

Red Azalea Study Guide

Red Azalea by Anchee Min

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Plot Summary

The author, Anchee Min, says that she began learning the teachings of Mao from a very early age as well as the operas of Madam Mao. She became a devout member of the Little Red Guard, a school version of the Communist Party. Her parents work long hours as teachers and Min is responsible for her three younger siblings from the time she was five. She says it is the same with all the children and that the older children tie the younger siblings onto their backs with a strip of cloth so that they are free to play.

As Min grows, she becomes very active in the Little Red Guard and is called on by Party officials to speak out for the Party. Her ability to write well and to recall what she has written makes her ideal for writing and presenting speeches. When she is told that a teacher named Autumn Leaves is an American spy, Min is skeptical. She's convinced by a Party secretary named Chain who uses the fact that Autumn Leaves has allowed Min to borrow American fairy tales as proof of guilt. Min is then told that Autumn Leaves had written in a diary that Min is "educable," which Min is told means that Autumn Leaves has targeted Min as a potential revolutionary. Min, caught up in the flattery of being singled out by the Party as a good young mind who will make a good adult Party member, the young Min writes a speech formally accusing Autumn Leaves though she wavers when forced to confront her teacher in front of a crowd.

At seventeen, Min is sent to Red Fire Farm - a Communist Party effort at mass production of food in unforgiving conditions. In truth, the farms fail to provide for the workers. Here, Min learns about the depths to which power-hungry leaders will go in order to advance in the Party as a woman named Lu remains bitter at her position as second-in-command. Min then develops hero-worship for the company commander, Yan, and then discovers that Yan, like herself, is young, impressionable and holds to dreams of love. The two grow closer and become secret lovers, though their love manifests in changes of attitude.

Then Min is chosen to try out for a film called Red Azalea, a project of Jiang Ching who is wife of Chairman Mao. Min is a strong contender for the part but a girl called Cheering Spear is chosen because of her fawning and flattery which is cited as dedication to the Party. When Cheering Spear falls out of favor, Min replaces her as the star of the project, though she meanwhile falls in love with a man she knows only as the Supervisor who is in charge of the project. With Mao's death, the Supervisor becomes a wanted man and Min is again reduced to the position of clerk before going to America in 1984.

Part One

Part One Summary

The author, Anchee Min, says that she began learning the teachings of Mao from a very early age as well as the operas of Madam Mao. She became a devout member of the Little Red Guard, a school version of the Communist Party. Her parents work long hours as teachers and Min is responsible for her three younger siblings from the time she was five. She says it is the same with all the children and that the older children tie the younger siblings onto their backs with a strip of cloth so that they are free to play. Min is bullied on her way to school and fights are common. In the evenings, she fixes a meal though she often has trouble with the stove and leaves it several times to be summoned for a smoked-up house. She tries to put the children to bed early so that she has some little time to look at the stars while she waits for her parents' return.

Min's name is Anchee which translates to "Jade of Peace" but also sounds like the American term Angel. She and her siblings have unique names among their peers, most which are given names that declare allegiance for their country and hatred for the United States. At home, the daughter of a family that lives in another apartment of their building becomes increasingly violent toward Min and her family which prompts them to look for a place to move. They are literally thrown out by a family that wants to trade apartments. Their new home on Shanxi Road is cramped but safer, though there is a workshop below that creates a great deal of noise.

One day, Min's mother is ordered to write the slogan, "A long, long life to Chairman Mao," but mistakenly writes, "A no, no life to Chairman Mao." She is publicly chastised and forced to "self-criticize." Min, now twelve, writes her mother's criticism speech. A week later, her mother is again in trouble, this time for having used a newspaper that contained Chairman Mao's picture to "wipe her shit in the toilet room." This time she is stripped of her teaching job and sent to perform manual labor in a shoe factory.

Min is a good student and is soon singled out for special attention, holding important roles in the Communist Party's student organizations. She is an excellent writer and serves as a model for her siblings who copy her compositions. She is also a proud speaker and at thirteen, is able to hold an audience spellbound for her speeches as she touts phrases and slogans from Communist-based magazines. One day the school's Party secretary, Chain, tells Min that one her favorite teachers, Autumn Leaves, is an American spy. Min wavers but seems swayed by the fact that Autumn Leaves had been to America with her father. Using books loaned to Min by Autumn Leaves - including fairy tales such as Cinderella - Autumn Leaves is tried publicly. Min gives a speech though she comes to wish she'd had the chance to talk to her parents first. Autumn Leaves is convicted and beaten brutally as Min watches. At home, her mother is angry, pointing out that she has also been a teacher and that one of her own students might have accused her as easily, and with no more evidence than Min had been given. Min says that she learned about punishment that day, but also about betrayal. Though Min is



young, she admits to being vain and it seems likely that being singled out by the Party was so important to her that she didn't consider her actions.

