



# Book of the Month

Presented by ADL's Education Division

**About the Book of the Month:** This collection of featured books is from our Recommended Multicultural and Anti-Bias Books for Children. 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 early childhood and elementary aged 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.

## The Year of the Rat

Grace Lin (Author)

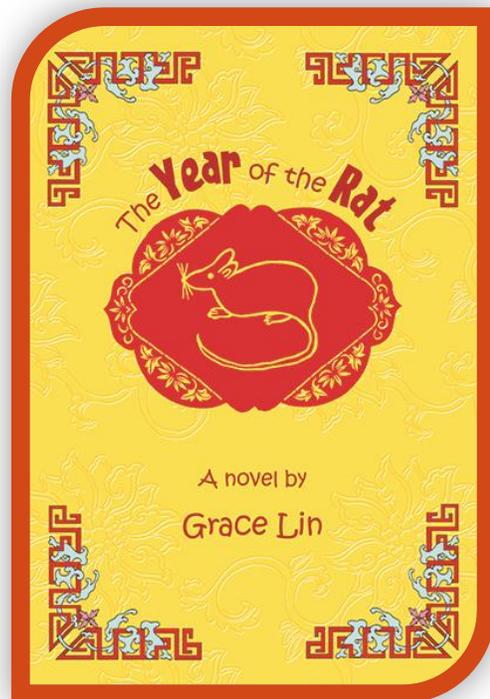
Pacy Lin is an elementary school student in upstate New York. As the book begins, Pacy and her family celebrate the Year of the Rat. The year brings big changes: Pacy must deal with the possibility of her best friend Melody, moving away, find the courage to forge on with her dream of becoming a writer and illustrator, deal with the prejudice directed toward a new student from China and learn to face some of her own flaws in the process. Along the way, Pacy encounters prejudice, struggles with acceptance and finds the beauty in change.

ISBN: 978-0316033619

Publisher: Little, Brown Books for Young Readers

Year Published: 2008

Age Range: 8–12



## Book Themes

Family, Culture, Bullying, Friendship, Prejudice

## Key Words

Discuss and define these words with children prior to reading the book and remind children of their meanings as they come up in the book. See ADL's [Glossary of Education Terms](#).

- ashamed
- destiny
- envy
- opportunity
- chopsticks
- embarrassed
- inexpensive
- quilt

- resolution
- target
- tradition
- sympathetic
- tease
- traitor

### Discussion Questions

If the students read the book in small groups or as a whole class, ask discussion questions throughout their reading in order to check comprehension and engage them on a deeper level. When students have finished the book, choose from these questions to guide a group discussion:

- What happened in the story?
- Why is the significance of the Year of the Rat and why do Chinese people historically and culturally admire rats?
- What is the difference between a resolution and a wish?
- Why is Pacy worried about her best friend Melody's move to California?
- When Pacy explains the Year of the Rat to her friends Charlotte and Becky, they don't have a positive reaction and Pacy feels badly. She says, "Sometimes, I felt like I was more than one person." What does she mean by this? Do you ever feel that way?
- What was the significance of the "Destiny Plate" and what did each item on the plate mean? What did each of the family members want for Max's "destiny" and why?
- Before Melody moves, why did she and Pacy decide to share their books by mailing them back and forth to each other instead of buying new ones?
- How did Pacy feel when Melody moved to California?
- What were different students' reactions to the new student in their class from China, Dun-Wei? Why do you think each person had that reaction?
- Why was Dun-Wei "an easy target," as Pacy observed?
- Why did Pacy's Mom want Pacy to be friends with Dun-Wei and how did Pacy feel about this?
- When she is around Charlotte and Becky (without Melody), Pacy says "I always feel like a shoe on the wrong foot." What does she mean by this? Do you ever feel this way?
- What advice would you give Pacy in terms of her friendship with Charlotte and Becky?
- What was your favorite part of Clifford and Lian's wedding?
- What did you learn from the book about Pacy's Asian culture?
- How did Pacy's opinion and feelings about Dun-Wei change throughout the book?
- How did Pacy use her talent for the schools' talent show?
- Towards the end of the book, Pacy figures out something important about her friendship with Becky and Charlotte. What did she discover and how did it change her feelings about them now?
- Pacy was born in the Year of the Tiger. Her Dad tells her this is meaningful, and later in the book she sees what he was saying. Why did Pacy feel like a tiger inside?
- Throughout the book, old stories passed down are told by different relatives of Pacy's. Which was your favorite story and why?

- How did you feel about Pacy throughout the course of the book? Did your opinion change? What makes you say that?
- In what ways does the story connect with something that happened in your own life?

### Extension Activities

Below are activities that you can do with children in order to extend the learning from the book.

#### 1. Create a Story Timeline

Students can create timelines that illustrate significant events that occur in the book. Explain to students that *The Year of the Rat* begins with Chinese New Year and ends with Chinese New Year one year later. Ask students: *How much time has passed over the course of the book?* Make sure they understand that an entire year has passed. Ask: *What were some of the important activities, events and incidents that took place in Pacy's life over the course of that year?* Make a list of all the ideas shared by students and add in your own if anything significant is missing.

