

Child of the Owl: Golden Mountain Chronicles: 1965 Study Guide

**Child of the Owl: Golden Mountain Chronicles: 1965
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Plot Summary

The novel CHILD OF THE OWL is the story of twelve-year-old Casey, a Chinese-American girl learning to accept her cultural heritage while living in Chinatown with her grandmother, Paw-Paw. At the opening of the novel, Casey lives in San Francisco with her father, Barney. Barney is hospitalized at the opening of the novel after being mugged outside the bookie's after winning a large sum of money on a horse racing bet. Because of Barney's hospitalization, Casey is first sent to live with her Uncle Phil in the wealthy part of town, and then with her grandmother, Paw-Paw in Chinatown. While living with Uncle Phil, Casey feels worthless, since her uncle and his family are only concerned with money and appearances; they do not allow Casey to live independently or have her own opinion on anything. When she proves to be too much of a hassle for Uncle Phil, who worries that Casey is a bad influence on his daughters, Annette and Pam-Pam, he arranges for Casey to move in with his mother in Chinatown.

Just driving through Chinatown, Casey begins to feel uncomfortable. She has never been around so many Asian people in her life, even though she herself is Chinese. She sees that her skin color is the same as the rest of the people in town, which makes her feel like she should know something about her culture, history, and language. She is embarrassed that she doesn't, and has always associated herself just with being American. All this begins to change when Casey meets Paw-Paw, an old Chinese woman steeped in Chinese history and mythology. She tells Casey that she is a Child of the Owl, and shows her a necklace that symbolizes the mythological history of their family, which stems from a single owl that sacrificed herself for the safety of her family, and descended to earth in human form. Because of this history, all women in their family are doomed to feel lonely and isolated, but there is hope; the women are also determined, smart, and will eventually return to the sky. Initially, Casey just feels the isolation and loneliness. School in Chinatown is a disaster because Casey has no friends and is bullied by students and teachers alike for her inability to speak or write Chinese.

Throughout her time in Chinatown, Casey investigates her family history and learns that her father's gambling addiction is far worse than they thought. When Paw-Paw's necklace is stolen during the night, and Paw-Paw is hospitalized after her attempt to fight-off the burglar, Casey's mission changes from discovering more about her past to returning the owl necklace to its rightful home. Casey is shocked to learn, then, that it had not been Gilbert, the greasy teenager with money to burn, who had stolen Paw-Paw's necklace, but Barney himself. Casey realizes that she no longer belongs with Barney, and that Chinatown is her home. She is not Barney's child any longer, but is a Child of the Owl.



Chapter One

Chapter One Summary

The novel opens with Casey visiting her father, Barney, in the hospital. She isn't allowed to be there, and has sneaked her way in with the help of Barney's friend, Morey, who is distracting the nurse. Barney has been beat-up by some men outside the bookie's and he has lost a large sum of money to the muggers. Casey acknowledges that she and her father have an unusual relationship. She calls him Barney, after all, but the two belong together. Throughout Casey's life, Barney has told the same stories over and over, about how he's going to strike it rich and move them into a big penthouse. Of course this never happens, and Casey works two paper routes and occasionally washes dishes at a local restaurant to make extra money for groceries and rent. Even so, she loves her father. Her mother, Jeannie, passed away when Casey was a baby, and she doesn't remember her. It's always been her and Barney, looking out for each other.

With Barney in the hospital, Casey needs somewhere to stay because she is too young to live on her own; even Barney recognizes that. He arranges for Casey to go and live with her Uncle Phil, Jeannie's brother. Even though she has an uncle, aunt, and cousins, Casey doesn't know them. Her extended family had lost contact with Barney once Jeannie died. They had clearly never approved of Barney or his lifestyle. Before she leaves, Barney gives her his good luck charm, the statue of the Happy God. When Casey gets off the train in her uncle's home town, he clearly does not want her and finds her an annoyance. His nickname is Phil the Pill for good reason. He constantly reminds Casey that she is a burden on him and his family. He doesn't allow her to do anything fun, like watch Dracula on TV. He finds almost everything she does, says, wears, and eats, disgusting - a constant sign of Barney's ineptitude as a parent, a repeated statement that deeply offends Casey. Phil also reminds Casey, numerous times a day, that he's only taking care of her because he made a promise to his dead sister.

Phil lives with his wife, Ethel, and their two daughters, Annette and Pam-Pam. Even though the family is Chinese, like Casey and her father, they have done whatever they can to blend in with White Americans. Annette constantly curls her hair, while Pam-Pam only wears frilly pink dresses, like a princess. Everything in their house is expensive and has been carefully chosen from various catalogues to show just how well-off the family is. Casey does not feel like she belongs. Phil believes that Casey is a bad influence on his precious daughters, so after a few weeks, he arranges for Casey to go live with her grandmother, Paw-Paw, who lives in Chinatown. When they drive through Chinatown, Casey is overwhelmed with an uncomfortable feeling. As they drive through the Chinese streets, full of Chinese people and Chinese writing, Casey seems to notice for the first time that she shares a culture with these people, even with her Uncle Phil.

When they arrive at Paw-Paw's house, Casey notices that Phil's ringing of the bell is the Morse code for SOS, which she finds amusing. Paw-Paw's apartment is tiny and



cramped, cluttered with all of Paw-Paw's belongings. Immediately, Casey feels more at home with Paw-Paw than she ever had at Uncle Phil's. Paw-Paw even greets Casey with an all encompassing hug. Paw-Paw agrees to keep her temper with Casey as long as Casey promises to control her love of adventure and intelligence, which some people could misconstrue as mischief. Paw-Paw explains that the Happy God is actually Buddha, but does not go into any further detail. At the end of their first night together, she teaches Casey how to play a card game called Slapjack.

Chapter One Analysis

In this opening chapter, the connection between Casey and her father, Barney, is created. Although the two have an unusual relationship, Casey insists that they belong together. It is clear from this opening that there is a role reversal in Casey's relationship with her father. She acts more like the parent while Barney is the one who needs looking after. It is interesting to note that Casey does not know the family from her mother's side, notably her Uncle Phil and her grandmother. This highlights the fact that Barney's gambling addiction has created a wedge between Casey and her family, completely isolating her from them.

When Casey moves in with her Uncle Phil, she feels very uncomfortable. Phil is obsessed with money and appearance, and so is the rest of his family. This underscores the theme of money in the novel as Casey struggles between two worlds - the world of commodities and wealth, as highlighted by Uncle Phil and his family and later by Booger Chew and her family, and the world of history, which has no monetary value but is extremely valuable. This world is highlighted by Casey's relationship with Paw-Paw, with whom she feels an instant connection, perhaps because Paw-Paw closely ties Casey to her mother, Jeannie, who passed away when Casey was a baby.



