

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

### *What Happened This Summer*

Grade 8 and above

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#### 1. Book Summary

These nine stories are about immigration. Eight stories share lead characters who attend Grade 12 at the same school in 21<sup>st</sup> century Toronto (it could be any large urban centre with a large immigrant Chinese population). Each story is narrated by a different person. They are teenagers from Hong Kong, Taiwan, or China. They have lived here for different lengths of time, and enjoy varied levels of fluency in North American culture and the English language.

Individual stories that address certain themes around IMMIGRATION are:

High expectations of new homeland:	Stories 5, 7, 8
Disappointment in new homeland:	Stories 1, 2, 3, 4
The importance of family:	Stories 2, 3, 5, 7
Adaptation to the new homeland	Stories 1, 3, 4, 8
Trying to succeed	Stories 2, 4, 5, 8, 9
Racism and conflict	Stories 1, 6,
Changing identities	Stories 2, 6, 8, 9
Ties to old homeland	Stories 4, 7

The stories focus on immigrants of Chinese background, but their experiences can reflect those of another group.

Students may read one or several stories, or the entire collection. To choose a story by homeland or gender of narrator, check the summary for each title below. Each story is also described below.

The *Ideas for Classrooms* for each title provide questions and activities for absorbing story content, researching related issues, and exploring the craft of writing.

## 2. Author's Note

I wrote these stories after writing about the contemporary Chinese communities of Canada for my book *Chinatown* (James Lorimer and Company, 2005).

During the research, I read of many personal situations that didn't lend themselves to being included in a non-fiction book.

I was also interested in exploring different viewpoints inside the Chinese communities of Canada. The most obvious divisions involve the recent homelands of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China. These new waves of immigration have greatly changed the Chinese communities of Canada.

My fiction has always been rooted in the recorded experiences of community members, and the stories in this collection aren't any different.

The school was a natural background for these stories because the public school system has always been key in integrating immigrants into mainstream society.

## 3. Background: Recent Chinese Immigration

- In the 2001 census, the Chinese formed Canada's largest racial minority, at 3.5 percent of the nation's population.
- From 1987 to 1994, Hong Kong supplied the most immigrants to Canada. After 1994, the People's Republic of China became the top source.
- In the ten years between 1995 and 2004, a total of 2.2 million immigrants came to Canada. Of these, 21 percent (about 460,000 people) were age 14 and younger and from the Asia and Pacific region. These people will pass through Canada's education system.
- Toronto, Vancouver, and Calgary contain Canada's largest Chinese communities.
- Chinese is the third most spoken mother tongue in Canada, after English and French.

## 4. The Stories

### 4.1 'Never Go To School With a Hangover' (page 1)

Hung-over Lincoln Wen is hauled to the counsellor's office after a classroom incident involving Chinese-Canadian history. He was from Hong Kong.

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.1.1 Let's say that after Lincoln leaves the counsellor's office, Mr. Wong meets Mr. McGee in the hallway. Write a conversation, based on the story, between the two men. Mr. McGee starts by asking, "Why is Lincoln so angry, Mr. Wong?" Present the conversation to the class.
- 4.1.2 Lincoln challenges Lisa Yip and Mr. Wong. Is this conflict only about teenagers versus adults? What else led to tension between these characters?
- 4.1.3 It is said, "People who don't learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Yet Lincoln feels that learning about history doesn't help him deal with the non-Chinese who make fun of him. Do you agree with Lincoln? Why or why not?
- 4.1.4 This story was written before Canada's government dealt with Chinese Head Tax Redress in June 2005. The issue of government apologies for historical wrongs committed against different ethnic groups has been controversial. Pairs of students can research the issue (or those of other ethnic groups such as the South Asian, Ukrainian, Italian) and present the two sides to the class.
- 4.1.5 Try and collect posters similar to those that Lincoln saw in Mr. Wong's office. Do you think these posters are effective? Why or why not?

### 4.2 'I Thought Things Were Getting Better' (page 17)

After Hu-lan Xie learns her brother is gay, she tries to find a new church for them to attend. Her family came from the People's Republic of China.

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.2.1 Why does Hu-lan feel she must help her brother? Would she feel differently if her family was not immigrants?
- 4.2.2 At the end of the story, is Hu-lan able to resolve the problem? Why or why not?

