

# The Year of the Dog

By Grace Lin

## *Library of Congress Summary:*

Frustrated at her seeming lack of talent for anything, a young Taiwanese American girl sets out to apply the lessons of the Chinese Year of the Dog, those of making best friends and finding oneself, to her own life.

## **Book Information:**

Time Period: Contemporary

Genre: Contemporary Fiction

Curriculum Ties: Chinese New Year

## **Booktalk:**

<http://www.mackinbooktalk.com/viewbook.aspx?BookId=674>

## **Author Information**

[www.gracelin.com](http://www.gracelin.com)

This website includes a biography of the author, a studio tour, fun facts about the author, and information about contacting the author. The Year of the Dog activities include: make a New Year Banner, Chinese Horoscopes, a lesson suggestion on memoir writing, and instruction for drawing a dog like Pacy.

## **Pre-Reading Activities**

Students should learn about and study the Chinese New Year before reading this book so they at least have some background knowledge of it. This is a very important aspect of the book, so they could begin by reading about the Chinese New Year and the traditions that it holds. Then, the students could find out what

the animal was for that year and what it symbolized. The information about Chinese Horoscopes on the author's website would provide a great resource.

## Chapters 1-3

### Questions:

1. Do you think it's hard for Pacy to balance her Chinese traditions with her American traditions? Why?
2. Why is it important for Pacy's family to be rich?
3. How is the year of the dog *symbolic* for Pacy? What do you think will happen throughout the book?

Journal Topic: What kinds of traditions do you have in your house, especially during the holidays?

### Vocabulary

symbolize (6) – one thing that stands for or is a representative of something else;  
i.e. the fried dumplings *symbolize* gold coins.

stethoscope (7) – an instrument that doctors use to listen to a patient's heartbeat

frantic (8) – anxious, scared, and out of control

Hong-Bao (10) – special red envelopes with money in them given during the Chinese New Year

## Chapters 4-6

### Questions:

1. How do you think it makes Pacy feel to be one of two Chinese girls in school?
2. Would you consider Pacy's mom's "talent" of falling asleep anywhere to be a true talent? What kind of "talents" do you have that are like hers?

## Journal Topic

If you could make up a day like Pacy did with Unicorn Day, what would that day be? What kinds of things would you do, what would you wear, etc?

## Vocabulary

porridge (14) – a food usually eaten at breakfast that resembles oatmeal

scrambled (20) – to think up something really quickly

## **Chapters 7-9**

### Questions:

1. Would it be confusing to have two names the way Pacy has an American name and a Chinese name? Why or why not?
2. How would you react if you went to a friend's house for dinner and didn't like what was served?
3. Why do you think red eggs were chosen to symbolize good luck for a newborn baby?

### Journal Writing:

Pacy notices several differences between Melody's house and her own house (i.e., the "nutritious" food in Melody's kitchen). What differences have you noticed between your house and a friend's house?

## Vocabulary

nutritious (27) – healthy

tofu (31) – a bland, cheese-like food that is high in protein

ammonia (36) – a chemical used in many different types of products

menacingly (36) – to act in a way that threatens another person

pneumonia (37) – sickness that involves the lungs

## Chapters 10-12

### Questions:

1. What are some other ways that a newborn baby is celebrated?
2. What other foods have superstitions behind them, the way that the ginger and chicken soup is only for women to eat so they can get enough energy to take care of babies?
3. Why was it important that Teddy started going out with Sophie instead of Pacy?

### Journal Writing:

Pacy and her family gathered together to celebrate her new baby cousin's arrival. What is your favorite family memory?

### Vocabulary:

parsley (38) – a dark green plant used as decoration or seasoning for food  
embroidered (38) – a decoration that is sewn on to fabric  
bamboo (45) – a type of woody grass used when making furniture, crafts, etc.  
vigorously (48) – full of energy

## Chapters 13-15

### Questions:

1. Why did Pacy's grandmother make her mother a paper piano? Why is this important?

Journal Writing: Pacy's mom had to practice a lot to get good at playing the piano. What have you had to practice at to get good at? Or, have you ever practiced at anything and realized you *weren't* good at it?