Chapter Two

Chapter Two Summary

In this chapter, Casey begins her schooling in Chinatown, which she hates. At first, Casey hates the school because it is very small, with no room for any of the children to run during recess. Also, because Paw-Paw doesn't have the money to buy Casey a new uniform, she has to wear a hand-me-down that is far too large and the rest of the girls call her Rag Bag. But most of all, Casey hates the school because she feels incredibly isolated there. She is the only student who does not speak Chinese. She doesn't understand the language, which makes her studies incredibly difficult. She begins taking notes, writing down how certain words sound, phonetically, and is accused of being stupid and of cheating. Even when she does well on a test for which she has studied very hard, her teacher slaps her with the ruler and accuses her of cheating saying, "You too dumb, you copy book" (Page 56). Casey knows that there has to be something good about being Chinese; she just doesn't see it yet.

Barney calls and tells Casey that he has been released from the hospital. Casey is overjoyed, thinking that Barney is going to take her away from Chinatown, that she can move back in with him and start at a new school. When she meets up with Barney, however, she learns that Barney is going to go on the run trying to make money to pay back his bookie. He cannot live a life on the run with Casey; he would need to have a steady apartment and keep her in school. He says that Casey has to stay with Paw-Paw, and stay at Chinese school, until he comes back for her. He promises her, yet again, that it is only temporary. Even though Casey is heartbroken that she cannot move back in with her father, she does not let him see her emotion. She keeps a stiff upper-lip and tells him that it's no problem, that she has tons of friends at school and doesn't want to leave. To cheer her up, Barney takes Casey for a walk through the flower gardens that used to be Jeannie's favorite. He tells her a few memories he has of Jeannie before falling silent. It has always been difficult for Barney to talk about Jeannie.

When she returns home, Paw-Paw seems relieved to hear that Casey isn't leaving her just yet. Casey, however, finally lets her emotions come out and she sits on the bed, weeping. Paw-Paw crawls into bed with Casey and holds her until she stops crying. Then she tells her that all the girls in their family are destined to feel lonely because they are Children of the Owl. She tells Casey the story of their ancestors and why the women in their family are all the same - destined at one time in their life to feel like they are all alone inside. She even shows Casey her own charm, which she wears around her neck.

In Paw-Paw's story, two owls, Peony and Jasmine, live into adulthood with their mother owl. During the famine, their other siblings routinely steal food from their mother, and even contemplate eating her. When the walkers, a family of humans, move into the forest, they plant fields for their food, which attract many small animals for Peony,



Jasmine, and their mother to eat. In thanks, they would often help the youngest walker during his hunting expeditions during the famine, hooting to frighten game animals into the walker's path. In time, however, they stop helping the walker and his family begins to starve. As the famine worsens, the owl children turn on their weak mother and attack her, hoping to eat her for sustenance. Peony and Jasmine manage to fight off their evil siblings and their mother escapes, but she is tired and weak. Meanwhile, the young walker has set out into the woods to find food for his starving family. He sees the three owls sitting on a tree branch and notices that the middle owl looks old, its feathers mangled, and it has cuts and scratches on its face. He lifts his bow and shoots the middle owl, the mother, killing it. Peony and Jasmine are enraged. They cast a spell on the young walker so that his family will know true hunger, and will not eat again during the famine.

After that, the walker goes out to hunt in the woods every day. He always sees a game animal, but is never able to shoot it. His family slowly begins to starve to death. His parents are completely immobile, nothing but skin and bones. To save his parents' lives, their middle son begins cutting flesh from his body and feeding it to his parents so they will not die. In time, he has no meat left on his bones, and decides to boil water and make a soup of himself for his parents to drink. And so he does. As this happens, Jasmine begins to feel bad for the walker family and says that they should call off the curse. Peony disagrees and says that she will not be satisfied until all the walkers have starved to death. In fact, when the soul of the middle brother rises to the sky after he has boiled himself to death, Peony and her brothers capture the soul so it will never rest peacefully. The young walker sees the owl capture his brother's soul and begs them to release it. He promises that he will not rest until his brother's soul is free.

To better mock the walkers, the owls turn themselves into human form and dance around a fire. During this ceremony, the young walker creeps up on the owls and steals one of their feather coats, knowing they need the coats to return back to owl form. He tells the owls that he won't return the coat until his brother's soul is free. Even then, he says he will return all the coats but one, and the coat which he does not return must stay in human form forever and become his wife. Jasmine sacrifices herself so her sister Peony, whose coat the young walker holds in his hands, can return to owl form. She marries the young walker and bears him seven sons. Even though Jasmine does her best to love her life as a human, she misses being an owl. She works hard and respects her husband, but she feels isolated in her human form. Finally, after twenty years, she asks her husband to return her coat, which he does, and she returns to the sky.

Chapter Two Analysis

In this chapter, Casey first begins to question her cultural identity. When she looks outside, upon arriving in Chinatown, she cannot understand how she is related to the Chinese people outside. In her head, Casey sees herself as an American, the same as a girl with blonde hair and blue eyes; she doesn't understand the importance of knowing, or relating to, her cultural history. This realization makes Casey feel extremely



isolated. Her isolation is compounded by the fact that she has no friends in school, cannot speak the language, and doesn't understand the cultural significance of her actions in public. Additionally, Barney has been released from the hospital but refuses to take Casey with him as he goes on the run. This action signals to the reader that Barney's gambling addiction may be more dangerous than first thought, and that Casey's relationship with her now absent father may be challenged in the future. Also in this chapter, Casey learns a bit about her deceased mother, Jeannie, an interest that will prompt much more investigation as the novel continues.

Paw-Paw's story of the owl presents many different lessons about familial relationships. The Walker family's oldest son sacrifices himself for his family's benefit when he cooks himself into a soup so the family will not starve. This is important to remember since many members of Casey's family sacrifice deeply of themselves, particularly Paw-Paw, for Casey's benefit. It is also interesting to note at the end of the novel, the things that characters like Uncle Phil, and Paw-Paw's other children, will not sacrifice for Paw-Paw's survival, while Casey would sacrifice anything for her. Similarly, Jasmine sacrifices herself, and years of her happiness, for her family's safety from the youngest walker. Eventually she returns to the sky, and her characteristic of self-sacrifice and determination is passed on to her future generations, in Paw-Paw, Jeannie, and Casey.



Chapter Three

Chapter Three Summary

Even after Paw-Paw's story about the owl, Casey still wants to know more about her mother and how they are connected. Paw-Paw takes Casey into town to see a Kung-Fu movie, just like she had taken Jeannie to do years ago. During the movie, Casey realizes that the Chinese people are capable of great emotion - happiness and sadness. She loved watching the men fight on screen, and loved watching the women even more. She felt something bubbling up inside her that made her want to cry. While walking back to their apartment, Paw-Paw points out various things for Casey, including the duck hanging in the butcher window. She says duck is her favorite, and maybe one day she'll sew some extra shirts so she and Casey can eat one.

