



TIGER DAUGHTER

REBECCA LIM

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Recommended for 10-14 year olds

Summary

Wen Zhou is the only child of Chinese immigrants whose move to the lucky country has proven to be not so lucky. Wen and her friend, Henry Xiao – whose mum and dad are also struggling immigrants – both dream of escape from their unhappy circumstances, and form a plan to sit an entrance exam to a selective high school far from home. But when tragedy strikes, it will take all of Wen's resilience and resourcefulness to get herself and Henry through the storm that follows.

Author Style

Rebecca Lim's *Tiger Daughter* explores issues around growing up Asian in Australia from a first generation migrant child's point of view – who is navigating not just the challenges that face a young girl perceived as different because of her cultural background, but also resisting aspects of the traditional values of her strict and superstitious family.

Tiger Daughter has an edge to it that is fierce and honest and defiant and full of life. The main character, Wen, draws us into her world and clearly conveys her family situation through her observations: her father's domination of the things he can control (his family) and his despair about the things he can't control (his unhappy life in his new country), and her mother's resultant fear of stepping outside her narrow domestic sphere without permission.

Some of the content is challenging, but in the writing of it, and in the voice and tone of the first-person narration, there's a sense of hope, a sense of a young girl's determination to take risks and break out of the life that has been prescribed for her.

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Suggestions for Classroom Discussion and Application

Prologue

1. Why do authors write prologues in novels? How is a prologue different to diving straight into Chapter One? What do you think Rebecca Lim establishes in the *Tiger Daughter* prologue?
2. Draw a line down the centre of your workbook to create two columns, one headed 'Wen Zhou' and the other 'Henry Xiao'. In dot point form, list everything you've learned about each character from the prologue. Make sure you include information about their family life, where they live, how materially well-off they are and their strengths and weaknesses, among other things.
3. Why do you think Rebecca Lim opened her story with a class writing assignment on *The essence of being 'Australian'*?

- Can you tell the difference between metaphor and simile in this excerpt?

I tell Henry about my dad all the time, all the things he does, and Henry completely gets it – how fury is like this thing that holds the entire house up . . . Henry understands how anger has tides and temperatures and speeds that can suck you down, or spit you out, depending on the day, the hour, the moment – changing you forever. (page 31)

- Consider this excerpt from the text (pp 52–53):

When I think of my dad and my mum, I actually think of two different philosophies of life, two 'Ways' of being, if you like.

Dad, in my head, is always this famous Chinese philosopher called Confucius who said helpful things like "Being good as a son and obedient as a young man is, perhaps, the root of a man's character", and Mum is this other famous Chinese philosopher called Lao Tzu who would have replied...:

*"Know contentment
And you will suffer no disgrace;
Know when to stop
And you will meet with no danger.
You can then endure."*

Compare and contrast Confucius and Lao Tzu's teachings. What vital viewpoint do you think is missing from the Confucius teaching above? What does Wen's father say and do in the novel to illustrate the 'Way' he follows? Why do you think Wen is attracted to the other 'Way'?

- Wen's parents have a particular view of mental health and propriety:

Fay Xiao was weak, that much was well known. She did not conduct herself properly while she was alive, and now she has brought Ah Yuan and his connections great shame. We must all learn from this. (page 54)

Why do you think Wen's mother and father are so unforgiving about Fay Xiao's suicide? Do you think their attitude is indicative of our broader society's attitude to mental health? What does the excerpt say about 'proper' behaviour or living a 'proper' life?

- Words are not the only way Wen and Henry communicate in *Tiger Daughter*. Why do you think that some of the most powerful moments between them are via drawings or long division exercises?
- Overcoming fear is a theme that threads through this book:

Underneath the fear, Mum's a good person. She's kind, and softly spoken, and so very desperate to please. Without the fear, I know she would be a different person, a braver one. (page 62)

