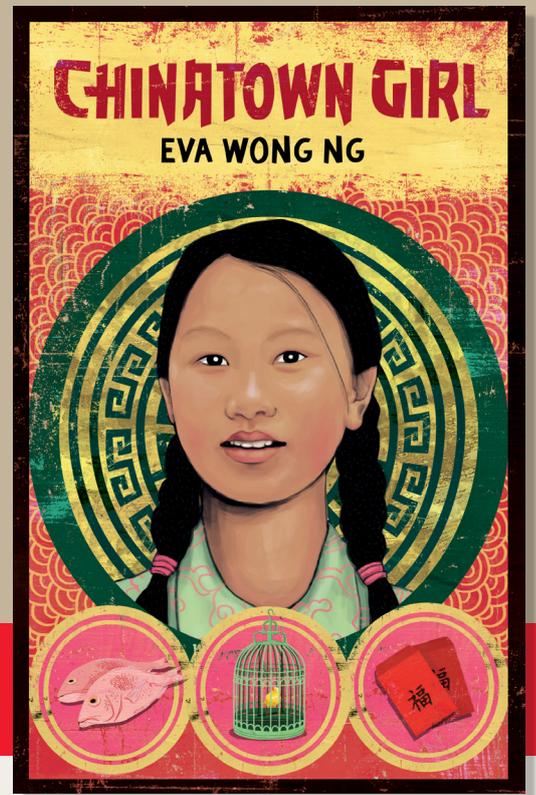


Chinatown Girl

By Eva Wong Ng

- Reading • Writing •
- Social Studies •



Synopsis

New Zealand is at war when Silvey starts her diary, but for Silvey this is just a backdrop to the main issues of her world. Her school has closed and she has to get used to going to a new school. She has many chores to fit in before and after school, as well as attend Chinese classes. A neighbouring boy called Sunny seems keen on her – she’s only 12 years old and has no intention of going out with him!

Whilst writing her family story for a school project she learns much about her family emigrating to New Zealand from China, the poverty in village life, about arranged marriages, and the hardships of making new lives in a strange country that often made them feel unwelcome.

Added to that, three Chinese American soldiers who have been stationed in Auckland begin joining them for Saturday night dinner and she learns of the opportunities she might have when she is older. She might train to be a journalist, or learn to play the guitar, or sing in a band. She hates the war for taking away the friendly soldiers, but without it she would never have met them.

About the Author

Eva Wong Ng was born in Khyber Pass Road in Auckland in 1934. Her father had a fruit shop, and she was very familiar with *Chinatown Girl*'s world. After training and working as a pharmacist, Eva met and married a doctor and moved first to Ashburton, then Dunedin, where she still lives. Eva has written a number of books about the Chinese communities around New Zealand and the history of immigration from China, beginning in the gold-rush days. When *Chinatown Girl* was first published, it was a finalist in the 2006 NZ Post Children's Book Awards, and acknowledged as a Storylines Notable Book the same year.

Writing Style

Chinatown Girl is a historical story and is part of Scholastic's My New Zealand Story series. The story is set in 1942 during World War Two in Chinatown, Auckland, where the descendants of the Chinese miners and market gardeners gathered together to maintain their culture and provide a sense of community. It is written in diary form, detailing in linear format the life of Silvey from 1st January to 31st December 1942. The text is in the first-person past tense. The author has used a range of short and long sentences, grouped in daily and monthly diary entries.



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Chinatown Girl has been written for the 10+ age group, enabling students to get an insight into Chinese culture against a backdrop of WWII. A glossary has been included to enable readers to understand any Chinese words used in the story. At the back of the book, the author has written a historical note about the time period the story is situated in, as well as more information about Chinatown, and the early Chinese immigrants. There is also a one-page biography about the author, showing she has the background to write *Chinatown Girl*. From pages 188-196 the writer/publisher has included photographs of early Chinese immigrants, what Chinatown looked like then and now, Chinese children, and the American soldiers marching in a parade down Queen Street.