Soon after, Paw-Paw promises to introduce Casey to one of her old friends, who had known both Barney and Jeannie when they were teenagers. Paw-Paw hopes that her friend will be able to give more insight into what both of Casey's parents had been like growing up. They walk together to a park where Paw-Paw's Chinese club meets. There are homeless people scrounging around in trashcans for something to eat, or to keep them warm, but there are also a collection of old Chinese people gossiping, playing chess, and exercising. One such man is Mr. Jeh, Paw-Paw's friend. Mr. Jeh moved to San Francisco from China during the 1949 revolution. He refused to live off his family's money, so he moved into a tiny, ramshackle hotel, and worked two jobs a day for money to eat. After he has finished his Tai Chi, Mr. Jeh comes over to meet Casey. He is warm and friendly, but somewhat confused that Casey doesn't speak Chinese. Mr. Jeh tells Casey the story of how when he had been sick, he had lost one of his souls; it had crawled out of him while he had been sleeping, and while it had been gone, the ghost of a dead man had possessed Mr. Jeh's body. In time, the ghost had gotten tired of not being fed the food it liked, so it had left Mr. Jeh's body and his second soul could return. When Casey hears this story, she knows it sounds crazy, but she is polite knowing that many of the older Chinese believe such stories.

After Mr. Jeh finishes his story, a giant purple Cadillac pulls into the park driven by a young man with greased hair wearing skintight black jeans and a black windbreaker. He argues with a plump young woman wearing a very short skirt, lots of make-up, and high heels. The two part ways and the young man walks into the park. He greets some of the old people, and they greet him back, calling him Gilbert. Casey thinks he's trying to look like James Dean, and that he looks like a Pachinko. He smokes a cigarette and then drops a wad of money on the ground before walking away. Paw-Paw later tells Casey that the young man is Mr. Jeh's grandnephew, who makes his money working for a gambler. He comes by the park to drop money off for Mr. Jeh, but Mr. Jeh refuses to take it. Instead, he puts the money in his coat pocket and any member of the club who's short on cash that month can help themselves to it.



The next weekend, Casey travels to the Orange Julius in town, where she has heard Gilbert's father works. Gilbert's father had been Barney's best friend in high school. As she approaches the fast-food restaurant, Casey sees that the girl who torments her in school, known as Booger for the unfortunate time she used a bobby pin to clean out her nose, is sitting at the counter slurping on a shake. Casey orders her food from the middle-aged man who works there, and then sits next to Booger. "You say one word about the way I'm dressed and I'll wrap that baton around your neck," she says. Booger is clearly terrified and doesn't even look in Casey's direction. When the middle-aged man delivers Casey's food, she asks if he's Sheridan, Gilbert's father. The man nods, and Casey tells him that she's Barney's kid. After some gentle prodding, and assurance that Barney doesn't need a loan, Sheridan tells Casey about how he and Barney graduated school together. Barney had always done well in school and thought he would have a bright future, but no one would hire him because he is Chinese. After ten years of working minimum-wage jobs without upward movement in the company, Barney had begun gambling.

After her conversation with Sheridan, Casey returns to her food, and to Booger. Booger seems somewhat interested that Casey comes from a sordid background and that Casey herself had had to work little jobs to help keep food on the table. Somehow, the girls begin talking about comic books, and realize they have a lot in common. After they finish their food, Booger and Casey walk to the comic book shop, giggling the whole way, clearly fast friends. Booger buys a copy of the newly released Katy Keene comic, and she promises to let Casey read it when she's done. As they are walking home from the shop, Casey stops to admire some statues in a storefront window, statues of the Eight Immortals. She asks Booger to explain what they mean, but Booger claims she doesn't know. When Casey persists, Booger becomes annoyed saying that just because she's Chinese doesn't mean she 's superstitious. Immediately, Casey realizes the difference between herself and Booger and finds that the difference makes her sad.

Chapter Three Analysis

In this chapter, Casey has her first realization that being Chinese can be interesting. She and Paw-Paw watch a Kung-Fu movie together and Casey is profoundly moved by the female characters who kick butt while remaining emotional and beautiful. Casey also continues her investigation into her past, and Barney's past, as she meets with various people who knew her parents before she was born. She meets with both Mr. Jeh, a man whose nephew had been Barney's best friend in high school, and the nephew himself, Sheridan. Sheridan's reaction to meeting Casey again highlights Barney's gambling addiction as now, twenty years since he'd last seen him, Sheridan's first statement is that he doesn't have any money to lend Barney. It is also interesting to note that while Paw-Paw doesn't tell Casey much about Barney's gambling addiction as a young man, it is clear that she sympathizes with him and does not blame him for his problems. In speaking to Sheridan, Casey learns about the history of racism in America, and that even though Barney is intelligent, he had had no options for employment after graduation. Even though Barney obviously didn't have to turn to gambling to make money, he didn't have many choices to make the kind of money he had wanted to raise



a family. His decision to turn to gambling agains highlights the theme of money - that money is more important than good morals.

This chapter also functions to introduce characters who will be very important as the novel progresses: Mr. Jeh as a spiritual and cultural guide for Casey, Booger Chew as the once bully who becomes Casey's best friend, and Gilbert the Pachinko who is mysterious, greasy, and has money to burn. Mr. Jeh's story in the park, about losing his soul while he was sleeping, echoes the story of the owls that trapped the oldest walker son's soul after he died and stored it in a gourd.



Chapter Four

Chapter Four Summary

Casey wakes up in the morning and finds that the apartment is colder than usual. She asks Paw-Paw if she can light the gas stove, but Paw-Paw thinks it's too dangerous for a child to light the stove; she's heard lots of stories of people suffocating on the gas, perhaps. Instead, Paw-Paw and Casey pile on their clothes in an attempt to stay warm. On another day, hoping to keep warm for a few hours, Casey invites herself over to Booger's house to look at her comic books. Booger's bedroom is covered with frilly pink lampshades and posters of heartthrob movie stars. There, Casey finds Booger's sketchpad which is full of her own drawings of fashion designs. She would love to be a model, but thinks she's too fat. She likes to go down to the roller skating rink for exercise, but finds that as soon as she's there, she's chowing down on all the junk food like caramel popcorn and pronto pups. Booger is very concerned with finding a husband, but Casey says that since Paw-Paw does alright on her own, she will do. After hanging out with Booger for a few hours, Casey returns home and is again overwhelmed with the cold. She makes rice for dinner, washing it the way Paw-Paw instructed her, until the water is no longer milky white. Still cold, Casey decides to put on the oven for a few hours and then extinguish it before Paw-Paw comes home, then no one is any the wiser.

This goes on for a few days, with Casey turning the gas oven off and on, until one day when she falls asleep while making dinner. She awakens to Paw-Paw banging a burnt cast-iron stove in the sink. She is irate with Casey because she believed that when she walked into the smoky apartment and saw Casey asleep in the bed, that she was dead. A few days later, Barney calls collect and promises to send Paw-Paw the money to pay for the phone call. Casey tells him that she's been in touch with Sheridan, which sort-of annoys Barney. He says he has forgiven and forgotten his past, if you don't it just opens up your heart to hard feelings, and Sheridan should too. A few days later, Casey goes to retrieve the mail and finds a white envelope with five dollars in it and assumes it's from Barney to cover the collect call. Instead of giving the money to Paw-Paw, she takes it into town to buy some duck, knowing that Paw-Paw loves duck. At the deli, however, Casey has a difficult time ordering. A fat Chinese woman pushes her way in front of Casey in line, and begins shouting at her in Chinese, which Casey, of course, doesn't understand. Luckily enough, one store attendant takes pity on Casey and serves her, but he charges her higher than the advertised price, probably because she doesn't speak Chinese. Casey stands her ground and refuses to pay the inflated price, although communicating her displeasure proves difficult.

