

# Children's Books on Asian Immigration

## The Chinese Immigration Experience...

### 1. *Dragonwings* by Laurence Yep

Moon Shadow joins his father, traveling from China to San Francisco in the early 20th century. Together father and son confront harsh prejudice as well as kindness, and ultimately follow a dream to build a flying machine in this Newbery Honor novel. **Ages 9-12**

### 2. *The Dragon's Child: A Story of Angel Island* by Laurence Yep \*\*

Based on conversations with his father and hundreds of pages of family interviews from the archives at Angel Island, Yep's story tells of his father's trip to America. In 1922, 10-year-old Gim Lew Yep is horrified to learn that he is to accompany his father when he returns and must prepare for the interview at Angel Island, an intensive examination about the minute details of his village and family in China. A nervous child, Gim always forgets to use his right hand instead of his left, and, worst of all, he stutters when he's anxious. Furthermore, he is heartsick over leaving his home and family. Told in Gim's very convincing voice, the tale captures the profound loss he feels at leaving his home as well as his determination to make his father proud of him. Yep raises many issues about both Chinese immigration and the immigrant experience in general: Who am I? Where do I belong? How can I balance the duality of my life? Why do people treat others this way? **Grades 3-6**

### 3. *Dream Soul* by Laurence Yep

The Lee family, first introduced in *Star Fisher* (HarperCollins, 1997), is Chinese. Living in Clarksburg, West Virginia, in 1927, they stand out in the community. Joan Lee and her siblings want to fit in and celebrate a non-Chinese holiday, Christmas. The children's parents agree, but only if the children behave according to the parents high standards. Understanding and friendship gradually emerge in this touching novel based on the experiences of the author's mother. **Age 9-12**

### 4. *The Magic Paintbrush* by Laurence Yep

Steve is a recently orphaned third grader who has been uprooted from a middle-class suburban lifestyle to live with his grandfather and his roommate, Uncle Fong, in a tenement in San Francisco's Chinatown. The lonely boy mistakes his grandfather's brusque nature for dislike and resentment. However, when Steve fails an art assignment because of a worn-out brush, his grandfather surprises him with a long-treasured magic paintbrush and the fantasy begins. Any picture the boy paints with the enchanted brush becomes real. As windows are painted on the walls of their apartment, they travel through them to the China of the old men's youth. Steve learns about his grandfather's past, about Chinese legends, and about life as a "Chinatownner." He discovers that his relative does indeed care about him, and that even though magic is enticing and exciting, its power should be used judiciously because, like nature, it cannot be controlled. Humor is evident when a greedy slumlord abuses the magic and is sufficiently humbled. Through simple

yet sensitive dialogue, the author weaves a tale of alienation turning into affection, and of good prevailing over meanness. **Grades 2-4**

**5. *Thief of Hearts* by Laurence Yep**

Stacy is called a “half-breed,” and both her loyalties and identity are challenged when Hong Ch’un moves from China to Stacy’s suburban California school. When Hon Ch’un is accused of stealing, Stacy is forced to carefully consider her own reaction and find out what has really happened. Much of the novel centers around Stacy’s struggle to reconcile her Chinese and white American heritage. 197 pages. **Ages 8-up**

**6. *My Name is America: The Journal of Wong Ming-Chung a Chinese Miner* by Laurence Yep**

In 1852, during the height of the California Gold Rush, ten-year-old Wong Ming-Chung makes the dangerous trip to America to join his uncle on his hunt for a fortune. The true treasure for Ming-Chung, though, is America itself. In the midst of the lawless, often hostile environment, he is able to forge an international community of friends. **Ages 9 and up**

**7. *Dragon’s Gate* by Laurence Yep**

When he accidentally kills a Manchu, a Chinese boy is sent to America to join his father, uncle, and other Chinese working to build a tunnel for the transcontinental railroad through the Sierra Nevada mountains in 1867. **Ages 10-up**

**8. *I Hate English* by Ellen Levine\***

Mei Mei, a bright and articulate immigrant from Hong Kong, overcomes her difficulty adjusting to the new language and culture at school in New York City. **Ages 4-8**

**9. *Almond Cookies and Dragon Well Tee* by Cynthia Chin-Lee**

Erica, a European American girl, visits the home of Nancy, her Chinese American friend. In her glimpse of Nancy’s cultural heritage, Erica finds much to admire and enjoy. In introducing her friend to her family’s culture, Nancy discovers that she needn’t feel embarrassed or ashamed about it. Together, the two girls learn that the more they share, the more each of them has. A wonderful story to help instill pride in children in their ethnic heritage rather than feelings of shame or embarrassment. An excellent story about cross-cultural friendship.