Over the years, children are assigned to various work details. Some die but families are always honored for the sacrifices. Then Min's name appears on the list to work at the Red Hill Farm

Part One Analysis

Min describes a time of near-starvation when the family always runs out of food toward her mother's payday and the joy her mother expresses when payday arrives. Space Conqueror eats the skins and cores of fruit he finds on the streets and Min and her sister, Blooming, drink water in an effort to stave off the hunger. Then her Grandmother brings the family a hen but Min convinces her family to keep the bird, which soon lays eggs. The bird begins to leave droppings in the kitchen where she is kept. Eventually an order is decreed that all animals must be killed to preserve the health of the people and Min is the only one of the family who will do the deed. She does so but then can't bring herself to eat the bird. This scene creates an interesting contrast in the Min and her family are often hungry but can't stand the thought of killing the bird. Even when they are forced to do so, they choose to give the hen away rather than eat her themselves.

Min says that she doesn't believe she was ever forgiven for her role in convicting Autumn Leaves of being an American spy. Though she doesn't offer details, she says that she heard "the familiar hoarse voice," which is apparently Autumn Leaves, saying that she doesn't remember Min at all and that she doesn't believe Min was ever her student. She doesn't say how or why she encountered Autumn Leaves, but it seems likely that she looked up her former teacher and mentor in order to apologize.



Part Two, Pages 49 through 108

Part Two, Pages 49 through 108 Summary

Min arrives at Red Fire Farm to discover that there are two barracks. Her initial impression is that she's arrived at a military camp, and this feeling is increased when she's introduced to the "commander," Yan Sheng. Yan calls Min and the others who arrive "soldiers of the Red Fire Farm." Yan is a powerful person and her voice lowers and rises during the initial greeting, welcoming them then warning them to never "shit in my face." Lu then takes over the welcome, reciting the history of the Communist Party.

On their first day in the fields, a girl named Little Green finds that she has a leech on her leg. When she tries to pull it off, it buries itself under her skin. Min calls for help and an "experience soldier" named Orchid pats the skin above the leech, prompting it to back out and fall off. The incident cements the friendship between Little Green and Min. Min notes that Little Green disobeys the Party directive that women are not to be vain and should not care about their appearance. She uses bright strings to tie up her hair, scorning the brown rubber bands used by the other girls. She is pretty and graceful, earning her the envy of the other young girls. Min notes that Little Green dares to go without a bra and that the sight of Little Green's bosoms bouncing makes Min feel withered and old, though she is herself still a teenager. Little Green bathes regularly, cleans her fingernails religiously and wears delicate underwear embroidered with tiny flowers and birds.

One day, Little Green criticizes Yan and Min realizes that she has become a great admirer of Yan. When stories of Yan's ability and dedication to work include the fact that she allowed bamboo poles to rub on her already blistered and bleeding shoulders, Min does the same. Min says that she "adores" Little Green but "worships" Yan. Min tells of her own weaknesses at the nightly meetings, self-criticizing before she's told. She admits that her reason for doing so is to impress Yan and that she isn't discouraged when time passes without notice from Yan.

Then Min is chosen to participate in additional training which means she sometimes has to rise in the middle of the night for missions. One night she is roused from bed and the small group, armed with live ammunition for the first time, slips through the fields until they hear voices. Min realizes that she's hearing Little Green long before she sees her friend, and then hears a male voice and knows that they are to break up a tryst between Little Green and a lover. Min wants to warn Little Green, but is unable to do so. At Yan's order, the man is beaten and Little Green, covered with a jacket provided by Yan, is lead away. The man is tried and convicted, and sentenced to death.

Min note that Little Green changes after the execution of her lover. Notably, she stops washing herself and is soon criticized by the other girls because of her body odor - an incredible change from her previous habits. Then she becomes destructive, tearing the mosquito nets of the other girls. She sings loudly and is finally taken to the hospital.



When the doctors find nothing wrong, Yan refuses to let them give up, threatening to report them to the Party officials unless they help Little Green.

Min, on her eighteenth birthday, is feeling the stirring of awakening sexuality and admits that she can't get the longings under control though she tries desperately to do so. She compares herself to the cotton plants that try to grow on the Red Fire Farm. The plants almost invariably wither and die, mostly because the reeds won't give the plants room, water and soil to grow. Min says that she, like those plants, is being starved out and is unable to grow.

