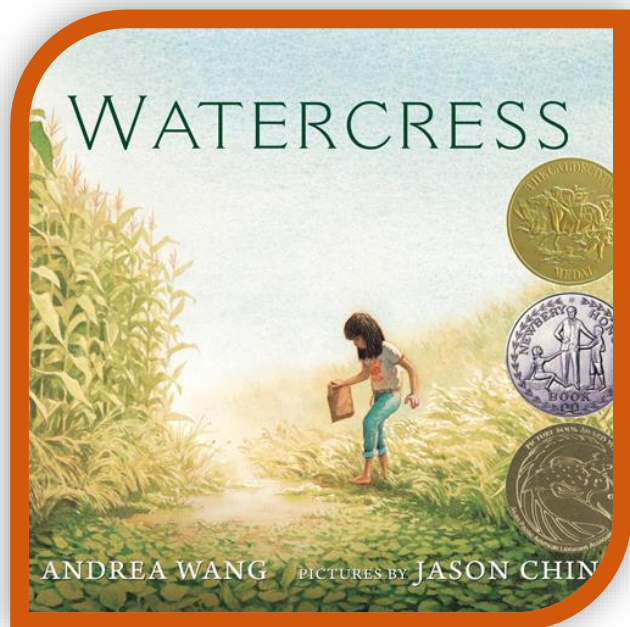
Driving through Ohio in an old Pontiac, a young girl's parents stop suddenly when they spot watercress growing wild in a ditch by the side of the road. Grabbing an old paper bag and some rusty scissors, the whole family wades into the muck to collect as much of the muddy, snail covered watercress as they can. At first, she's embarrassed. Why can't her family get food from the grocery store? But when her mother shares a story of her family's time in China, the girl learns to appreciate the fresh food they foraged. Together, they make a new memory of watercress.

ISBN: 978-0823446247

Publisher: Neal Porter Books

Year Published: 2021

Age Range: 4-8



Book Themes

Asian American People, Identity and Culture, Immigration, Socioeconomic Status and Classism, Power of Memory

Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book. Do not focus on students' retention of all the words; instead make sure they understand the words enough to follow the story and

remind children of the words' meanings as they come up in the book. You can also post the words and point out to students when they appear in the story. For definitions that are differentiated for young children, see ADL's [Education Glossary Terms](#).

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|---------------|----------------|--------------|
| ■ abrupt | ■ famine | ■ pelting |
| ■ ashamed | ■ glinting | ■ squirm |
| ■ bitter | ■ hand-me-down | ■ underside |
| ■ delicate | ■ horizon | ■ unearth |
| ■ destination | ■ longing | ■ unfinished |
| ■ faded | ■ memories | ■ watercress |

Discussion Questions

Before reading the book aloud, ask some or all of these pre-reading questions:

- What do you see on the cover of the book? What do you think is happening in the illustration?
- What is the title of the book? Do you know what watercress is?
- What do you think the book might be about?

As you read the book aloud, ask a few discussion questions periodically throughout reading to check for comprehension and keep the students engaged. Below are some sample questions that correlate to specific page numbers.

- What items do the family take out of the car? (page 6)
- What memory is “unfinished?” (Page 15)
- Why do you think the mom is talking about her family in China? (page 21)

After reading the book aloud, ask some or all of the following discussion questions:

- What happens in the story?
- What thoughts and feelings came up for you as you read the book?
- How do the parents feel when they see the watercress? How do you know?
- Why do you think the parents have a “longing for China?”
- What is the children’s response to getting out of their car to get the watercress?
- What does watercress represent or mean to the parents? What does it mean to the daughter?
- What different reactions do the family members (parents, daughter and son) have when they see the watercress?
- What are the different memories that are explored in the book?
- What memories do you have that are important and powerful?
- Why does it mean that the girl feels “ashamed” of her family? What does it mean when she later says she feels “ashamed of feeling ashamed” of her family? Have you ever felt this way?

- What do you learn about the mom's brother and what happened in China? How did you feel when you learned about this?
- What did you learn by reading this book?
- Why do you think is the author's message about family and memory?

Extension Activities

Below are activities for students that can extend learning from the book.