Casey isn't so lucky, however, when she tries to order some gai bow - white buns filled with chicken, eggs, and barbecued pork - from a different restaurant. She knows that the cook has some in the back of the kitchen, but she refuses to sell them to Casey unless she buys more food. Casey refuses and only gets two buns when she really ordered four. At home, however, Paw-Paw is amazed at their feast. She picks her



favorite part of the duck - the rear, because it is the fattiest. Casey feels warm inside being able to provide for Paw-Paw. In return, Paw-Paw teaches Casey how to eat using chopsticks. It is difficult work, particularly with the greasy duck slipping between the plastic sticks, but eventually Casey manages to eat a few bites before returning to her fork. After dinner, Paw-Paw tells Casey her true Chinese name, Cheun Meih, which means Taste of Spring. Casey feels now as if she is somehow complete, knowing her first name, her real name, her true name.

Chapter Four Analysis

In this chapter, the differences between Booger and Casey grow and the two act as great foils for each other, both representing Chinese-American teenagers in the 1960's, when the novel is set. Booger is very self critical and traditional in the sense that finding a husband and starting a family are very important to her - more important, even, than her own dreams of becoming a model or fashion designer. Casey, on the other hand, is only concerned with her own future and doesn't feel like she needs a husband to be successful or happy in her life. She feels more and more like an owl, which is important to her character growth, cultural awareness, and sense of personal history. Although Casey is maturing somewhat, she is still very much a child, as highlighted by her mistake with the gas stove, falling asleep while toxic gas filled the apartment, endangering her life. Paw-Paw's reaction to the accident reminds the reader that she buried her daughter and will do anything to protect Casey from the same fate. This situation also highlights the fact that Paw-Paw does not have a lot of money, the direct opposite of characters like Gilbert and Uncle Phil who literally have money to burn for heat, while Paw-Paw and Casey shiver in a freezing apartment. Even though they are poor and cold, it is important to note that Paw-Paw and Casey are for more content and happy in their lives together than any of the other wealthy characters.

This chapter also continues the theme of Casey's feeling of not belonging in Chinatown. There are clear cultural codes that relate to behavior and interactions in China that Casey never experienced outside of Chinatown, proving that this compressed little city is like another world. The woman in the deli pushes past Casey in line, orders with a loud voice, and then refuses to budge from the sidewalk where she's blocking Casey's path. All of these behaviors were accepted, even expected, in China, but don't seem to make sense to Casey when they're happening in America. When she thinks about living in China, Casey feels confused, even disgusted; her life in America is far more civilized, ordered, and respectable. The reader can see this strong reaction against everything Chinese beginning to shift, however, when Casey learns her real Chinese name. This proves to be the key to Casey emotionally unlocking herself to accept her Chinese heritage. Casey's statement to her father that "there's a difference between forgiving what happened and just forgetting" (Page 163) foreshadows events later in the novel when Casey will have to choose between forgiving her father for his crimes or forgetting him forever.



Chapter Five

Chapter Five Summary

As this chapter opens, Casey is rifling through her cigar box of old postcards from Barney. They all say pretty much the same thing: My luck's still slow, hope you're not down. She also keeps a cigar box of the letters she's sent to Barney that have been returned by the post office. She's planning on giving them all to him when they're back together, whenever that may be. To cheer Casey up, Paw-Paw takes her to the movies. Casey thinks she should save the money to have the clasp on the owl necklace fixed, but Paw-Paw thinks there are more important things in life, and puts the owl necklace in the jewelry box. When they return from the movie theatre, Casey hears someone inside their apartment, a burglar. The two aren't concerned about the money, but Paw-Paw suddenly remembers the owl necklace. She opens the door and faces the burglar, even though Casey warns her that the burglar is dangerous. Paw-Paw swings her purse at the burglar who is rapidly making his way to the window, but he turns around and punches Paw-Paw in the face. She falls back, hard, into the bureau, rattling her statues. During the fall, she breaks her leg, and now must be rushed to the hospital.

After Paw-Paw is brought to the hospital, where Casey is, again, not allowed into the room, she returns home and phones her relatives to tell them the news. Soon after, Booger shows up at the door to comfort Casey. While Booger is trying to convince Casey to come down for dinner, Uncle Phil arrives and threatens to sue Booger's family for not properly lighting the apartment building. After Booger is gone, Phil half-heartedly tries to convince Casey to move back in with his family, but Casey insists on staying here and staying close to Paw-Paw. After Phil leaves, Mr. Jeh and his grand-nephew, Gilbert, arrive to check up on Casey as per Paw-Paw's request. While Casey makes the men some tea, Mr. Jeh accuses Gilbert of telling one of his friends to break into Paw-Paw's apartment. Annoyed, Gilbert leaves saying he has things to attend to. After Gilbert is gone, Mr. Jeh says that he thinks Paw-Paw saw her attacker's face which might be why she didn't want to report the attack to the police.

Mr. Jeh takes Casey to meet with Mr. Fong, a pawn and antique dealer. It is likely that whoever stole Paw-Paw's necklace will bring it to Mr. Fong or one of his associates to sell. He says that whoever tries to sell the owl necklace will have very unfortunate luck, because Paw-Paw has a famous and powerful lawyer son, who is well connected. Any shop owner with a few things wrong, like loose garbage can lids, may receive a fine. Although Mr. Jeh's words are not a direct threat, it is immediately clear that Mr. Fong has received the point.

Chapter Five Analysis

The opening of this chapter, with Casey flipping through her old postcards from Barney as well as the box of letters that have been returned to her, unopened, highlight the fact



that Casey's relationship with her father is beginning to change. They don't communicate any more, and Casey has begun to feel like she is an afterthought in Barney's life. He writes the same messages on his postcards, over and over, symbolizing the fact that nothing in his life is changing; it is not improving, as he promised Casey it would, and he is clearly not taking any steps to curing himself of his gambling addiction. While Barney's life is seemingly stagnant, Casey's is swiftly changing as she is beginning to accept and appreciate her cultural awareness and personal history. Chapter Five, as well as the rest of the chapters in the novel, is full of instances of Casey feeling like, or comparing herself to, an owl. This comparison symbolizes that Casey is beginning to see herself in a new light, and that she is maturing as a character as well as a young woman.

This chapter also continues the spending of the money that mysteriously appears in Paw-Paw's mailbox. Although Casey believes the money has been sent from Barney, he reader may be wondering where Barney is getting this money. The attack by the burglar in Paw-Paw's house acts as the climax of the novel. Not only has Paw-Paw lost what little money she has and has been sent to recuperate from the attack in an expensive hotel, she has also lost her necklace to the burglar. The duration of the novel is spent with Casey's determined pursuit to find the thief and bring the owl necklace back home where it belongs. It is important to note that Paw-Paw clearly saw the face of her attacker and chose not to file a police report, which suggests that she knows exactly who her attacker is and does not want to get him/her in trouble. When Casey realizes this, she immediately suspects that the thief is Gilbert, a suspicion that will carry through to the end of the novel. Also in this chapter, Casey walks through town and feels as if she can see its reflection on the streets with Mr. Jeh. She still needs an older spiritual guide with her to feel the full vibrations of the city's history, but this will change by the end of the novel when Casey sees the reflections of Chinatown, and her own reflection in the water, when she is completely alone.