- 4.2.3 Social workers often say, “You can’t help someone unless they want to be helped.” How does this statement apply to Hu-lan and Han-ming, and to Hu-lan’s entire family?
- 4.2.4 As a freelance researcher, you are writing a report for Canada’s new ambassador to China. The report’s topic is: how gay and lesbian people of China are treated differently from those of Canada.
- 4.2.5 Ang Lee’s movie *The Wedding Banquet* (1993) was a Taiwan-U.S.A. co-production about a gay Taiwanese-American. If you can rent the film, write brief reviews of the film from the perspective of (a) Hulan (b) Han-ming and (c) Hugh Somers. How would their opinions differ from one another?

4.3 ‘You Cannot Mess With Fate’ (page 33)

Hong Kong-born Philip Ma unwillingly enters a marriage of convenience, becomes a father, and has a hard time accepting his life as an immigrant.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.3.1 When a person marries a second person in order to help the second person immigrate and gain new citizenship, that arrangement is called a ‘marriage of convenience.’ Why are immigration authorities opposed to such marriages?
- 4.3.2 You are the narrator’s oldest sister. Write a letter in 1997 to one of your sister about your father’s decision re: immigration. Include your own comments about your father’s thinking. Write a second letter in 2003, again reporting on his decision re: immigration. Comment on how he has changed his mind.
- 4.3.3 Both the narrator and Jenny face a big decision that involves independence and family. Why are such decisions difficult? What events help the narrator and Jenny make their decisions?
- 4.3.4 ‘Fate’ can be defined as “...the force believed to predetermine events.” In life, people often recall key events that shaped later actions. The narrator does that at the end. What key events that shaped Jenny’s later actions? Have her describe them, and how she feels about them, in a letter that she writes to Edmund when she breaks up with him.
- 4.3.5 The narrator’s father displays both ‘old-fashioned’ and ‘modern’ behaviour. Create an imaginary conversation between these two sides of the man as he tries to decide if he should ask his son to do the marriage of convenience.

#### 4.4 'Don't Trust Your Parents' (page 51)

Da-ren Zhao is in the process of studying to write the *Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL)* when his mother offers to take him back to China.

- 4.4.1 In the scene where Da-ren's mother meets Shelley, two conversations run side-by-side. In one, Da-ren talks to his mother. In the other, he talks to Shelley. The author could have stopped Da-ren from talking to Shelley but did not do so. Why did the author choose to run two conversations at the same time? Is the content of the conversations important here?
- 4.4.2 Alternate Ending. Let's say that Da-ren's mother insists on taking him to China. Let's also say that Da-ren's father strongly opposes her. The two parents land in Family Court before a judge. Draft opening statements for Da-ren's father and mother. Read them to the class. Another student plays the role of the judge and questions each parent. The class votes on which parent should win the case.
- 4.4.3 How does the author use 'language' to create character and move the plot to its end?
- 4.4.4 You are Da-ren, writing an email to your friend in Shanghai explaining why you broke up with Shelley. Or, you are Shelley writing an email to a friend explaining why you broke up with Da-ren. Mention what you liked and disliked about the other person.
- 4.4.5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of changing non-English names to English names? Are the same points equally valid for teenagers and for adults?

#### 4.5 'Astronaut Dads Are A Pain' (page 75)

Taiwan-born Julia Teng fights her father about her determination to attend art school.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.5.1 What different roles/symbols does the camera play in this story?
- 4.5.2 What aspects of Uncle Foon's character lead him to befriend Julia?
- 4.5.3 Some ethnic groups have neighbourhoods that help define their community, e.g. Little Italy, Korea Town, India Bazaar, and Greek Town. Other ethnic groups do not have such focal points. How is Chinatown important to Julia?

- 4.5.4 Immigration is the most stressful experience a family can undertake. Let's say that at the end of the story, Julia's parents decide to get marriage counselling. The counsellor starts by saying, "So, tell me what you think is the problem." Write responses for Julia's father and for her mother. Read them to the class. Then the counsellor says, "Tell me what the other person can do to improve the situation." Write responses for Julia's father and mother. Read them to the class. Then, have Julia's father and mother discuss how they want to proceed.
- 4.5.5 The struggle between some parents and their offspring about careers involves high stakes. Often, neither side will back down. This story ends with Julia attaining her goal. Is the ending believable? Why or why not?

