

"Heartfelt, personal, and real—this book is a gift."

—TAE KELLER, Newbery Medal-winning author  
of *When You Trap a Tiger*

# Maizy Chen's LAST CHANCE

LISA  
YEE



EDUCATORS' GUIDE



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# ABOUT THE BOOK

**Packed with surprises, heart, and stories within stories, this irresistible novel from an award-winning author celebrates food, fortune, and family.**

Maizy has never been to Last Chance, Minnesota . . . until now. Her mom’s plan is just to stay for a couple of weeks, until her grandfather gets better. But plans change, and as Maizy spends more time in Last Chance (where she and her family are the only Asian Americans) and at the Golden Palace (the restaurant that’s been in her family for generations), she makes some discoveries. For instance:

- You can tell a LOT about someone by the way they order food.
- People can surprise you—sometimes in good ways; sometimes in disappointing ways.
- And the Golden Palace has secrets.

But the more Maizy discovers, the more questions she has. Like, why are her mom and her grandmother always fighting? Who are the people in the photographs on the office wall? And when she discovers that a beloved family treasure has gone missing—and someone has left a racist note—Maizy decides it’s time to find the answers.



Grades: 3–7

Themes: Immigrant Experience, Family & Relationships, Racism & Prejudice, Friendship, Cultural Diversity

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Emi Fujii

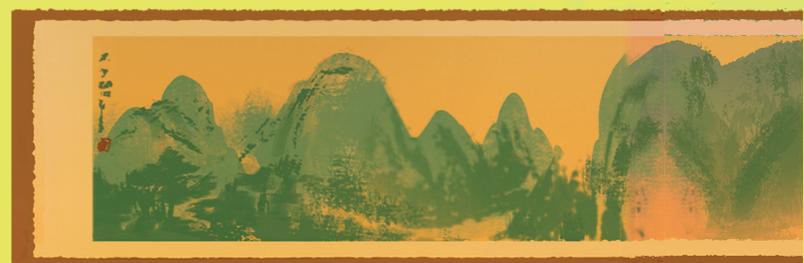
# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**LISA YEE** is the award-winning author of *Millicent Min*, *Girl Genius*; *Stanford Wong Flunks Big-Time*; *So Totally Emily Ebers*; *Absolutely Maybe*; and many other books, including the DC Super Hero Girls novel series and numerous American Girl books. Lisa is a third-generation Chinese American. She says, “I wrote *Maizy Chen’s Last Chance* as a tribute to my grandparents and to all the immigrants who made the journey to America.” Lisa divides her time between Western Massachusetts and Los Angeles.

# PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES



1. Based on the cover of *Maizy Chen's Last Chance*, what do you think this book is about? Who is on the cover?
2. Look up the definitions of *nationality*, *race*, *ethnicity*, and *culture*. How do you identify in terms of each? How is each special to you?
3. What have you learned in school about Chinese immigration to the United States or to other places outside China? Do some research about the history of Chinese immigration, including why people may have left China and what drew them to their eventual destinations. Write a letter to a friend about what you learn.
4. There are many Chinatowns and Chinese communities in the United States and in countries all over the world. Do some research about the nearest Chinatown—you might be living in it, or it might be thousands of miles away—and write a travel guide about its history, special events, traditions, monuments, and other important characteristics.
5. People have arrived in the United States over millennia for many different reasons. Some were voluntary migrants, some were kidnapped and brought here, and some came seeking opportunity. Do some research and write a brief history of your family's journey to and time in America.
6. Your family may have lived in the same place your whole life, or you may have moved around. What are some of the characteristics of the places you and your parents and grandparents have lived? What makes each place special? Who are the Indigenous inhabitants of those places?
7. Do a Google image search of "transcontinental railroad." What images appear? Imagine a story based on these images.
8. Browse the websites of the [Museum of Chinese in America](#) and the [Chinese American Museum](#). What are some of the most compelling facts you learned? Write a postcard to a friend about your virtual museum visit.
9. In addition to sustenance, what role does food play in your life? Does your family have any favorite dishes or recipes that have been passed down through generations? What are the stories behind those dishes?





# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. Lisa Yee begins *Maizy Chen's Last Chance* with: "No story starts at the beginning." Why do you think she starts the book with this statement? What does it mean in relation to the structure of the novel and in the way Maizy understands her own story?
2. Maizy and her grandfather, or opa, develop a very close relationship. Who are some of the important elders in your life? Write a letter to a grandparent or older neighbor or family friend about *Maizy Chen's Last Chance*. Summarize the plot, describe the relationships Maizy develops with the other characters, and share what you think about the story.
3. When Maizy first arrives in Minnesota, she says, "I bet nothing ever happens in Last Chance" (p. 15). Make a timeline of the most important things that happen while Maizy is there.
4. When Maizy is exploring the town, she observes, "It seems like everything here is also something else. I wonder what the Golden Palace doubles as" (p. 16). As you read the story, make a list of what the Golden Palace doubles as.
5. Opa starts looking and feeling better when he begins telling Maizy stories about Lucky. Why do you think that is? And why do these particular stories brighten him up?
6. Racist bullying and discrimination happen multiple times throughout the story, both in the past and in the present. When Maizy talks with Riley about her friends being mean to her (p. 81), she says, "Maybe you can tell them to stop." Riley says, "You can ask them to stop, too." Whose responsibility is it to stop bullying? What resources are available to help young people understand race, racism, and bullying? Create a flyer with information, strategies, and resources to share with your friends and classmates.
7. Maizy writes messages on fortune cookies for the people in Last Chance. If you could make fortune cookies for Maizy, what messages would you write? Why? What messages would you write for other people in your life?
8. When Bud the Bear was first kidnapped and defaced, who did you suspect? Why did you suspect those people? What clues were in the story?
9. Maizy's initial perceptions of some of the Last Chance residents turn out to be wrong. Pick one character—such as Lady Macbeth, Riley, or Principal Holmes—and track how she learns to see them differently over the course of the story. Cite specific evidence from the book.
10. Throughout the story, Daisy speaks about the importance of recycling. What is your city's or county's policy on recycling? If you're not already recycling, make a list of actions that you, your family, and your friends can take to be better stewards of the environment.



# QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES *continued*

12. Opa explains the concept of paper sons to Maizy (pp. 94–95). Later, when looking at the photos, Maizy says, “Behind all those serious faces in the photos, I can now see fear—but when I look closer, I also see determination, hope, and courage. It takes a brave person to cross an ocean for an uncertain future” (p. 97). Do some research on paper sons. In Maizy’s voice, write a letter to a paper son’s descendant, and then write a response to Maizy. Did the journey have a happy ending?

13. Oma tells Maizy, “Not everything illegal is wrong” (p. 97). What are some things that were once illegal but are not now? Are there any laws today that you think are wrong? How are laws made and changed? What steps can you and the people around you take to change unjust laws?

## POST-READING

1. In the author’s note, Lisa Yee says she first learned Chinese American history when taking a college course titled “The Chinese in America.” Ethnic studies classes such as “The Chinese in America” were not always available; in fact, people had to demand those classes be included in college curricula. Research the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF) at San Francisco State University, the University of California at Berkeley, and the University of California at Los Angeles. What were the TWLF 1968–1969 strikes about? Many people think these classes also belong in K–12 classrooms. Write a letter to your school board about this history and why K–12 students should have ethnic studies classes, too. Include a list of books to suggest as required reading.

2. Lisa Yee writes that there are over 25,000 Chinese restaurants across the United States. Research the Chinese restaurants near you. Which is the oldest? How was it established?

How has it changed over the years? Based on what you find, write an article for your local newspaper.