Min, now without the company of Little Green, seeks friendship from a girl named Orchid. Orchid loves to knit and explains that she has now used the same thread to knit the same sweater four times. She completes the project, ravel it to recover the thread, then knits the sweater again. Min tries to talk to Orchid about other things, but Orchid always returns to talk of her knitting projects.

On a particular day, Min is relieved because the rain means they have time off work to rest. When they return to work, they are assigned a field and are told to plant rice shoots. Min sees blood in the water and follows the stream to find that Orchid is writhing in pain from her period, but has been denied time off work. Min promises to return and help Orchid with her work. Min then begins to hurry her own assigned patch of ground and is soon racing to keep up with Yan, though Yan is much faster and toys with Min during the time of work.

After the work is completed, floodlights are turned on the field and Yan shows how one particular section is filled with floating plants, the work having been done shoddily. Yan says that the worker doesn't need to take blame, but should correct the problem. Min returns to the field after everyone leaves and begins to replant the seedlings. When she wakes, it's daylight and Yan has helped her with the work, complimenting Min for her dedication and explaining that Orchid had told the story of Min's attempt to help a comrade in distress. Yan confesses that when she'd seen Min laying in the field, she feared that Min was dead and says now that losing Min would be a loss to the Party. Min is then moved to Yan's barracks where she is to serve as platoon leader.

Min notes that Lu is second in command to Yan, but that Lu desires to be commander. Min notes that she is afraid of Lu and that Yan fights back, but Min is not Lu's equal and Yan cannot hold her own verbally.

The soldiers take turns caring for Little Green but her grandmother comes to suspect a problem when she realizes the handwriting on the letters she's received is not that of Little Green. Yan writes the grandmother a letter but Min says that it gives no details, saying only that Little Green is in good hands and that sacrifices are to be expected. After writing the letter, Yan tells Min that she will be torn to shreds by the demons of hell when she dies.

One day Min is out walking near an abandoned brick factory when she hears the beautiful sounds of a small stringed instrument call an erhu. Min follows the sound of a



forbidden song and comes to learn that Yan is playing. This is the beginning of a strong friendship between the two though they know they must hide it from Lu.

There is a crafty pig on the farm that continues to break into the feed storage and to eat the choice feed that is supposed to be fed to all the pigs. When the problem continues, Lu gets a dog named 409, a trained German Shepherd that Lu believes will solve the problem. Lu and 409 become attached to each other and 409 is greatly agitated when Lu is gone for a day. The dog's attachment makes Lu happy, but the dog doesn't guard the feed. Instead, the dog and pig become friends and 409 even helps the pig get to the feed. When Lu is ordered to return the dog - which is now mean to everyone other than Lu - Lu first begs then points out that returning the dog won't solve the problem. The pig is butchered and served for dinner. Lu takes the dog to nearby villages where he breeds with several dogs but then bites their owners.

One day Lu returns home with 409. The dog is soon very sick and dies, and a veterinarian says the animal was poisoned. Lu is heartbroken and buries the dog, mourning the loss. When Lu asks Min to accompany her to the grave, Min does so. When Lu says that she's lost her only friend, Min says that Lu will make other friends. This makes Lu angry and she says that the one thing 409 would never do was to lie to her. Min notes that she can't tell Lu the reason she doesn't want to be friends, but that Lu is right in assuming that she doesn't.

Part Two, Pages 49 through 108 Analysis

Min and the other girls refuse to say that Little Green is pretty, though Min secretly admits this to be true. She says that Little Green is able to look pretty and graceful at any job, evening when spreading pig shit. Little Green has done nothing wrong by the standards of most, but the young women of this age under the rule of the Communist Party were not supposed to want to be pretty and were not to feel the natural stirrings of young women who desire sex and relationships. Min goes so far as to say that Little Green "upsets" the balance of Min, the room they share with several other girls, and their entire platoon because she exhibits several taboos - including a constantly neat appearance and the brightly colored string for her hair. It's never made clear why Little Green is allowed to flout her small rebellions when many other minor offences were cause for public chastisement, beatings or even death.

When a pair of Little Green's fancy underwear is stolen Yan apologizes for having been less vigilant on her soldiers. Yan seems to be saying that she should have prevented the theft, though she doesn't say how she might have accomplished this. She also criticizes Little Green for her vanity and orders that she not hang her underwear near her window but doesn't demand that she not wear any of the fancy underwear.

Min notes that Yan cries as she asks the man why he would "do that" to Little Green. As the man is beaten, Lu yells "death to the rapist." This is another aspect of the propaganda that is such a vital part of the Communist control and is not the first time Min has referred to a rape, though this seems to have been a consenting relationship



between a girl of eighteen and a man who was apparently attracted to her. Yan's attitude toward Little Green is perplexing. She wraps Little Green in her own jacket when escorting her to be taken to the hospital and Min likens her action to the way a mother would protect her infant. Considering these actions, it seems possible that Yan truly was trying to protect Little Green from man she sees as a rapist.