4.6 'We're Dating White Guys' (page 99)

Hong Kong-born Joyce Koo loses weight and dates a white guy while her cousin dumps her boyfriend, a kung-fu fan.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.6.1 Do Joyce and Carol have a healthy friendship? Why or why not?
- 4.6.2 Do you agree with Joyce when she calls Carol's parents 'racist' for not liking Kevin?
- 4.6.3 You are Joyce's mother. When you visit Doctor Gullidge, the doctor says, "So Joyce brought you in today. How's she doing?" How do you respond?
- 4.6.4 The diary or journal form is often used to tell stories. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of using this form for fiction?
- 4.6.5 Joyce's diary reveals that she faces many conflicts. Describe these various conflicts. How are they connected to one another?

4.7 'Death Seems To Linger' (page 123)

Simon Yu returns to Hong Kong and learns about his birth-mother who died when he was four years old.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.7.1 Simon's mother character emerges from what other people say. How is her character as portrayed by Simon's adopted family in Canada different or similar

- to that described by members of Simon's other family in Hong Kong? Is there any foreshadowing of why Simon's mother killed herself in their descriptions?
- 4.7.2 At the start of a story, personal motivation helps to develop a character and his/her involvement in the plot. How does the author develop Simon's motivation to go to Hong Kong, given that Simon didn't want to go at first? Does the ending of story address Simon's motivation?
- 4.7.3 At the airport when Simon is about to leave, he tells his grandmother, "I'm happy too," in reference to his visit to Hong Kong. Do you think he was being truthful? Why or why not?
- 4.7.4 Let's say that when Simon chats with his pals over the internet, a female friend asks about his grandmother. If you were Simon, how would you describe her? What do you like and dislike about her? How would your description of the grandmother be different if you were responding to a male friend?
- 4.7.5 Simon was born in Hong Kong but grew up in Canada. When Simon returns to Hong Kong for a visit, what experiences are strange to him, and what experiences are familiar to him? How does this affect the conclusion of the story?

4.8 'Reading This Novel Made Me Want to Have Sex' (page 145)

Away from her home and family in China, Julie Sung challenges the strict guardian she lives with in Canada.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.8.1 There is no mention of Julie's mother in this story. How would this absence affect Julie's character? How would this absence affect the way the aunt treats Julie?
- 4.8.2 Teenagers often feel powerless and seek to challenge adults. How does Julie challenge her aunt? What is Julie trying to prove when she challenges her aunt?
- 4.8.3 At the story's start, Julie is too shy to speak in class. Yet, at the story's end, she chats with adult dignitaries at the banquet. How can this change in behaviour be explained?
- 4.8.4 Julie's friend Shelley appears in two other stories in the book: 'I Thought Things Were Getting Better' and 'Don't Trust Your Parents.' What role does she play in each story? Does your impression of Shelley change from one story to the next?

4.8.5 In this story, all the female characters are strong women with power: the aunt, the senator, the reporter. How does this shape a larger context for this story?

4.9 'What Happened This Summer' (page 165)

Taiwan-born Wayne Lin loses his best friend in two separate situations.

Ideas for Classrooms

4.9.1 Crystal Yeh appears in two other stories in the book: 'Astronaut Dads Are a Pain' and 'Death Seems to Linger.' What role does she play in each story? Does your impression of Crystal change from one story to the next?

4.9.2 What are common stereotypes of Chinese high school students in Canada? How do the characters in 'What Happened This Summer' challenge those stereotypes?

4.9.3 What are the different things that make Wayne angry? If you were another buddy of Wayne, how would you try to help him?

4.9.4 There is a form of modern folklore called *urban legends*. Research this form and tell the class whether or not the ghost story in 'What Happened This Summer' qualifies to be called an *urban legend*.

4.9.5 Wayne loses his friend Andy twice in the story. How do these two separate events create drama for this story?

## 5. Further Reading

Yee, Paul, *Chinatown: An Illustrated History of the Chinese Communities of Victoria, Vancouver, Calgary, Winnipeg, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Halifax* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2005). This book's lengthy introduction describes the background to recent Chinese immigration.

Yee Paul, *Saltwater City: An Illustrated History of the Chinese in Vancouver* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, revised edition 2006). The 2006 revised edition contains a new chapter covering the 1986-2001 period.