

Mao and Me



Author/Illustrator:
Chen Jiang Hong

Awards

Skipping Stones, Multicultural and International Honor, 2010

Vocabulary

revolutionary, reeducation, propaganda

Reviews

[Publishers Weekly](#) - starred review

Summary

In this graphic novel style memoir, author and illustrator Chen Jiang Hong shares his memories of growing up during the Chinese Cultural Revolution, interweaving ordinary domestic scenes with moments of profound cultural change.



FAIR Standard

HM.9-12.5 I can explain why societies that most fully respect human dignity promote the greatest contribution from everyone and the greatest prosperity for everyone.

Discussion

1. The author writes, "Every morning [at school] in front of a portrait of Mao, with his Little Red Book held over our hearts, we had to make a self-critique, listing our good and bad actions of the previous day." Why do you think the teachers asked the students to do this? What would you do if your teacher asked you to do this?
2. Why do you think Chen chose the title *Mao and Me*? How can one man have such a big impact on a little boy he has never met?
3. On the front cover flap, it says: "This is Chen's first book about his childhood . . . While wanting his readers to know what life was like [during the Cultural Revolution], Chen also hopes that you will discover the similarities that exist between your own life and his." What are some similarities between your life and Chen's?

Discussion

4. Chen's grandfather told him, "When one has truly understood something, a single thing, then one is able to understand everything." What do you think he means? Do you agree?
 5. The Red Guards burned books and smashed ancient objects. What were they trying to do? Why did many people, including Chen's grandparents, destroy old photos of themselves in traditional clothing?
 6. On page 24, the illustration shows Mr. Huang beaten and forced to walk through the streets wearing a card that says "rich landowner" around his neck. This kind of punishment is called public shaming. In our society, have you ever seen someone publicly shamed for being part of the "wrong group" or having the "wrong ideas"?
 7. Why do you think the Red Guards took Mrs. Liu away? What do you think they forced her to confess?
 8. During the Cultural Revolution, there were many changes to school and education. Which examples in the book stood out to you? What do you think Mao imagined that education would look like for the people of China? How is that different from what you understand education to be?
 9. Chen never found out what happened to his father at the reeducation camp. Based on what you know about the Cultural Revolution, what do you think happened there?
 10. Read the author biography on the back flap. Why do you think Chen has made it his life's purpose to tell stories that revive the traditions of ancient China?
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Activities

1. The author/illustrator of this book used a graphic novel style for the pictures. Why do you think he chose this format? Create your own graphic novel or comic strip telling the story of one of your most important memories.
2. Think about some of the bad things that happened in the book. Work in a group to draft a set of laws that you think would help protect people from this kind of thing happening again. The group should include three or more people, and a majority has to agree for a law to be added to the list. Try to agree on at least five good laws.

Challenge: Review the Constitution and Bill of Rights. Are any of the laws similar to the ones on your list?

3. Chen's father was sent away for nearly ten years to be reeducated. Imagine you are Chen, growing up during this time. Write postcards explaining what is taking place back home, using the book to guide your thinking. Consider sharing some of the challenges you are facing, questions you may have, and anything else you think your father would like to hear about during his time away.

Additional Resources

[Aren't These Books for Little Kids?, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development](#)

[Never Too Old: Embracing Picture Books To Teach Older Students, School Library Journal](#)