1. Power of Memory

Explain to students that the book focuses a lot on the power of memory. Ask students: *What is a memory?* If they don't know, share a memory of your own that is important or meaningful to you. Then elicit/explain that a **memory** is something learned or experienced that is kept in your mind. Ask students: *What are examples of memories in the book (e.g., the parents' memory of watercress and of China, the mom's memory of her brother and of famine, the new memory they are making of eating watercress as a family)?* Ask students if they have a memory that is important, meaningful or powerful to them. Explain that a memory can be large or small; it can be an object, food, experience, person, photo, trip, a conversation, holiday, something said, etc. For a few minutes, have students share aloud their important memories, and then have them turn and talk with someone sitting near them about one of their memories, explaining why it's important to them. Then invite students to draw a picture of that memory and add thought bubbles as to what they or others were thinking, speech bubbles to quote something they said, or narration on the page about what is happening. Have students share their memory pictures with the whole class and then engage students in a discussion by asking: *What did you learn about memories? Why are they important? What can our memories tell us about ourselves? What can memories tell us about others? How do memories make us feel?* You may choose to put all the memory drawings on the bulletin board, in a book or on a webpage and call it: "The Power of Memory."

2. What is Bias?

Ask students: *What is bias?* Elicit/explain that **bias** is a preference, either for or against an individual or group, that affects fair judgment. Explain that there are some pages in the book that reveal bias that the main character faces as well as why she feels "ashamed." Re-read pages 18 and 19 when she says that "free is bad" because it means "hand-me-down clothes" and "roadside trash-heap furniture." Ask students: *What is happening here? What are the other children doing (i.e., laughing, pointing)? How does the main character feel?* Elicit that this may be happening to the main character because of bias against people who don't have that much money. Because the girl wears clothes that are handed down (i.e., not new) and the family sometimes get furniture that has been placed on the side of the road as trash, the author is telling the reader that the family may not have much or enough money. The main character reflects on feeling "ashamed" of her family, which may be because they don't have much money, or because the family is Chinese (in a community where there are not many or any other Chinese families) and the parents are originally from China and are immigrants. Then ask students: *In that situation, what could others do to act as an ally to the girl who is being teased targeted?* Explain that an **ally** is someone who helps or stands up for someone who is being bullied or the target of bias. Brainstorm ways that others could act as an ally to the girl in the story. Then ask students whether they have acted as an ally when faced with bias, asking them to share what happened and how they acted as an ally.

3. Get to Know the Author or Illustrator

Share information with students about author Andrea Wang and illustrator Jason Chin. You can read aloud some sections of [Andrea Wang's website](#) or [Jason Chin's Amazon page](#). Ask students: *What more do you want to know about Andrea Wang and Jason Chin and their work?* Create a list of their questions, which could include where Andrea Wang and Jason Chin grew up, why they wrote and illustrated *Watercress* and the book's meaning to them, other books they wrote and illustrated, important moments and milestones in their lives, awards they have won, their interests, hobbies, family life, relevant quotes, etc. Then have students choose either Andrea Wang or Jason Chin to research in more detail, using their website and other online, interview and print sources. The students' research can culminate in one of the following projects: an illustration/portrait of Andrea Wang or Jason Chin with a short blurb describing them, a letter to them that expresses students' thoughts and feelings about the book, or a semantic web with Wang or Chin's name in the middle and words and/or illustrations of what they learned about them.

ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and educational resources on AAPI Heritage Month, people identity and culture, and acting as an ally.

Curriculum Resources

Diverse Books Matter, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/diverse-books-matter.

Huddled Mass or Second Class? Challenging Anti-Immigrant Bias in the U.S.,

www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/huddled-mass-or-second-class-challenging-anti-immigrant.

Who Am I? Identity Poems, www.adl.org/education/educator-resources/lesson-plans/who-am-i-identity-poems.

Websites

6 Ways to Be an Ally

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/6-ways-to-be-an-ally-en-espanol

Some simple things a student can do to be an ally to targets of name-calling and bullying. (Also in Spanish.)

Asian American Pacific Islander (AAPI) Heritage Month Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/asian-american-pacific-islander-aapi-heritage-month

A collection of resources to teach help you teach and celebrate the Asian Pacific American heritage in school, communities and at home.

Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources

www.adl.org/education/resources/tools-and-strategies/bullying-and-cyberbullying-prevention-strategies

Provides a collection of ADL resources on bullying and cyberbullying for educators, administrators, students and families and caregivers.

Children's Books

Below are links to lists of recommended anti-bias and multicultural books for the indicated category.

Bullying Awareness & Prevention, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid\[165\]=165&tid\[166\]=166&tid\[167\]=167&tid\[168\]=168&tid\[169\]=169](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?childrens-lit-select-all-2=1&tid[165]=165&tid[166]=166&tid[167]=167&tid[168]=168&tid[169]=169)

People, Identity & Culture: Asian, Asian American, South Asian, South Asian American and Pacific Islander, [www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid\[203\]=203](http://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resources-for-educators-parents-families/childrens-literature?tid[203]=203)