Chapter Six

Chapter Six Summary

All alone in the apartment, Casey wishes Barney was there to keep her company, but she'll have to settle for Booger, who shows up at her door feeling obligated to invite Casey to breakfast. In return, Casey allows Booger to come with her to Jack's pool hall where she plans on having a stake-out to watch Gilbert's behavior in the hopes that he'll lead her to the necklace. On the way to the pool hall, the girls stop off at the library where Booger checks out a massive book on Florida birds, claiming that she'll need a weapon if things get dicey. On the walk to the pool hall, Booger complains about her real name, Tallulah Bankhead, and wonders which name is worse, her given name or her nickname. Casey admits that she was named after Casey Stengel, the Yankees manager, which makes Booger feel a bit better since at least she was named after a woman. After swearing Casey to secrecy, Booger admits that she would love to change her name to Talia, so Casey starts calling her that, instead of her unattractive nickname.

Upon arriving to the pool hall, the girls stand in a nearby alley for their stake-out. Talia is somewhat disgusted, but as Casey points out, there's no room to be fashionable in this business. In the alley, Casey is not surprised to see Mr. Jeh there as well, also to stake-out Gilbert's behavior. Finally Gilbert arrives and enters the pool hall. He is in there for a few hours while the makeshift detectives grow increasingly bored in the alley. Finally, Gilbert emerges and heads straight to a pay phone. The detectives discretely follow him from the payphone to a rundown apartment building. Then, they sneak in behind him after he's been buzzed into the building by someone inside. They creep up behind Gilbert as he stands in the hallway speaking to a slovenly looking man through an apartment door. They realize that the man has a gun. Mr. Jeh bursts from his hiding spot and hits the man over the head with Booger's Florida Birds book. The man drops to the floor, much to Gilbert's surprise. Gilbert begs his uncle to get rid of the kids, but Mr. Jeh refuses. Gilbert admits that he's not here to sell the necklace, but to buy it back.

The apartment door opens and the seller, Paw-Paw's attacker, steps out. Casey is shocked to see that it is Barney. She can't put it all together in her mind, so she simply asks, "What are you doing here?" Barney barely answers, and starts dragging his unconscious friend back into his unfurnished apartment. Barney tells the story of how he needed money to pay back some debts and that he never meant to hurt Paw-Paw, but Casey won't believe it. She's sure Barney is covering up for his friend. But Barney persists, insisting that it's true. Finally, Casey relents to her tears and outrage, claiming that she doesn't even know who Barney is anymore. How could he steal from Paw-Paw? Why didn't he just use the five-dollars a week he'd been leaving in the mailbox to help pay off his debts? Barney claims he has no idea where the money came from, and Casey soon realizes that it had been Gilbert leaving the money for her each week. Even though Barney claims to feel badly for hurting Paw-Paw, his actions don't seem remorseful. He simply keeps repeating over and over that his luck is about to change.



Chapter Six Analysis

Casey dreams that she has fully transformed into an owl. She swoops down and captures a weasel, then washes the blood off her talons in the river. When she wakes, Casey is sure that the weasel is Gilbert, and that he is the one who stole Paw-Paw's necklace. Casey's suspicion of Gilbert as the thief mounts as she plans a stake-out of his behavior at Jack's pool hall. Mr. Jeh's appearance at the same spot proves that Casey is not the only one with suspicions. This chapter functions mainly as a way to pull all the plot points together. It is revealed that Gilbert had been acting valiantly, in an attempt to return Paw-Paw's necklace to the rightful owner, and that Barney was, in fact, the thief, a fact which many readers may have suspected and by which many readers may be shocked. Casey's reaction to the discovery that Barney is not who she thought he was nearly reaches the pinnacle of her coming-of-age. She realizes that Barney is a flawed man, and she no longer believes his fairy tale stories of how they are destined to become wealthy some day. She realizes that money is not the most important thing in life, in stark contrast to Barney who still does not see the error of his ways.



Chapter Seven

Chapter Seven Summary

After her encounter with Barney, Casey hurts all over. She walks to the park and sits on the grass, completely alone until Talia comes running over to collect her. All she wants to do is see Paw-Paw, but the hospital rules still forbid it. Talia arranges for her Aunt Angela, a nurse at the hospital, to arrange a phone call between Casey and Paw-Paw. Casey still wishes it was a visit, but this is the best she can do. Immediately, Casey confronts Paw-Paw as to why she didn't admit that she knew Barney was the thief. Paw-Paw claims that Barney is very sick with his gambling addiction and that he never meant to hurt her. Casey doesn't understand why Paw-Paw can be so forgiving. She says that she would like to stay with Paw-Paw indefinitely, and that she's grown used to life in Chinatown. Paw-Paw is overjoyed. After the phone conversation, Gilbert presents Casey with the necklace, now with a newly replaced clasp so it will never fall off again.

The news from the hospital is mixed. Paw-Paw is allowed to return home, but her hospital bill is a whopper. Phil claims that he doesn't have enough money to help pay for it, and the story is the same from Paw-Paw's other two children. Casey is outraged that they would turn their backs on Paw-Paw in her time of need, but Paw-Paw is much more understanding. This is America, where everyone is supposed to own their own car and have the newest electronic devices. No one has time for their families or values any more. After this conversation, Barney arrives. Even though Casey doesn't want to see him, Paw-Paw lets him in. Barney apologizes for hurting Paw-Paw, and claims that he wants Casey back. He says that as soon as he pays off this loan, over \$2,000, he'll quit gambling. Casey knows Barney can't quit gambling as easy as that, and says that she never wants to see him again. Paw-Paw interjects that never is a very long time. Barney tries to justify his crime saying that the necklace belongs on some rich, white woman's neck. This statement outrages Casey who feels very sentimentally toward the history of the necklace. Barney doesn't believe in the story of the owl and doesn't understand why it's so important to Casey. The two get into an argument, and Barney leaves.

After Casey and Paw-Paw fully understand the gravity of their financial situation, Paw-Paw arranges for a meeting with the local museum curator. He is very excited by the prospect of buying Paw-Paw's necklace. Two weeks later, Casey, Gilbert, and Mr. Jeh stand in the museum staring at the necklace behind the glass. Some museum visitors stop to enjoy the beauty of the necklace, and some walk right past it. Casey feels empty inside, but the money from the museum is more than enough to pay back Paw-Paw's hospital bills. At the museum, Casey makes up with Gilbert, and agrees to go out to dinner with him. Upon returning home, Paw-Paw convinces Casey to call her father and make up with him, too.