Tell students that they will each create a timeline. Elicit from them what is a timeline, then explain that a timeline is a way to display events in chronological/date order. Have each student identify 8–10 events, activities and incidents from the book that are important and for each event, record (1) the title, (2) a few sentences about what happened and (3) an illustration. After making their list, have them pinpoint when each happened and the order in which all of their events occurred. They are to then create a timeline using all of the compiled information in the sequence in which it occurred. When the timelines are completed, they can be displayed around the classroom and all students can take a “gallery walk” to see all of them. Each student can also present their timeline to the rest of the class.

#### 2. Reader's Response

Have students write a reader's response essay about the book, using one of these three options:

- **Character Analysis:** Write an essay that focuses on one character from the book. It can be one of the main characters including Pacy, Melody, Lissy, Dun-Wei, Clifford, Becky, Pacy's Mom or Dad. The essay should include responses to the following questions: (a) What do you most appreciate about the person and find most frustrating about the character? (b) Was there an important scene in which the character has a realization about something or changed in some way? (c) Why did you pick the character and what about her or him do you relate to? (d) Describe at least three character traits of the person and include evidence and quotes from the book that illustrate these characteristics.
- **Book Review:** Write a book review of *The Year of the Rat*. The elements of a book review should include: (1) title, author, genre and theme; (2) personal reflections about the book: your thoughts, feelings and what you learned from the book; (3) plot summary: what happened and why, without giving away spoilers; (4) characters you loved or hated and (5) why it is worth reading or not. Consider sharing the reviews on a class blog.
- **Write the Next Chapter of the Book:** In the last scene of *The Year of the Rat*, Melody has come back to town and is visiting Pacy and her family. They are celebrating Chinese New Year, talking about changes over the past year and their making resolutions for the upcoming year. Have students consider what might happen next in the story by asking: *What else do Melody and Pacy talk about and do during the visit? How does Pacy interact with Dun-Wei after her revelation*

*about him and her confrontation with Becky about how she treated him? How does Pacy continue to work on her aspiration to become a writer and illustrator? Write a new chapter of the book based on what you think will happen next in the story.*

### 3. Acts of Kindness Lunchbox

Read aloud the story that Pacy's Mom told her called "Mom's School Lunch" on pages 141–144. After reading it aloud, ask students: *What happened in this story? Why did Pacy's mom tell her this story? Why did Chan hide her secret about her lunch? Why did Pacy's Mom share her lunchbox with Chan?* Explain to students that Pacy's Mom was being kind to Chan for sharing her lunch with her every day and in not telling her secret. Ask: *What is kindness? How does it make us feel? What are some ways in which you have been kind to other people or other people have been kind to you?* Have students share a few examples.

Explain to students that they are going to think about an act of kindness that they will do for someone else in the next week. It should not be something they already do like a chore at home or playing with a friend at recess. The act of kindness may be for a family member (e.g. help your younger sibling with their homework), friend or classmate (e.g. bring them a special treat at lunch) or a stranger (e.g. give up your seat on the bus for them). With students, brainstorm possible ideas for their acts of kindness. Each student is to come up with at least one idea for something they will do. Have them write out what their act of kindness is ("I will \_\_\_\_\_"), identify who the act of kindness is for and illustrate it. Or, time permitting, students can create lunchboxes of their own (either by using shoeboxes or cut cardboard paper made into the shape of a lunchbox) and write their act of kindness in or on the lunchbox. This symbolizes the lunch sharing in the story. (You may also choose to have students keep these private, especially if their acts of kindness are for other people in the class or about something private.) After the week is up, have a discussion with students to reflect upon their acts of kindness.

## ADL Resources

The following are curriculum and resources on anti-bias teaching strategies, name-calling and bullying and Asian-American culture.

### Curriculum Resources

"Identity-Based Bullying," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/identity-based-bullying.pdf](http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/identity-based-bullying.pdf).

"Who Am I? Identity Poems," *Current Events Classroom*, [www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/who-am-i-identity-poems.pdf](http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/who-am-i-identity-poems.pdf).

### Websites

Anti-Bias Education

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/anti-bias-education)

Provides training program offerings for pre-K through 12th grade school communities—educators, administrators, youth and families—which focus on the development of an inclusive culture and respectful school climate by addressing issues of bias and bullying.

### Anti-Bias Resources

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/additional-anti-bias-resources.html](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/curriculum-resources/c/additional-anti-bias-resources.html)

These resources provide a wide range of tips, tools and strategies for K-12 educators, administrators, students and family members to promote diversity and anti-bias behavior in learning environments and society.

### Bullying/Cyberbullying

[www.adl.org/education-outreach/bullying-cyberbullying](http://www.adl.org/education-outreach/bullying-cyberbullying)

Anti-bullying and anti-cyberbullying training program offerings, curriculum and resources for youth, educators, youth providers and adult family members.

### Children's Books

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

Cultural and Religious Groups: Asian/Asian-American, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/default5390.html>

Bullying and Name-Calling, <http://archive.adl.org/bibliography/defaultf0e2.html>