Lu is so anxious to advance in the Party that she will stoop to anything to do so. Min notes that Lu is willing to serve others continually. She volunteers for all sorts of duties, washes clothes for the soldiers on the farm and anonymously gives money to families in trouble. Min doesn't seem to believe that Lu's giving is sincere and that she's actually trying to buy her way into the good graces of others. Lu expects - and generally receives - words of praise from all the soldiers, though they do so not because of her good deeds and sacrifices but because they fear her. Min also notes that Lu has the right to send negative remarks about Min to Party officials, and that these negative remarks will remain in her dossier forever. The right combination of remarks could result in Min's life being spent in labor camps or worse. As she notes, that dossier will be with her as long as she lives.



Part Two, Pages 109 through 172

Part Two, Pages 109 through 172 Summary

After Min discovers that Yan plays the erhu at the nearby brick factory, the two go there as often as possible, talking about their lives and sharing intimate feelings. Yan says that her mother had taught her that all men were evil. Min disagrees but Yan cites her older brother bragging that he lured a girl into his room and seduced her while the other brothers watched. When Yan reported the story to her parents, she wasn't believed and her brothers beat her for telling - an act her mother apparently condoned. Min then confides that she was once touched by a boy at her school during a moment of darkness in an auditorium. When Yan asks why she didn't scream and run away, Min says that her body enjoyed the feel of the touch. Yan then confides that she's attracted to a young man named Leopard Lee who lives in the camp and Min sets out to bring the two together, promising to be the personal messenger for Yan. Yan makes an attempt at a letter but Min writes a replacement. Yan tells Min that she is highly talented and Min predicts that the young man will immediately fall in love with Yan. The night Yan is to read the letter, both Min and Yan complain of the cold so that Lu insists that they share their blankets. The two get into bed together and Yan reads the letter. They are both suddenly very aware of their nearness and make a joke of the situation as they each pull away.

The output of produce, including beets, is down because the soldiers - including Min - are stealing in order to supplement their low pay. Lu has turned something of a blind eye to this and now reports that villagers have stolen the missing crops. While Min is stealing food, Yan has taken Little Green for daily acupuncture treatments and on one particular day reports that Little Green sang. Over the coming days, it's obvious that the moment of lucidity was a fluke and Little Green returns to her unaware state.

Yan sends Min to Company Thirty-two to give the letter to Leopard Lee. Min notes that Leopard's company seems more established than her own. She endures a lecture on agriculture by a woman while Leopard reads Yan's letter. Leopard doesn't send a return letter on any of Min's visits to his company and Yan remains lovesick. Min, hoping to dispel any heartache, continues to assure Yan that Leopard will write back. One night Yan tells Min that she knows Min has been lying about Leopard's response and Min says she did so because she doesn't know what else to do. Yan sees herself as an old woman and says all she has to offer anyone are her titles in the Communist Party, and that a person reaps what he sows.

One day, nearing the end of Min's first year at Red Fire Farm, she is called by a boatman who has discovered the body of Little Green. Yan tries to perform mouth-to-mouth though the girl has obviously been dead for hours. Little Green's grandmother attends the memorial service.



Yan, deeply depressed after Little Green's death, says she wants to give up her position as commander. Min argues, saying that Yan can't make their lives better but that the lives of the soldiers under Lu would be infinitely worse. Then Yan is sent for an intensive political training and Min is depressed at her absence, fearing that she'll lose Yan to Leopard after all. One day, Min's mother arrives. She says that Blooming has been assigned to a professional boarding school and that Coral fears leaving home. Like many young people who fear assignments on the farm, she hopes to be able to claim disability and had refused to see a doctor during a recent bout of dysentery in the hope that it would cause permanent damage. Her mother leaves the day after her arrival, saying that she hoped she hadn't increased Min's homesickness. Min says that she is brave for her mother, though she doesn't want to be.

Yan returns and says that she is to be transferred. Lying in bed together that night, they cry and then become very sexually aware of each other, though Min says she can't decide which was playing the role of the man. Yan's orders fall through and Lu is angry that she won't take Yan's place as commander but Yan and Min are excited.

Lu's hatred takes on new depths and Yan begins to be serious in her fighting back. Yan and Min continue to sleep in the same bed and one morning Min wakes to find Lu peering closely at her. Had she lifted the sheets, she would have found that both were naked. The two then sleep apart though it's torture. When the entire platoon goes away for a festival, Yan and Min remain behind to serve as guards but Lu returns unexpectedly, saying she wanted to give one of them the opportunity for a holiday.