Shared Learning and Discussion Points

ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

- Look at the cover, front and back. When and where is this story set? Who or what is this story about? Why do you think that?
- Why does Silvey want to keep a diary? How did she get her name and what does it mean? Why is naming a baby serious business for Chinese? Why is Silvey moving schools and why did she pick her new school? What does Silvey do after school some days? What special time of the year is it and how do they prepare for stage one? What tragic event has happened in the Philippines? What other war does Silvey refer to? What is the technique to doing calligraphy? (pp.9-21)
- What has Judy been collecting on the farm to help with the war effort? What sort of chores does Silvey do and why is she rushing them? What do you think 'dark-night people' are? How did the teacher see who had flicked a paper ball at his neck? How do you think Ma's nose told her it was Harm Yue process stage three? Why do you think Sun Tong wanted to see Silvey? (pp.24-32)
- What is the recipe for *harm yue gai lup farn* (salt fish and cubed chicken rice)? Why doesn't Silvey go fishing and who was disappointed when she didn't turn up? Why does Sunny give Silvey a card? (pp.33-38)
- What is Judy's big news? Why is she surprised when Silvey tells her news? Name four interesting things you learnt about Silvey's culture on page 43. What sort of shows are held at the Town Hall? What do they call their canary and how did they acquire it? How did Chinatown begin? (pp.39-52)
- What did Western Springs used to be called and why was it called that? What interesting fact do you learn from Ah Yeh's life experience? What happened to his wife, Ah Ngin? What was the name of the exercise that Nam Bak taught the family? How does Nam Bak think the Japanese will take Singapore? (pp.54-61)
- Why are the family given identification tags? Why is Mai scared when she has to go into the *huk see* house? Why does Mai not want Silvey to tell anybody her secret? How do they celebrate the Chinese New Year's Eve? (pp.62-71)
- What bad news do they hear on the first day of the Year of the Horse? Why does Ma think she was lucky to get an education? What is a matchmaker? What sort of wedding dress did Ma wear? Why does the school want the children to be sent away to the country? (pp.73-81)
- What activities do they play on Point Chevalier Beach on Chinese New Year? What survival activity do the students have to practise at school? Why is Silvey scared of the plane flying overhead? Why are the children given free apples at school? Why was Ah Yeh's poll tax certificate racist? (pp.82-91)
- Why does Silvey's family place food at the foot of the headstones? What do you think happened to Huk Sarm in the ghost story? Why does Silvey want to see the ghost and what do you really think she heard? Why is food rationed? (pp.92-101)
- Where did most of the Chinese in New Zealand originally come from in China? What has prevented Yee Bak's wife and son from coming to join him in New Zealand, and what happens that enables them finally to come? What battle occurred on Tuesday 12th May and why was it important? Why did Yee Bak-Mu sometimes suck on pebbles? How do you think they taste, and would it help? (pp.102-111)
- Why have the boys been given English names? How difficult do you think it would be to change your name at that age? What is an abacus and why is it quicker to use than working calculations out on paper? What day do the Americans arrive and why is it greeted with such fanfare? (pp.112-121)
- What illness do you think Mar Hoy Bak has? What two deaths did Silvey have to contend with in July? How did she feel about the two deaths? What gift does Silvey make for Mar Hoy Bak's funeral? How did Silvey save Sunny? (pp.122-131)
- How does Silvey react when a burglar enters the house where she is babysitting? How does she help catch the burglar? Why does Silvey have nightmares after the visit to the police station? Why does Silvey's mother not want her to stay over at a friend's place? (pp.132-142)
- What do you think '*When drinking water, one must remember the source*' means? How do Chinese show they appreciate food? What age do you become a teenager and why is it significant? What do you think is the meaning of Confucius's saying '*Excellence does not remain alone: it is sure to attract neighbours*'? Who was this Chinese sage and what were his messages about? What did Silvey like about the Christian message? (pp.142-151)



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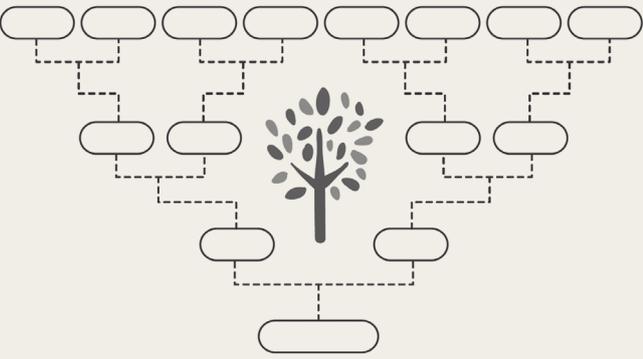
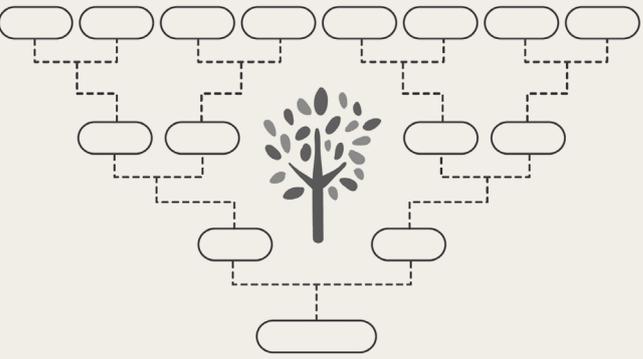
- What are coupon books? Why is Silvey excited to go and see the US army camp? What gifts do the soldiers give the children and why are they so excited about it? What type of food do the Americans enjoy from New Zealand? (pp.152-162)
- How do the soldiers show they have good manners when they come to dinner? What is Tom's 'girlfriend' and why does he call it that? What does Tom promise to teach Silvey and how does she practice? What bad news does Sunny share and how is it going to affect his life? What news does Silvey share with Tom and why does she ask him not to laugh when she tells him? What obstacle had Tom encountered in America? (pp.162-171)
- What does Sunny ask before he leaves that shocks Silvey? Why was Silvey so upset when the soldiers said they couldn't come anymore as they had been 'called up'. What does that mean? Silvey says she hates war – why does she hate it so much? (pp.172-178)
- Read the Historical Note. What is Chinatown? What does it mean to be 'inconspicuous as possible'? Why did the Chinese originally come to New Zealand? How did the New Zealand government try to curb the Chinese immigration? What were their reasons for doing so? How else did the government show institutional racism? When did conditions change for Chinese and what changed? How has Chinese culture added to New Zealand's multicultural country? (pp.179-184)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: FAMILY TREE

Discuss with your students about family trees.