Chapter Seven Analysis

In the final chapter of the novel, all the plot points come full circle. Casey realizes that she does not belong with Barney, but wants nothing more than to stay forever with Paw-Paw. Like the opening chapter of the novel, when Barney was in the hospital, in the closing chapter of the novel Paw-Paw is in the hospital. The fact that Casey speaks to Paw-Paw on the phone rather than sneaking into the hospital as she would have done a year before, shows the reader that Casey has matured while living in Chinatown and that she has learned patience. When Paw-Paw returns home, the theme of money and happiness is revisited for the final time. Uncle Phil does not help his mother financially, saying that he must care for his children first. Obviously Uncle Phil does not have a happy life - at least not happy the way Casey and Paw-Paw's lives are happy - because he is so worried about his finances and appearance. Paw-Paw solves the financial troubles by selling her necklace to the museum, a sale that troubles Casey but she finally accepts. Casey learns that she doesn't need a necklace to show that she is a Child of the Owl, it is in her blood. She also finally learns that having some money can lead to a better life, and that making sacrifices is essential to growing-up. In choosing to live with Paw-Paw, to part with the necklace, and to forgive her father, it is clear that Casey is reaching maturity, and that she has a new, unexpected, perspective of life.



Characters

Casey

Casey is the twelve-year-old protagonist and narrator of the novel. She is sent to live first with her Uncle Phil and then with her grandmother Paw-Paw after her father, Barney, is hospitalized following a mugging outside the bookie's office. When Casey is sent to live with her grandmother, Paw-Paw, she doesn't know anything about her Chinese culture, or her family's personal history, and she doesn't want to know. She associates herself with being strictly American, and doesn't recognize how similar she is to the Chinese people she sees on the streets in Chinatown. Through her relationship with Paw-Paw, however, Casey begins to grow and her interest in Chinese culture matures, particularly after she hears the story behind the owl necklace Paw-Paw always wears, and how it relates back to Casey's own feelings of isolation and loneliness living in Chinatown. After hearing this story, Casey sets out to learn everything she can about her parents' history in Chinatown, as well as cultural and historic information about China. When Paw-Paw's prized necklace is stolen, however, Casey's mission changes as she becomes obsessed with returning the necklace to its rightful owner. Casey is shocked to learn, then, that it had been Barney who stole the necklace and put Paw-Paw in the hospital. When she learns this information, Casey is forced to choose between the life she knew and her new life in Chinatown. In the end, she chooses her new life with Paw-Paw in Chinatown, feeling for the first time like she really belongs, and that she is, in fact, a Child of the Owl.

Paw-Paw

Paw-Paw is Casey's maternal grandmother. She is a tiny, pleasant, round-faced woman who acts as a mother figure for Casey after Barney is hospitalized, and teaches Casey all about her Chinese history, as well as tells her the story of the owl necklace. Paw-Paw has a head full of frizzy, gray curls, wears rimless glasses at the end of her nose, and always wears sweaters, even in the summer. She works as a seamstress doing piecework, and sometimes sews extra shirts so that she has enough money to take Casey to see a Kung-Fu movie, just like she used to do with her own daughter, Jeannie. Paw-Paw is a strong, independent woman who has lived on her own for many years before Casey arrives on her doorstep. When her apartment is broken into halfway through the novel, Paw-Paw does her best to fend off the attacker on her own, and ends up with a broken leg. Everyone suspects that Paw-Paw saw the face of her attacker and wonders why she refuses to file a police report. Later, it is revealed that Barney is the thief and that Paw-Paw doesn't want to file a police report, but wants to protect him. She has always forgiven Barney for his gambling addiction, and encourages Casey to do the same. When the hospital bills are too much for Paw-Paw, she sells her prized owl necklace to the local museum to pay off her debts.



Morey

Morey is described as an old musician with dark skin that shines like gold. Most of the time he walks around in army fatigues and a flannel shirt, but other times he wears an old zoot suit. His voice sounds like an instrument on its own, oily and rich. He is Barney's constant companion, and helps him with most of his plans to get rich quick.

Uncle Phil

Uncle Phil is Casey's uncle with whom she is first sent to live after Barney's hospitalization. He is considered to be a hotshot lawyer who is more concerned with money and appearances than the well being of his family. For example, he refuses to help Paw-Paw with her hospitalization bill claiming that he needs to care for his family first, but he clearly has enough money to spread around. Uncle Phil is a short, round man with a flat top haircut and horn-rimmed glasses that are always flecked with dandruff.

Pam-Pam

Pam-Pam is Casey's cousin who is also twelve-years-old, but is the polar opposite of Casey. She has curly hair, wears frilly pink nightgowns, and speaks in an affected, soft whisper, the way she imagines a little girl might speak. Pam-Pam is the excuse Uncle Phil uses to move Casey in with Paw-Paw, claiming that Casey is a bad influence on his youngest daughter.

Annette

Annette is Uncle Phil's oldest daughter. She is only referred to as the hedgehog by Casey after Casey sees her cousin with a head full of hair curlers. She is typically seen wearing a floral quilted robe and fluffy house slippers. She is a junior at Berkeley University where she acts as the president of the Chinese girls' sorority.

Eddy

Eddy is the dwarf who runs the news stand near Uncle Phil's house. He has an almost normal sized trunk but short, squat legs. He wears rimless glasses and a funny straw hat shaped like a fedora.

Barney

Barney is Casey's father. He is addicted to gambling and often lives his life on the run, forcing him to leave his daughter with her relatives. He is always in debt and always trying desperately to get out of it. Although it is clear that Barney loves Casey, his bad



decisions negatively affect her life in various ways. At the opening of the novel, Barney is in the hospital after being mugged outside the bookie's. In the climax of the novel's action, Barney breaks into Paw-Paw's house and steals her owl necklace hoping to sell it to help pay off his debts. During the scuffle, he pushes Paw-Paw and she breaks her leg. This action greatly damages his relationship with Casey, who chooses to live with Paw-Paw indefinitely.

Mr. Jeh

Mr. Jeh is an old Chinese man who lives nearby Paw-Paw and is a member of her Chinese Club. He is a firm believer in the mysticism of Chinese history, including the belief that one's soul leaves the body during sleep to investigate the world. He practices Tai-Chi in the park, and always wears an impeccably clean suit. When his son is attacked by a man with a gun, Mr. Jeh fends the attacker off with a giant book about Florida birds.

Gilbert

Gilbert is Mr. Jeh's great nephew. He has greasy pomaded hair and he drives a purple Cadillac around town. He clearly has money to burn, but everyone wonders how he gets it. When Paw-Paw's necklace goes missing, Gilbert is the first suspect. Later, it is revealed that Gilbert is not the thief, but has been working diligently to help return the necklace to its rightful owner.

Booger Chew

Booger Chew is Casey's best friend in Chinatown. Initially, Booger is known as a bully who picks on Casey for having to wear hand-me-down uniforms. Later, the two become friends over their love for comic books. Booger is seen as the constant foil for Casey, since she is Chinese but has no interest in her culture. She is interested in fashion and wants to be either a model or a designer someday. She is wealthy and somewhat vain, but is Casey's constant companion.



Objects/Places

The Happy God / Buddha

The Happy God / Buddha is Barney's good luck charm when he is gambling. It is described as a fat little, bald, smiling man. When Barney is hospitalized, he gives the Happy God to Casey so the luck doesn't go cold. It is only after moving in with Paw-Paw that Casey learns that the Happy God is actually Buddha.