One day Min is confronted by some well-dressed people who ask her for directions to headquarters and take notes while carefully observing her appearance and manner. She later discovers that they are from the Shanghai Film Studio and that they are searching for people to become the new stars of upcoming films. Min doesn't believe she has a chance next to the obvious abilities of several others, but goes through a series of regional tryouts. She's selected, at least partly because of her stable background with the Communist Party. She returns to Red Fire Farm with the news of her selection and discovers that Lu is leading an investigation into Yan and Min.

Yan tells Min to deny everything and to follow her lead, though Min begins to lose faith. When Lu's personal investigation fails, the Shanghai Film Studio launches an investigation and Min's opportunity to become an actress is put on hold. Then one night, Yan - from the bottom bunk - pokes Min's mattress and tells Min to meet her at the brick factory. She laces the plea with "It's been too long," and finally demands that Min accompany her. Yan then gets on a tractor and takes off with Min aboard. A short distance from the compound, they hear another tractor start up and know Lu is in pursuit. Yan tells Min to return to the compound, gather soldiers together, and to come to mount a search of the brick factory. Yan then pushes Min off the tractor and Min, confused, does as she was told. When the soldiers arrive at the brick factory, they find Min and Lu, each half dressed, struggling together. Lu objects, saying that Yan and Min hatched the plot to destroy her but Yan objects, trying to take the blame and asking that Lu be spared - playing exactly the role of a woman in love fearing for the life of her lover. The two are arrested and confined and Min is prepared to leave for Shanghai.



Though Min is saddened and doesn't want to leave Yan behind, she knows that Yan has made an incredible sacrifice and does leave when ordered.

Part Two, Pages 109 through 172 Analysis

There's a growing intimacy between Yan and Min as the two find they have much in common and become devoted friends. As this relationship is budding, Min says Yan murdered Little Green by killing her lover. While Little Green remains alive, she is a shell of a human, responding to no one and nothing. Now Min admits to Yan that she found a book among Little Green's possessions and that this book is a hand-written copy of a love story. They agree that the story is likely the source of Little Green's wayward behavior and Min says that she's also read it. Yan wants to read it as well and Min agrees, though she says Yan will have to be responsible for her own thoughts after reading the book. Yan finishes the book in three nights, hidden under her covers and reading by flashlight, and then tells Min that she wants to write a letter to the young man who has attracted her attention.

When Yan and Lu become open enemies, Min is fearful of the eventual retaliation. When she voices this to Yan, Yan says that she has become a dog backed into a corner and that she's ready to fight back. She tells Min that Lu will be her enemy regardless of Yan's actions anyway. Min is likely right as Lu's actions are prompted by greed and a desire for power within the Party.



Part Three, Pages 174 through 212

Part Three, Pages 174 through 212 Summary

Min arrives in Shanghai and calls her mother who is glad to see her. The family dinner that evening is somewhat strained. Coral is worried because she doesn't want to be sent to the country to a farm and the family must have at least one "peasant" to fulfill the Party's policy. Neighbors look at Min and say that she isn't that pretty and her father warns that a person who climbs too high gains attention, and that attention isn't a good thing.

Min arrives at the film studio with a sealed letter announcing her arrival. She finds that there are slogans everywhere and is introduced to a man named Sound of Rain and a woman named Soviet Wong. Soviet Wong is a former actress and both, along with several others, are to serve as teachers to the girls trying out for the part in an upcoming film called Red Azalea. Sound of Rain is complimentary of Soviet Wong. It soon becomes obvious to Min that Soviet Wong is not happy with her role as teacher rather than actress but she says that she is happy to do whatever the Party asks of her. Min notes that this seems to be Soviet Wong's way of walking carefully around her true feelings and Min vows to walk carefully herself.

Min learns that she is to attend classes on politics as well as acting. When she's told that she's to have no outside visitors and isn't to go outside the studio grounds except one day each month, Min asks if letters are permitted. Her question immediately prompts the suspicions of Soviet Wong and Sound of Rain who ask who she would want to write and why. Min attempts to allay their suspicions by saying it was merely a question, but they don't seem appeased. She's told that she should provide the name of anyone she wants to write and that Soviet Wong will check to be certain that person is acceptable for correspondence.

Min is taken to a house that was once part of a movie set where she meets Firewood, Cheering Spear, Little Bell and Bee OhYang. Cheering Spear plays an accordion and rides horses, and is held up as a model for the others to achieve. Firewood wears a vermilion shirt and has long braids. Little Bell is very shy. Bee OhYang says that she lacks "a fighting spirit," and that she wishes for that spirit. During the initial introductions, Min learns that a man called only "Supervisor" is expected to arrive soon, that he will make the final decision of which of them will be taken to Comrade Jiang Ching, wife of Chairman Mao and the person responsible for the film.