Draw a family tree for your family and then draw one for Silvey's family. Under the tree, include a text box saying how, when and why you/your family/ancestors/whānau came to New Zealand, and another text box saying why Silvey's family came to New Zealand.

<p style="text-align: center;">FAMILY TREE</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">YOUR</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">FAMILY TREE</p>  <p style="text-align: center;">SILVEY'S</p>
<p>How, when and why your family came to New Zealand:</p>	<p>How, when and why Silvey's family came to New Zealand:</p>

ACTIVITY 2: POETRY CLOSE-UP

Read the poem on page 30 aloud to your class:

Quiet Night Thoughts

*Moonlight streams across my bed,
Is that frost covering the ground?
I lift my head and see the shining moon,
Bow my head and yearn for home.*

What does the title mean? Ask the students to read the poem 2–3 times. Suggest that each time they read it they try to see something different in it. Ask the students to write a brief summary of the poem in their own words. Tell them to highlight or list some of the words (nouns, verbs, phrases) that are important to understanding the poem. Then say why they are important. Ask the students (verbally or in written form) what they think the poem means? For example: Who is the subject of the poem? What is the poem talking about? Why do you think the author wrote the poem? Where is the poem happening? What is the poet's attitude? What emotion does the speaker use as s/he talks? Who is telling the poem? How has the poet created pictures with the words?

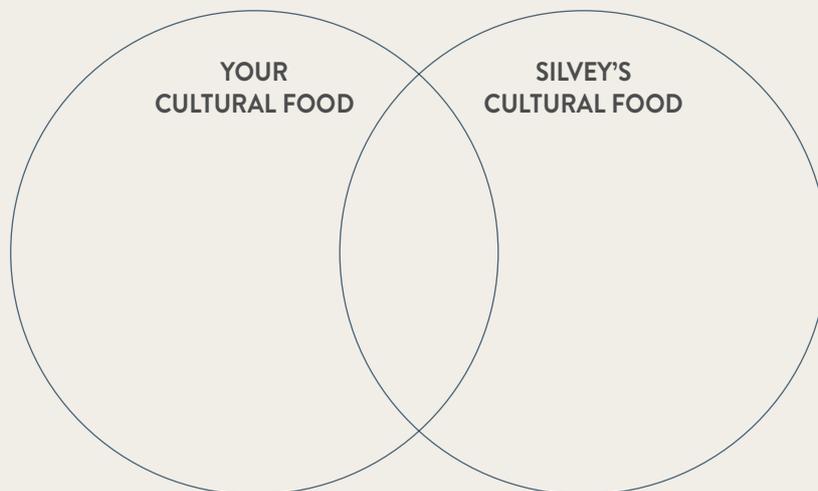
Ask the students to look at the title again and ask if they now have a different interpretation of the title?

Discuss why do you think the poem has special meaning for Silvey?

Extra activity: Ask what is the structure of this poem? (It has four lines; the syllables are 7/7/10/7 ('covering' is read as two syllables); the last line has a twist – similar, in some ways, to a Haiku.) Students can write a similar poem, using the same structure. The poem could be about the book, something they have learned from the book, or free choice.

ACTIVITY 3: FOOD WEB

Silvey talks a lot about food in the story. Discuss some of the interesting foods she has mentioned. Have you tasted any of these before? Would other cultures have the same or different types of food? In the Venn diagram below, list foods typical to your culture, then list Silvey's cultural foods. In the middle, include any foods that are similar or the same.



Extra activity: Ask the students to think about their favourite cultural dish. Students then go home and find out how to make it (with a parent's help, if needed), and bring it into class for a shared cultural lunch.

ACTIVITY 4: BE DETECTIVES

Enlarge and print out the photographs at the back of the book. Arrange the students into groups of four and give each group one of the enlarged photographs (without the caption). Ask the students to THINK (by themselves), PAIR (with a partner), then SHARE (in their group) the following questions:

1. What’s going on in this picture?
2. What do you see that makes you say that?
3. What more can you find?

Then students comment on what the other students noticed. Next, give each group the original caption. Students comment on the image with new ideas and questions after reading the caption.

In groups the students tick which ones of the following they think apply to their photograph:

Portrait	Landscape	Aerial/Satellite	Action
Architectural	Event	Family	Panoramic
Historical	Posed	Candid	Documentary
Selfie	Other		

Next the students list the people, objects and activities they see:

PEOPLE	OBJECTS	ACTIVITIES

Students then make sense of the photograph by answering the following questions:

1. Who do they think might have taken this photograph?
2. Where is it set?
3. When was it taken?
4. What was happening at this time in history when the photograph was taken?
5. Why was the photo taken? *List evidence from the photo or your knowledge about the photographer that led you to your conclusion.*
6. Why was it included in the book *Chinatown Girl*?

Teacher notes written by Maria Gill