Zoot Suit

A Zoot Suit is the type of suit that Morey wears when he wants to dress up. The suit is bright pink, has shoulder pads like a football player's, and big floppy pants that narrow at the legs. Morey wears the suit with a broad-brimmed hat, a small crown, bright patent-leather pink and black shoes, and a long silver keychain.

San Francisco

San Francisco is where Casey lives with her father, Barney before he is hospitalized. There is a small section of San Francisco, known as Chinatown, where Paw-Paw lives, and where Casey learns about her cultural history.

Morse Code

Morse Code is a system of taps used to communicate messages over telegraph during the First World War. It is also the system Paw-Paw put into place to know who is buzzing at her doorbell. She had learned Morse Code while working as a nanny for an American family.

Slapjack

Slapjack is the first card game Paw-Paw teaches to Casey. The deck of cards is divided in half, split between two players. The players then take turns taking the top card off their pile and putting it in the middle. Whenever a jack appears, the first player to put their hand on the deck wins all the cards. The game is over when one player wins the entire deck of cards.

Mah-Jong

Mah-Jong is a game of tiles played like checkers by the old Chinese men in Chinatown's parks, particularly by the Chinese men who belong to Paw-Paw's club.



The Owl Necklace

The Owl Necklace is the necklace that Paw-Paw always wears around her neck, and that is stolen by Barney halfway through the novel. The necklace is made of jade and is carved so that every part of the owl's face seems to have come to life. An eyebrow is not just an eyebrow but a little scaled dragon trying to swallow up the owl's eyes.

Princess of the Streets

Princess of the Streets is the first Kung-Fu movie Paw-Paw takes Casey to see in Chinatown. It is in all Chinese, but is subtitled in English. The movie is about a girl who grew up on the tough streets of Hong Kong. The film has a strong impact on Casey who sees for the first time that it is cool, even tough, to be Chinese.

The Listener

The Listener is a statue Paw-Paw shows to Casey to help her connect to her Chinese heritage. The Listener should have gone to Heaven but is tormented by the cries of all the lost souls still on earth, so she has turned her back on Heaven and says she will not enter until everyone else's soul has passed through the gate before her.

Jack's Pool Hall

Jack's Pool Hall is the place Casey stakes out while she is watching Gilbert's behavior. The outside of the building is just a corrugated iron door with a No Parking sign hanging on it. Inside, patrons shoot pool, play pinball, smoke cigars, and get into more trouble than they ever could have bargained for.



Themes

Cultural Identity

One main theme of the novel is cultural identity. Throughout her life, Casey has identified herself as strictly American, not Chinese, her cultural heritage. When she moves to Chinatown, however, she is forced to see herself as part of a larger community, the Chinese community. When Casey first arrives in Chinatown, she has a total identity crisis and says, "I knew more about racehorses than I knew about myself - I mean myself as a Chinese. I looked at my hands again, thinking they couldn't be my hands ... Maybe it was because I thought of myself as American and all Americans were supposed to be white like on TV ... but now I felt like some mad scientist had switched bodies on me like in all those monster movies, so that I had woken up in the wrong one" (Page 35).

The theme of cultural identity is especially highlighted when Casey starts school. Even though she is Chinese, she does not understand the language, nor does she have any desire to learn it. She knows there must be something beneficial about being Chinese, but she cannot find it. She associates herself with being American, which is much different to her than being Chinese. When she looks around her, the other girls seem more Chinese than she, but they treat her terribly, bullying her, and telling her that she is stupid for not knowing the language. This mentality is also demonstrated by Casey's teachers. At school, Casey feels like an animal in the zoo, with tourists walking through to gawk at how she doesn't belong. By the end of the novel, however, Casey understands the inner workings of Chinatown and even begins to respect them. At the end of the novel she makes the difficult choice to stay with Paw-Paw in Chinatown rather than returning home with Barney. This decision makes it clear to the reader that Chinatown, and the history of her culture, have become home for Casey now.

Belonging

Another theme in this novel is belonging. Growing up, Casey knows that she belongs with her father, Barney. Because of this, she is resistant to the fact that she might also belong to another community, meaning her Chinese community. The theme of belonging is also mirrored in the story of Jasmine the owl. After she is forced to marry a human man and live as a walker for twenty years, she begs her husband to allow her to return to her owl form saying, "'It is only that I am tired of walking, always walking,' she said. 'I am an owl after all'" (Page 100). Even though the owl in this novel had been willing to live as a woman for many years, for the sake and happiness of her family, she knew that she didn't really belong on the ground: she belonged in the sky. Similarly, once Casey arrives in Chinatown and hears the story of the owl, she begins to see that she, too, belongs in the sky, in the mysteries of her cultural heritage. As time passes, she sees that Barney does not understand the gravity of his actions or how they affect Casey's life. It becomes clear to the reader that Casey has outgrown Barney when she



finally admits that Barney's been telling himself lies all his life, and that he's been telling her lies, too (Page 242). It is clear, now, that Casey realizes she does not belong with Barney and that he doesn't have her best interests at heart. She sees that she belongs with Paw-Paw, and even with Mr. Jeh and Gilbert, to whom she had been particularly resistant when she first arrived in Chinatown. Even with the owl necklace secured behind the glass at the local museum, the reader is content with the knowledge that Casey is where she should be by the end of the novel.

Coming of Age

Another theme in the novel is coming-of-age. At the opening of the novel, Casey is a somewhat troubled twelve-year-old who gets into a lot of mischief. She is generally considered to be a trouble maker. Casey's spirit is symbolized in flowers Barney shows her on her birthday. Casey wants to pull them off the tree to take home, but he stops her saying, "Let them grow. They'll know when it's time to let go" (Page 66). Then he picks up a blossom that has already fallen to the ground and is covered in dirt. He cleans it up and notes that the flower is in "near perfect condition.". This symbolizes Casey's coming-of-age because even though she was a rough and tumble girl in the beginning of the novel, symbolically covered in dirt, her maturity has proven that she is still a beautiful girl. At the end of the novel, although Casey no longer believes the fairy tales from her father that they will strike it rich someday, it is interesting to note that as Casey matures, the more she invests in cultural mythology, like the story of the owl. In this way, she is aging far past her years, and her soul is aligning with the older generation of Chinese Americans like Paw-Paw and Mr. Jeh. Casey's final act of maturity is in her forgiveness of Barney for his crimes against the family at the end of the novel. In this moment, it is clear that Casey has left the drama of her teenage years behind her and has moved on, at least emotionally, to adulthood.



Style

Point of View

This novel is told in first-person, past tense narration from Casey's point-of-view. This point-of-view is very important to the novel as the reader gains insight into Casey's thoughts and desires, which are important for the reader to understand Casey's character development and emotional growth. There is an exception to this narration, however, in Chapter Two, when Paw-Paw tells the story of the owl to Casey for the first time. In this chapter, the narration shifts to third-person omniscient, which works out to allow the reader to experience the story of the owl first-hand alongside Casey, rather than be retold through Casey's past-tense narration.