3. Revisit the question about the transcontinental railroad in the first section of this discussion guide. Explore [“Building the Transcontinental Railroad: How 20,000 Chinese Immigrants Made It Happen,”](#) which Lisa Yee cited in her resource list. Read [“Descendants of Chinese Laborers Reclaim Railroad’s History”](#) by Hansi Lo Wang on NPR. Having read *Maizy Chen’s Last Chance*, the website, and the article, what is missing from the Google images? Using the story you imagined earlier, flesh out some details. What have you learned that you can include in your story?

4. What if Lucky Chen’s friend Li Wei had not been killed while working on the railroad? How might his life have turned out? Rewrite the next chapter of Lucky’s life, with Li Wei by his side.

## POST-READING *continued*

5. Lisa Yee says, “The transcontinental railroad also changed the country in destructive ways. Many trains crossed through tribal lands, destroying Indigenous communities and cultures, altering the landscape and resources, and bringing unwanted white settlements” (pp. 264–265). Research the impact of westward expansion on Indigenous communities. How have Indigenous communities advocated for their lands, communities, and resources throughout history? How do they continue to do so?
6. Write a newspaper article addressing the important contributions of Chinese laborers to the development of the United States.
7. Maizy’s grandparents wish they could have gone to Hawai’i for their honeymoon. Research the history of Asian immigration to Hawai’i, plantation labor, and Hawaiian sovereignty. Explore the impact of tourism on Native Hawaiian communities. Write a letter to Maizy, sharing some of the most interesting things you learn.
8. Explore the [Stop AAPI Hate](#) website. What is a hate crime? Why is the note from Bud the Bear’s kidnapper a hate crime (p. 110)? How are the hate crimes that have taken place during the COVID-19 pandemic a continuation of the history and hate crimes Lisa Yee writes about in *Maizy Chen’s Last Chance* and in her author’s note?
9. There are many other books where protagonists have close relationships with their grandparents: for example, Andrea Wang’s *The Many Meanings of Meilan*, Tae Keller’s *When You Trap a Tiger*, and Lynne Kelly’s *Song for a Whale*. Form a book club with some friends; read one of these books and discuss some of the similarities (such as the importance of these relationships, how the author writes about race and culture) as well as the differences (such as the setting, time period, and other issues that are addressed).
10. Writer Paula Yoo and illustrator Lin Wang have written [two children’s books](#) about actor Anna May Wong, who Lisa Yee calls “the first Chinese American movie star” and who will be on the new United States [quarter](#). Read one or both of these books and look up #RepresentationMatters on social media. Pick a current Asian American actor and write them a letter about the impact of their work, what #RepresentationMatters means, and how Asian American representation in various media has changed over the decades.
11. Think about a favorite scene from the book. Design your own book cover based on that scene.





PRAISE FOR  
*Maizy Chen's*  
**LAST CHANCE**

★ “Told through the eyes of a spirited and likable protagonist, the story explores evergreen issues of immigration, intergenerational trauma, and the many dark aspects of U.S. history alongside Lucky’s adventures with ‘sailing ships, outlaws, and a gold mountain.’ Through this captivating story of the Chen family legacy, **Yee makes the personal political, and prompts readers to consider what it means to be American.**”

—THE HORN BOOK, starred review

“The pace is lively and the writing strong, seamlessly weaving together themes of belonging, racism, and anti-immigration sentiment. **A moving, engrossing story of a girl’s transformative change and strengthened sense of belonging.**” —KIRKUS REVIEWS

“I love this book. **This is a big story** and brings up much-needed discussion about the importance of community, history, and truth.”

—RITA WILLIAMS-GARCIA, Newbery Honor-winning author of *One Crazy Summer*

“**Heartfelt, personal, and real**—this book is a gift.”

—TAE KELLER, Newbery Medal-winning author of *When You Trap a Tiger*

“Food, fortune, and heart—like the best Chinese food, Lisa Yee’s story is **powerful yet subtle and truly delicious.**”

—GRACE LIN, Newbery Honor-winning author of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

“Celebrates the power of food, family, and **stepping up when it matters the most.**” —KATE MESSNER, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Breakout and Chirp*

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