Min wakes at six the next morning to Firewood exercising her voice outside the small house the girls share. Firewood asks to hear Min's range of voice but Min declines as Firewood slides down into a position of the splits. Firewood then mentions "Hollywood movies" and Min admits that she doesn't know what that is. As all the girls gather outside the house and begin stretching exercises, a janitor named One Ounce comes



by and tells them that they are to prepare for a visit from the Supervisor, which prompts the girls to search for their best outfit, but the Supervisor doesn't put in an appearance.

After three weeks, Min and the others are studying Mao's theories on the arts and Min notes that they've studied politics, fencing, acting and boxing. Min notes that the days are full but that they are all waiting for their opportunity to meet the Supervisor. Then comes the day they're told to prepare for the Supervisor's meeting, and each girl is to present a recitation from Red Azalea. It has become clear that only Cheering Spear and Min are really in the running for the part but Cheering Spear has become the favorite of Soviet Wong, largely by flattering Soviet Wong at every opportunity. Whenever there is a lull in the conversation, Cheering Spear is ready to fill it with praise for Soviet Wong, her acting ability and teaching efforts. While Min sees this for what it is - hollow flattery - Soviet Wong is enamored with Cheering Spear.

Min notes that while Soviet Wong doesn't seem to pay extra attention to Cheering Spear, doors begin to open for Cheering Spear while Soviet Wong does her best to make instructions unclear for Min. Min is criticized often. At one point, Soviet Wong takes Min to have her eyes checked, saying that Min's pupils are too small. Her criticism over the size of Min's pupils becomes so stringent that Min becomes convinced that she won't get the part because of this flaw in her character. She then comes to believe that there are many things wrong with her appearance and performance, all detrimental to her self-esteem. Then Soviet Wong says that acting ability has nothing to do with who will be chosen because the successful candidate will be the one who can accurately play the role of Communist. Min says that she wants to quit but forces herself to remain at the film studio, as do the other girls who are by now certain that they have no chance of winning the competition. One day the girls are told they are now to perform for the Supervisor but again he fails to show up, having been called away on some urgent matter.

Min, who is by now working almost solely in the kitchen, tells Soviet Wong that her mother is ill and begs for permission to go home and care for her. Soviet Wong eventually agrees but Min goes instead to Red Fire Farm where she finds Yan working in the fields and Lu gone on to a command position at another farm. The meeting is strained with Yan crying some of the time and neither seeming to know what it is that they should say or do. Yan says that they must forget each other and then leaves Min in the room alone. Min leaves some cookies she'd brought for Yan and heads toward the bus station. She stops off at the brick factory first and talks for awhile with Orchid. Orchid says that she doesn't really want to see Min, that it makes her unhappy because Min has escaped the drudgery of the farm life, and Min goes on to the bus stop, now fearing that she's going to be late returning home. Just as the bus arrives, Yan runs up and they have just enough time to touch hands. Yan hands Min the cookies she'd brought and Min boards the bus for home.

When Min arrives home she discovers that Soviet Wong has come to the home of her parents to check up on her. Min is criticized for having brought the trouble onto the family, especially when her parents learn where she has been, and Min wants to tell them that she hasn't done well at the film studio but doesn't want to let them know.



Part Three, Pages 174 through 212 Analysis

Min is criticized for a myriad of offenses. When the girls are taken into a room that reeks of the smell of mold, Min covers her nose which prompts Soviet Wong to point out that Min has been a peasant and should be accustomed to bad smells. However, it's not only Min who is criticized. When one of the young men flushes upon seeing Min and the other girls, he is criticized harshly, having been accused of having impure thoughts that caused the blush. This, as is to be expected, causes the young man to blush more deeply.

It's noted that the young girls are all pitted against each other as they vie for the single position being offered in the Red Azalea. Min says that she is certain at one point that they are thinking the same thing - how to murder the other girls without getting caught. She doesn't seem to be joking about this and it should be noted that the girls who are not chosen will likely each be sent back to their previous assignment - in the fields or factories to their manual labor jobs.

Soviet Min lectures about the evils of a close relationship between a man and woman, using the book "Jane Eyre" as an example. Min notes that she had never heard of that story but became immediately interested and wants to read the book. This is an example of what often happens with young people who need the opportunity to rebel, at least in some small way.