**10. *Oranges on Golden Mountain* by Elizabeth Partridge**

This handsome picture book tells the story of a young immigrant fisherman in the 1850s. Jo Lee’s widowed mother sends him from their drought-stricken village to join his uncle in California. Reluctantly, the boy makes the arduous trip, taking with him branches of his mother’s orange trees to plant when he arrives. Partridge introduces a fantasy element drawn straight from Chinese philosophy and traditional literature: the notion that a spirit can leave its body during dreams and

travel where it will. Jo Lee's dream spirit makes three visits back to China, each one representing a stage in his growth from miserable homesickness to strength and competence. The orange cuttings also take root in California's rich soil, putting out tiny new blossoms, a promise of fruit to come. The story ends with the expectation that Jo Lee's mother and sister will eventually join him. **Grades 1-4**

**11. *Apple Pie 4th of July* by Janet Wong \***

A Chinese-American girl predicts, incorrectly, that her parent's restaurant won't be visited on this national holiday. **K-2**

**12. *Landed* by Milly Lee**

Based on a true story, 12-year old Sun studies hard to be able to answer questions correctly to prove that he's his father's son and get into America. Upon arrival he is detained for a month due to the 1882 Chinese Exclusion Act. **Gr 3-5**

**13. *Earthquake* by Milly Lee**

A Chinese American girl tells the story of her family during the fallout from the San Francisco earthquake of 1905. Based on a real family story. Excellent author's note. **Grades K-2**

**14. *Nim and the War Effort* by Milly Lee**

Nim, a young Chinese-American girl, lives with her multigenerational family in San Francisco's Chinatown. World War II is ongoing, and she is absorbed in the last day of a competition to gather more newspapers for her school's paper drive than Garland Stephenson, the class bully. Taking her red wagon into the ritzy Nob Hill area for a last search for newsprint, Nim discovers a treasure trove of collected papers, finds a way to transport them to school, and wins the contest. Scenes from the family's daily life are effectively described in the narrative and illustrated in the soft contours and muted earth tones of the full-page paintings. Grandfather's morning Tai Chi practice, Grandmother's bound feet, the polite rituals of the family meal and the scheduled lessons at Nim's late-day Chinese school all take readers into life in Chinatown in the mid-20th century. **Ages 7-12**

**15. *In the Year of the Boar and Jackie Robinson* by Betty Bao Lord**

Set in 1947, Chinese-American Shirley Temple Wong becomes part of her new American surroundings. There is a teacher's guide available for using this book in the classroom. **Gr 3-6**

**16. *Coolies* by Yin**

Framed as a family story, this beautifully illustrated picture book tells of the Chinese immigrants who helped to build a great railroad across the western United States. **Grades 1-4**

**17. *Hannah is My Name* by Belle Yang**

Hannah and her family are so excited to immigrate to the United States, to become Americans. But how scary and worrisome it is to wait and see if they will be sent green cards. Joyful, vibrant and optimistic without minimizing the challenges faced by newcomers. **Ages 4-up**

**18. *The Great Wall of Lucy Wu* by Wendy Shang**

In this humorous and heartfelt debut about a split cultural identity, nothing goes according to plan for sixth-grader Lucy Wu. Lucy Wu, aspiring basketball star and interior designer, is on the verge of having the best year of her life. She's ready to rule the school as a sixth grader and take over the bedroom she has always shared with her sister. In an instant, though, her plans are shattered when she finds out that Yi Po, her beloved grandmother's sister, is coming to visit for several months -- and is staying in Lucy's room. Lucy's vision of a perfect year begins to crumble, and in its place come an unwelcome roommate, foiled birthday plans, and Chinese school with the awful Talent Chang. **Grades 4-6**

**19. *The Ugly Vegetables* by Grace Lin**

A Chinese-American girl and her mother grow a vegetable garden in a neighborhood where everyone else grows flowers. The girl thinks their plants are ugly compared to flowers, but soon learns that vegetables can make a very delicious soup one that the whole neighborhood wants to try. Soon everyone is growing Chinese vegetables as well as flowers. A recipe for "Ugly Vegetable Soup" is included. Lin's brightly colored gouache illustrations perfectly match her story, creating a patchwork-quilt effect as the neighbors' backyards all converge. **Grades K-3**

**20. *Char Siu Bao Boy* by Sandra Mamate**

Charlie loves char siu bao and eats it every day. But his friends think it's awful! What can he do? This Asian American classic looks at peer pressure to conform versus cultural pride. Includes Grandmother's char siu bao recipe! Selected by the Anti-Defamation League's World of Difference Program for its anti-bias education program. **For Ages 5-9**

**The Japanese Immigration Experience...**

**21. *How My Parents Learned to Eat* by Ina Friedman**

An American sailor courts a Japanese woman, and each tries to learn the other's way of eating. **Ages 4-8**

## **22. *Grandfather's Journey* by Allen Say**

Home becomes elusive in this story about immigration and acculturation, pieced together through old pictures and salvaged family tales. Both the narrator and his grandfather long to return to Japan, but when they do, they feel anonymous and confused: "The funny thing is, the moment I am in one country, I am homesick for the other." Allen Say's prose is succinct and controlled, to the effect of surprise when monumental events are scaled down to a few words: "The young woman fell in love, married, and sometime later I was born." The book also has large, formal paintings in delicate, faded colors that portray a cherished and well-preserved family album. The book, for **ages 4 to 8**, won the 1994 [Caldecott Medal](#).