 - a) Name three events in Part One that help Wen's mother to overcome her fear and become a braver person.
 - b) What events in Part Two complete this transformation of Wen's mother?
 - c) *'I'm going for practicality over style today.'* (page 168) How does Wen's mother's interest in clothes and accessories illustrate this transformation?
 - d) Do you think that fear is the reason that Wen's father is so strict and unbending for much of the novel? What incidents in the story indicate this?
- Mr Cornish says to Henry early in the novel, *'To live, is to risk everything'* (page 10) and Henry repeats it much later in the novel when sitting at night with Wen at his front door. What do Wen and Henry have to risk in the novel to be able to truly live?
- Miss Spencer says to Wen, *'You show that school what different looks like, why different is important. Why they need you.'* (page 175). What do you think Miss Spencer means when she says that Wen is different and it's important to show her difference?
- Wen says to Henry, *'The point is how you get to the point'* on page 206. What do you think she means by this?
- Why do you think Rebecca Lim included the piece by Lao Tzu at the end of the novel?
- Rebecca Lim writes in the Author's Note, *'...it's me thinking out loud and advocating to keep what's good, what's benevolent, but to discard ideas and systems and behaviours that hold us back...'* How does this message reflect Wen's journey in *Tiger Daughter*?
- Rebecca Lim says of *Tiger Daughter*, *'While it can't speak for, or to, everyone who is migrant or refugee, [it] is a migrant story for children actually written by a migrant. Not someone "imagining", from inside their relative privilege, what it would feel like to be one. And that makes Tiger Daughter, if not unique, then sadly still too rare.'*
 - a) Research the #OwnVoices movement. Why do you think that #OwnVoices stories about marginalised people are important?
 - b) What are the pros and cons of the #OwnVoices movement? There are many articles on the internet about this subject but these are a good starting point:

<http://www.corinneduyvis.net/ownvoices/>

<https://www.readbrightly.com/why-we-need-diverse-authors-in-kids-ya-lit/>

<https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/2019/04/228847/own-voices-movement-ya-literature-impact>

About the author

Rebecca Lim is an Australian writer, illustrator, editor and lawyer. She is the author of over twenty books, including *The Astrologer's Daughter* (a Kirkus Best Book of 2015 and CBCA Notable Book for Older Readers), *Wraith* and the internationally bestselling *Mercy*. Her work has been shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards and Foreword INDIES Book of the Year Awards, shortlisted multiple times for the Aurealis Awards and Davitt Awards, and longlisted for the Gold Inky Award and the David Gemmell Legend Award. Rebecca is a co-founder of the Voices from the Intersection initiative to support emerging young adult and children's authors and illustrators who are First Nations, People of Colour, LGBTIQ+ or living with disability, and is a co-editor of *Meet Me at the Intersection*, a ground-breaking anthology of YA #OwnVoice memoir, poetry and fiction.



Courtesy of Eugenia Lim

In the author's own words

'A huge part of why I write, and why I create the kinds of books and stories that I do, is about building empathy in my readers. That's my guiding principle.

'I was a migrant child of the 1970s and 1980s. Being Asian or migrant or refugee was certainly never positively portrayed or synonymous with being "Australian" back then. I *never* saw myself in any children's books from that time, and I have only just, in 2020, edited a picture book featuring a little Asian girl protagonist which was wholly written and illustrated by an Asian-Australian author.

'*Tiger Daughter* is the product of years of thinking and processing, and it's trying to work on a number of levels.

'It's seeking to build that empathy in readers, but it's also interrogating things that humanity is currently grappling with – racism, sexism, violence against women and girls, financial abuse, intersectionality, superstition, systemic bias, unconscious bias, privilege, the mainstream idea of what is "normal" – through the story of a migrant girl who has to resist these things while walking in two worlds: the mainstream "Western" sphere she is expected to navigate and accumulate fluency in, and the private, cultural sphere in which she is being brought up.

'*Tiger Daughter* asks mainstream readers – readers who've never been told to "go back where you come from", and never will – to think about what it would feel like to be marginalised for *more reasons* than merely being female.

'*Tiger Daughter* is also, most defiantly, **not** a book that assumes anything. It does not assume that the reader and writer share an identical background that is somehow universal, homogenous and instantly translatable. It does not assume that the reader's and the writer's ways of thinking, their philosophies, their belief systems or their conditions of life are the same, because they can't be. While it can't speak for, or to, everyone who is migrant or refugee, *Tiger Daughter* is a migrant story for children actually written by a migrant. Not someone "imagining", from inside their relative privilege, what it would feel like to be one. And that makes *Tiger Daughter*, if not unique, then sadly still too rare.'

– Rebecca Lim