## Vocabulary:

scratchboard (52) – a type of board that is coated with ink and when scratched, it reveals the white surface underneath

established (55) – to be secure in where you are at, whether it is in your job, your home, etc.

botanist (60) – a plant scientist

control (61) – the part of the experiment in which the other parts will be compared

scrawny (64) – small

substantiate (65) – to make it true

glum (66) – sad or down about something

## **Chapters 16-18**

### Questions:

1. Would it seem strange if no one from your ethnicity starred in movies or were characters in books?
2. What about being the munchkin that hands Dorothy a gift scares Pacy the most?
3. What was the purpose of Pacy's mother telling the story about her first day of school?

Journal Writing: Write a journal entry about your day. Include anything that happened throughout the day – your routine, any interesting things that happened throughout the day, etc. Write a story about your life the way Pacy is trying to write a story about her own life!

### Vocabulary:

writer's block (74) – when a writer can't think of any words to write

short-lived (79) – brief

## Chapters 19-21

### Questions:

1. How do you think the ugly vegetables in Pacy's mother's garden compare to Pacy?
2. Why is it important to write and then rewrite?

Journal Writing: Pacy was really nervous to perform in the play, but she came through in the end. Write about a time that you were really nervous but everything worked out in the long run.

### Vocabulary:

calico (82) – a type of fabric with bright print  
unreliable (83) – can't be depended on  
mahogany (92) – a shade of red

## Chapters 22-24

### Questions:

1. Why was it important for Pacy to go to a Taiwanese-American convention? Do you think it was important to be around people from her own background?
2. Why do the girls make fun of Pacy for not being able to speak Taiwanese? Is it really important that she can't speak the language?
3. How is Pacy's friendship with Melody similar to Pacy's mom's friendship with Mei?

Journal Writing: Pacy's mom tells a story about the first friend she made in the United States. Can you remember the first friend you made?

### Vocabulary:

cramped (107) – crowded  
devour (110) – to eat greedily

## Chapters 25-27

### Questions:

1. Have your teachers ever compared you to your older brothers and sisters?  
How did it make you feel?
2. What is significant about Pacy wanting a china doll for Christmas?

### Journal Writing:

What was your favorite past Halloween costume?

### Vocabulary:

paraded (116) – marched around, showed off  
blustering (117) – roaring, noisy

## Chapters 28-29

### Questions:

1. Do your parents make you clean extra on special occasions or when people are coming over?
2. Is it important for us to look back at what we've accomplished in a week's time? A month's time? A year's time?

Journal Writing: Think about this past year and everything you've accomplished. Make a list of things you have completed, new things you have tried, new friends you have made, etc.

### Vocabulary:

delicate (132) – easily broken or fragile

## Other Works by Grace Lin:

*Year of the Rat*

*Olvina Flie*

*Lissy's Friends*

*Olvina Swims*

*The Ugly Vegetables*

*The Red Thread*

*Bringing in the New Year!*

*Our Seasons*

*Dim Sum for Everyone!*

*Okie Dokie Artichokie*

*Kite Flying*

*Merry Christmas*

*Fortune Cookie Fortunes*

*Robert's Snow*

*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

*Robert's Snowflakes*

## Additional Websites:

[http://crafts.kaboose.com/holidays/chinese\\_new\\_year.html](http://crafts.kaboose.com/holidays/chinese_new_year.html)

There are all sorts of crafts on this site that are related to the Chinese New Year that are mentioned in the book, including Chinese New Year red envelopes.

[http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/chinese\\_new\\_year.htm](http://www.activityvillage.co.uk/chinese_new_year.htm)

There is information regarding the Chinese New Year on this site too, including Chinese New Year recipes, puzzles, games, stories, coloring pages, and crafts.

<http://www.newportlibraryri.org/images/YearoftheDogDiscussionGuide.pdf> -

Discussion Guide for the book

<http://www.wakegov.com/NR/rdonlyres/5A2B952E-B44D-4835-9BA9-6BF41D113045/0/YearoftheDog.pdf> - author interview, discussion guide