## **23. *Tea with Milk* by Allen Say**

At home in San Francisco, May speaks Japanese and the family eats rice and miso soup and drinks green tea. When she visits her friends' homes, she eats fried chicken and spaghetti. May plans someday to go to college and live in an apartment of her own. But when her family moves back to Japan, she soon feels lost and homesick for America. In Japan everyone calls her by her Japanese name, Masako. She has to wear kimonos and sit on the floor. Poor May is sure that she will never feel at home in this country. Eventually May is expected to marry and a matchmaker is hired. Outraged at the thought, May sets out to find her own way in the big city of Osaka. Allen Say has created a moving tribute to his parents and their path to discovering where home really is. **Ages 5 and up**

## **24. *A Jar of Dreams* by Yoshiko Uchida**

Growing up in California during the depression isn't easy for eleven-year-old Rinko. She desperately wants to fit in and be like everyone else, but instead she is ridiculed and made to feel different because she is Japanese. But when Aunt Waka comes to visit, and brings with her the old-fashioned wisdom of Japan, she teaches Rinko the importance of her Japanese heritage, and the value of her own strengths and dreams, in this warm and touching story. **Ages 8-up**

## **Japanese Internment and World War II**

### **25. *Baseball Saved Us* by Ken Mochizuki**

During World War II, a young Japanese-American boy and his family are sent to an internment camp after the attack on Pearl Harbor. Despondent in their desolate surroundings, father and son pull the camp together to build a baseball diamond and form a league. **Grades 5 and up**

### **26. *The Bracelet* by Yoshiko Uchida**

The year is 1942 and America is at war with Japan. All Japanese-Americans are being sent to live in internment camps for the duration of the war, including seven-year-old Emi and her family. Before they go, Emi's friend, Laurie, gives her a gold heart bracelet to remember their friendship.

But upon her arrival at the camp, Emi discovers she has lost the bracelet. How will she remember her friend now? **Ages 4 up**

**27. *So Far from the Sea* by Eve Bunting**

Laura Iwasaki and her family are paying what may be their last visit to Laura's grandfather's grave. The grave is at Manzanar, where thousands of Americans of Japanese heritage were interned during World War II. Among those rounded up and taken to the internment camp were Laura's father, then a small boy, and his parents. Now Laura says goodbye to Grandfather in her own special way, with a gesture that crosses generational lines and bears witness to the patriotism that survived a shameful episode in America's history. This story of one family's visit to Manzanar, and of the memories stirred by the experience, will linger in reader's minds and hearts. **Ages 5 up**

**28. *The Invisible Thread* by Yoshiko Uchida**

Growing up in California, Yoshi knew her family looked different from their neighbors. Still, she felt like an American. But everything changed when America went to war against Japan. Along with all the other Japanese-Americans on the West Coast, Yoshi's family were rounded up and imprisoned in a crowded, badly built camp in the desert because they "looked like the enemy." Yoshiko Uchida grew up to be an award-winning author. This memoir of her childhood gives a personal account of a shameful episode in American history. **Ages 11 up**

**29. *Journey Home* by Yoshiko Uchida**

The book is an outstanding example of a young girl's bravery and courage during WW2. The story begins when Yuki and her family are released from concentration camp to travel back to their home in Berkeley California. When they got there Yuki feels UN welcomed and afraid, because people have been prejudiced toward her and many Japanese Americans. Yuki shares a close relationship with her brother and is disappointed when he wounds his leg in war. Yuki knew things would be different, but she didn't know things would change so much that her best friend Emi wouldn't want to do the things with her like they use to do. Yuki wishes for a return to the time before the war, but realizes things will never be like they were. **Older Readers (144 pages)**