Part Three, Pages 213 through 336

Part Three, Pages 213 through 336 Summary

Min goes home on a Sunday afternoon. Coral has been sent to Red Fire Farm. Blooming is at boarding school and Space Conqueror working at a tractor factory. Min's mother is reading and Min asks her to explain love. Min's mother says only that Min has embarrassed her and Min is left only with what information she has accumulated on her own - that she loves Yan and had given her "full love" to Yan. On another day, Min stops by her home while out doing errands and finds a net filled with turtles and fish in her yard. Min finds Yan waiting and takes her inside. Yan says that she wants to meet with Leopard and asks Min to stand guard for them. Min agrees. The girls have several hours before Leopard is due to arrive and go out together, Min saying that she probably won't be missed at the film studio and that she'll lie if she is asked.

The girls eat together, then visit a bathhouse where they toy with a sexual encounter but settle for washing each other. After leaving the bathhouse, they stop for noodles and then return to the home of Min's parents. They are surprised to find Min's father arriving early and Min sends Yan out for tickets to back-to-back movies. Yan returns and Min convinces her father to go to the shows. He agrees and leaves. Yan and Min wait together until Leopard arrives. When Yan and Leopard are in the bed together, Min imagines their sexual encounter and eventually peeks through the curtain. Her presence interrupts the encounter and Leopard goes to the bathroom. While he's gone, Min and Yan talk and Min comes to realize that Yan has arranged for Min to be witness to the encounter so that she will be able to let go of Yan and move on with her own life. When Leopard returns to the bedroom, Min again watches and Yan meets Min's eyes but doesn't stop. Min's mother returns home before Leopard and Yan have left, though they take time only to say hello before leaving.

Back at the film studio, Cheering Spear advises Min to simply give up and go home. Min is amazed at the girl's audacity but the others begin to pay more attention to what makes Soviet Wong happy. Then the girls are told to choose a scene from the film to perform for the Supervisor. Cheering Spear tells Min that Min is likely to win. Min says she doesn't understand Cheering Spear's attitude about the situation. Then Cheering Spear tells Min that they should practice together for their auditions in front of the Supervisor. Min agrees. Cheering Spear says she plans to do a scene in which the heroine is in jail and Min doesn't understand the choice, citing the fact that the character is very limited with only a few lines. Min herself chooses another scene, that of "Azalea tells her story." The girls practice together, critiquing each other's performances up to the moment of the Supervisor's arrival. When they take the stage, Cheering Spear is called onstage first and begins the scene of "Azalea tells her story." Min is immediately aware of what's happened, that Cheering Spear has stolen her scene and that Min's final hope is now gone, especially when Cheering Spear does the scene better than Min could. Cheering Spear is selected for the part and Min is assigned to be a set clerk for the film studio, but spends a great deal of time in menial tasks, such as mopping.



Soviet Wong and Sound of Rain go to Min's mother, requiring that she admit that Min deserved to be kicked out of the film studio. When Min's mother refuses without concrete evidence, an argument erupts with Min's father dragging Min's mother back inside to end the altercation. It's during this time that Min's father says that he's been fired from his job at the Shanghai Museum of Natural History because he "disagreed" with a technical plan. Min notes that her mother doesn't understand any of this.

Min begins smoking in a darkened room whenever she has the chance and it's there she encounters the Supervisor though she doesn't initially know who he is. He asks for her opinions which she initially declines, saying that having an opinion other than the one expressed by the Party is not wise. She finally says that the protagonists seem to have no depth because they have no love. The Supervisor says love is for the bourgeois, then accuses Min of having a lover which she denies.

It's during her talks with the Supervisor that Min learns that Comrade Jiang Ching is being criticized for some of her actions. Min says that Jiang Ching, as wife of Chairman Mao, is the "standard bearer," but it's noted that in Chinese history the "concubine" is often blamed for the fall of the country. One day Min goes to a temple where she encounters the Supervisor. He holds her hand briefly but security guards accompanying him preclude any other interaction. Later, he tells Min to meet him at Peace Park and she does so, noting that his lips are tender and his body aquiver. Under his questioning, she tells him about Yan. She goes to the train station to see him off to his home in Beijing though she knows they cannot acknowledge each other.

Then the production of the film is stopped and the story circulated that there are problems with the cast. Those working on the film endure lectures and studies. In the midst of this, Min longs for someone to love and turns her attention to Yan or the Supervisor. Cheering Spear becomes ill when it's noted that Jiang Ching is uninterested in Cheering Spear. Then word comes that Min is to travel to Beijing to tryout again for the part of Red Azalea. Soviet Wong is furious and says that she won't let Min go without an investigation, citing her belief that Min must have a lover pulling the strings. Sound of Rain refuses to launch an investigation and Min travels to Beijing.