Casey is a completely reliable narrator, in direct contrast to many of the other characters in the novel who are perceived as shady, and would quickly tell a lie to save their own skin. Casey, on the other hand, acts as a foil for these characters by being resilient and tough while remaining honest and straight-forward. Because Casey is the narrator, and because she is a young teenager, much of the narration is told with slang that may appear somewhat dated since the novel was published in the 1960's.

Setting

This novel mostly takes place in the Chinatown district of San Francisco, California. Chinatown often feels like a different world to Casey, particularly when she first arrives there. The air seems lighter and brighter than anywhere else she has lived. Also, upon her initial arrival, Casey feels as if someone had taken several square miles of buildings and squeezed them into a tiny little half a mile square. On the north side of Chinatown are all the American bars and topless joints. On the west are the mansions and hotels of Nob Hill, the rich part of town. Being in Chinatown has a profound effect on Casey's character development as she learns more about where she came from, and what Chinatown means to her, individually. Because of this, the setting of the novel is very important to understanding Casey as a narrator, as well as to understanding the plot of the novel. Even more, the majority of the novel takes place in Paw-Paw's house in Chinatown. Paw-Paw's apartment is tiny, ten by fifteen feet, and is completely cluttered with her belongings. There is a bed pushed lengthways against the wall near the doorway, leading to a small cubicle kitchen. There is one window, connected to the fire escape, giving a view into the alley. Paw-Paw's tiny, cluttered apartment is a smaller, more condensed version of the Chinatown streets outside.

Language and Meaning

The language of this novel tends to be very conversational as it is told from a twelve-year-old's point of view. This conversational tone helps to characterize Casey as an individual, as well as in her community, particularly when the language of the novel



clashes with the language of the outside world in Chinatown. Because the novel is set in Chinatown with a variety of Chinese characters, it is fitting that there would be various Chinese phrases included in the novel. All of the Chinese words and phrases are explained contextually, so readers should not trip up on the foreign words. While some of the Chinese words and phrases seem inorganically included, perhaps in an attempt to create setting, others fit well into their scenes, or the plot of the novel overall. One of the best inclusions of a Chinese phrase occurs when Casey learns her real Chinese name. The novel manages to balance its bilingualism while keeping the narration in an even flow. Readers should not be tripped up by the language, and might even learn some basic Chinese phrases.

Structure

The novel is divided into seven chapters of relatively equal length, averaging around 50 pages each. Each chapter is also subdivided into smaller sections, noted by Roman numerals. Each chapter has two to five sections, with the shifts in section happening at a change of scenery, or with an extended time gap. The novel is relatively quick-paced, with action encouraging the reader to turn the page and find out what happens next, but the small section breaks are vital so the reader doesn't feel bogged down with narration, especially since the chapters are quite long for a Young Adult novel.

The novel is divided equally between exposition and dialogue. The exposition is completely filtered through Casey's thoughts and eyes, since the story is told from her perspective. Because the exposition is filtered through Casey's perspective, the world created is unique to her character, and the reader learns more about Casey through her perception of the world, particularly when she arrives in Chinatown, through this structure.

Quotes

"Somehow Barney never got around to what would happen after we ran out of things to buy and apartments to move into. But maybe that's because his story never really got off the ground" (Page 4).

"The only thing in Uncle Phil's house without an expensive price tag was me, and they started to see what they could do about upping my value as soon as I got in the door" (Page 17).

"I knew more about horse races than I knew about myself - I mean myself as a Chinese. I looked at my hands again, thinking they couldn't be my hands, and then I closed my eyes and felt their outline, noticing the tiny fold of flesh at the corners" (Page 35).

"The simplest thing would have been to go to Paw-Paw and ask her to help me, but for one thing I never wanted to learn Chinese. I was an American and I couldn't see any good reason to learn a foreign language" (Page 56).

"Suddenly all the gaudy neon signs were no longer a bunch of words but were like snakes of colored lights crawling up the faces of the buildings and their reflections smashed themselves on the street, looking like broken stars sliding back and forth and trying to put themselves back together" (Page 109).

"If there were invisible walls around Chinatown for Paw-Paw, they were like the walls of a turtle, walls behind which you could remain warm and alive, and for someone like me, those walls didn't have to be any more of a trap than I let them. They could be like something to give me shape and form and when I couldn't grow anymore inside them, I could break out of those invisible walls" (Page 115).

"Each of us has only a certain amount of luck we're born with. Some have a lot. Others don't have any" (Page 125).

"Respect differences, cherish the things you share in common" (Page 158).

"There is a difference between forgiving what happened and just forgetting. You can't run away from the past. I want to know what it means to be Chinese" (Page 163).

"While he was with me I felt as if the Chinatown I saw at that moment was only the reflection on a pool, and Mr. Jeh was the breeze that moved across the still waters, making the reflection shimmer and become unreal so that I could sense the other Chinatowns of the past that lay within the dark depths" (Page 202).

"That's a lie, Barney. All your life you've been telling yourself lies. And you've been telling me lies" (Page 242).



"Barney can't help himself, girl. Gambling's like a sickness with him. You or I could leave a card game anytime, but Barney can't - no more than a starving dog can leave a bone" (Page 249).

"The only place where the old China lives on is in the memories of the old people here and in the movies" (Page 255).



Topics for Discussion

Discuss Casey's reaction to the hospitalization of people in her lives. Compare Casey's reaction to Barney's hospitalization at the opening of the novel to her reaction to Paw-Paw's hospitalization at the end of the novel. How do Casey's reactions to these hospitalizations show how her character has changed over the duration of the novel?

Discuss Casey's relationship with her hands. How does Casey's view of her hands when she first arrived in Chinatown reflect her cultural awareness as well as her feeling of home?

"I noticed that my hand on the windowsill was colored a honey kind of tan like some of the people outside. I took my hand off the handle and stared at it" (Page 34).

How does Casey's view of her hands change as the novel progresses, particularly after she's heard the story of the owl?

Describe Casey's relationship with her extended family. How does her relationship with her extended family change over the course of the novel? Would you say that Casey's extended family has a healthy relationship? Why or why not? What is most important to Casey's family? Do you think Casey is a good fit with her extended family? Why or why not?

Describe Casey's experience in Chinese school. What are her first days like? Do you think Casey is treated fairly by her peers and teachers? Why or why not? What do you think is the biggest obstacle that holds Casey back in school? How, if relevant, does Casey overcome this obstacle? What does this tell you about her character?

Describe Casey's first impression of Chinatown and life with Paw-Paw. Are these first impressions shown to be accurate later in the novel? Why or why not? Choose one example of a first impression that is wrong in the novel and describe it. Then, choose a first impression that is accurate and describe it here. Overall, would you say that first impressions are important in Casey's life? Why or why not?

Discuss Casey's relationship with the owl necklace. What is the story behind the necklace? How does the story of the necklace pertain to Casey's life with Paw-Paw? At the end of the story, where does the owl necklace end up? Do you think this is a good home for the necklace? Why or why not?

Describe Casey's relationship with her deceased mother, Jeannie. Before living with Paw-Paw, what is that relationship like? How does that relationship change after Casey moves in with Paw-Paw? What does Casey learn about Jeannie during her time in Chinatown and how does this new information change Casey's relationship with herself?