**30. *Children of Topaz: The Story of Japanese-American Internment* by Michael Tunnell and George W. Chilcoat**

The authors have constructed their text around an actual classroom diary kept by American children of Japanese ancestry, unfairly and unconstitutionally remanded to prison camp during World War II. Selections of entries made by a third-grade class cover the period from March 8 to August 12, 1943. Under each date, the brief accounts are given, followed by extensive, well-researched commentaries explaining the children's allusions, expanding upon the diary text, and placing events in socio-historical perspective. The youngsters reveal a lively interest in the world

around them and a patriotic support of the war effort. The commentary details the bleakness and cruelty of their situations and amazing loyalty in light of the injustices heaped upon their families by the U.S. government and their fellow citizens. The well-chosen illustrations consist of fine-quality period photographs, a layout of the camp, and black-and-white reproductions of the children's crayon artwork. The photos are often quite moving and bring home the experiences described in the text. Others have written first-hand accounts of the internment camps, largely reminiscences for children told from an adult perspective. Here readers are exposed to nine-year-olds writing as it happened and are given a timely reminder for those who say, "It can't happen here." **Grades 4-9 Non-fiction**

**31. *Farewell to Manzanar* by Jeanne Wakatsuki Houston**

During World War II a community called Manzanar was hastily created in the high mountain desert country of California, east of the Sierras. Its purpose was to house thousands of Japanese American internees. One of the first families to arrive was the Wakatsukis, who were ordered to leave their fishing business in Long Beach and take with them only the belongings they could carry. For Jeanne Wakatsuki, a seven-year-old child, Manzanar became a way of life in which she struggled and adapted, observed and grew. For her father it was essentially the end of his life.

**Ages 12-up**

**32. *Japanese American Internment Camps (Cornerstones of Freedom)* by Scholastic Press)**

**Ages 9-up**

**Korea, Vietnam, Cambodia**

**33. *Angel Child, Dragon Child* by Michelle Maria Surat and Vo Dinh Mai**

This book is a wonderful story about a Vietnamese child trying to adjust to life in the USA. Ut has trouble with children at school because she is different. Haven't we all been there? Angel Child, Dragon Child is very realistic. Many children are brought to the USA by their families looking for a better life for themselves and their children. Unfortunately, not all people are accepting of those that are different. Surat does a terrific job of showing how UT sees herself as both an angel child and a dragon child. This story is one that should be used in classrooms across the country. Children can learn from this book that just because people look or dress differently, does not mean they do not have the same feelings as everyone else. Surat portrays how communities and people can come together to survive life. This is a wonderful story of accepting differences in others that children and adults should read. **Ages 4- up**

**34. *Song Lee in Room 2B* by Suzy Kline**

The students are 2nd graders in the book but they could just as well be 4th or 5th graders. It was nice to have a character originally from another culture in Song Lee, who seems to have been born

in Korea and emigrated to the USA fairly recently. As a child in a bicultural family, who looks a little different from her Japanese peers at school, I think my daughter appreciated the character of Song Lee. My only gripe is the rather stereotypical way in which Song Lee sometimes speaks-- 'Asian English' for want of a better word. However, it does show that she has come to the USA from another culture and is integrating. Her antics are amusing and show originality. **Ages 7 up**

### **35. *Gathering of Pearls* by Sook Nyul Choi**

This novel completes the autobiographical trilogy begun in *Year of Impossible Goodbyes* (Dell, 1993) and continued in *Echoes of the White Giraffe* (Houghton, 1993). Here the story begins with Sookan's arrival in White Plains, New York, in 1954 to start college, where she is the only Korean student at a small Catholic school for women. She confronts all the problems of adjustment normal to freshmen, plus the added burdens of absorbing a foreign culture and earning extra money. It is easy to fall in love with this gentle girl. She combines a delicate sweetness with a fierce determination to fulfill her dreams. She works hard to produce her own blend of cultures and values—she delights in the new, and tempers it with the traditional. She also attempts to maintain a correspondence with family members struggling to rebuild their lives in post-war Korea, but they see her as a deserter. Only her mother understands her yearnings and conflicts.

**Grades 7-12**

### **36. *The Lotus Seed* by Sherry Garland\***

A Vietnamese woman plants a lotus seed to bring her traditions to her new home. **Gr 2-5**

### **37. *Who Belongs Here? An American Story* by Margy Burns Knight**

A ten-year old Cambodian boy tells of leaving his homeland and settling in this country. **Gr 3-5**

### **38. *The Name Jar* by Choi Yangsook\***

Being the new kid in school is hard enough, but what about when nobody can pronounce your name? Having just moved from Korea, Unhei is anxious that American kids will like her. So instead of introducing herself on the first day of school, she tells the class that she will choose a name by the following week. Her new classmates are fascinated by this no-name girl and decide to help out by filling a glass jar with names for her to pick from. But while Unhei practices being a Suzy, Laura, or Amanda, one of her classmates comes to her neighborhood and discovers her real name and its special meaning. On the day of her name choosing, the name jar has mysteriously disappeared. Encouraged by her new friends, Unhei chooses her own Korean name and helps everyone pronounce it—*Yoon-Hey*. **Ages 5 and up**

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