In Beijing, the Supervisor order Min to spend her days studying for Red Azalea. She learns that there is a troupe of actors and actresses who have performed the play for so many years that they are simply bored with the details. They are never given a performance date and lack any energy. Min, remembering the price she's paid, puts herself fully into the role. They return to Shanghai for the filming and Min acts out most scenes in several ways, each slightly different as the Supervisor attempts to satisfy those watching the filming. Though the sexual tension remains high, the Supervisor tells Min that he will achieve his goal of completing this film, even if it means that he has to replace Min.

As the filming reaches yet another change, Min seems unable to interject the feeling the Supervisor requires for a particular line. He finally comes to her in private and explains to her that Red Azalea is the story of Jiang Ching. He talks of her life with Mao, including her own acting ability. Though Mao denounces her, Jiang Ching uses every



opportunity to cry out for a long life for Mao, and these public displays eventually earn her the approval of Mao, though it doesn't last long. Then the Supervisor doesn't appear for a filming session and it's soon learned that Mao has died. Min quickly receives orders to return to Red Fire Farm. The Supervisor calls for Min to meet him at Peace Park where he tells her that Jiang Ching is soon to be arrested and that he is wanted. When Min asks about the relationship between Jiang Ching and the Supervisor, he says that it's safer if she doesn't know. He also says that he has managed to arrange for Min to continue working at the film studio as a clerk. Though the job is menial, she doesn't have to return to the farm and she is grateful.

As predicted, Jiang Ching is arrested and for the coming years Min works at the film studio. Her health deteriorates and she contracts tuberculosis. In 1984, despite the fact that she knows no English and will be leaving family and friends behind, she travels to the United States.

Part Three, Pages 213 through 336 Analysis

It's impossible to believe that Min could have believed that Cheering Spear was sincere in her attempts to have the two of them work on their lines together. Min, upon hearing what scene Cheering Spear says she plans to perform for the Supervisor, says she feels sorry for Cheering Spear.

Min seems distraught over her assignment as clerk and describes her distress by reciting an adage that indicates that it's "difficult for a snake to go back to hell once it has tasted heaven." Min seems to be comparing this adage to her situation in that she wasn't particularly unhappy at the farm until she'd been involved in the relatively easy life of a budding film star. This seems reasonable in that Min had known nothing other than hardship up to this time. Even her childhood was difficult. Not only is she facing a difference in the work load, she's had a taste of what it's like to have enough food and to have the opportunity to be clean. When she is reduced again to the menial tasks of the clerk - which includes a great deal of mopping - she loses hope. Min goes on to explain that she copes by not thinking about her chores. She says that her body mops while her soul considers "vague hopes." On the rare occasions when the two come together, she imagines the mop as a weapon.

The reaction of Min's mother is interesting. Min's mother says that Min, if she hasn't deserved the criticisms she's received, should not be criticized. Her mother says that if Min hasn't done anything wrong, she shouldn't be punished. Min says that her life now consists of endless repetitions of mopping floors. Her mother counters that this can't possibly happen. Min counters that it is happening now, and that it's happening to her. Her mother returns to the argument that if Min did nothing wrong, she shouldn't be punished. The argument circles this way a number of times and Min finally stops talking to her parents at all.

The Supervisor seems different when he begins having encounters with Min and is "almost bashful." He is also very effeminate and Min soon learns that he is married, though this doesn't stop her from looking for an opportunity for an encounter with him.



Characters

Anchee Min

The author, Min describes herself as a typical young girl of the time and place in that she begins referring to her three younger siblings as her children from the time she is five. From that time, Min is in charge of her sisters and brother, bringing them home at the end of the school day, preparing meals and putting them to bed, often before their parents arrive home. Min soon becomes a member of the school-aged version of the Communist Party and is called on to betray a teacher who is accused of being an American spy. Faced with what she's told is evidence, Min does so though she almost immediately has reservations about her actions. Min notes that she learns that day what betrayal really is and the incident seems to greatly impact her life.

Based on her early school records and actions, Min is among those people who might have climbed the ranks of the Communist Party, but doesn't do so and seems unable to conform to the standards expected of her after that time. Her inability to fawn over those in power becomes one of her major downfalls and she finds herself doomed to a life of menial labor until she moves to the United States in 1984.

Yan Sheng

The commander of Red Hill Farm, she is something of a legend and Min refers to her as "heroic." Yan is a tough commander, demanding dedication and work from her "soldiers" that seems to Min as often unfair and overly harsh. Min later comes to know Yan well and the two are best friends who eventually become lovers. Yan feels a deep responsibility for the nervous breakdown and later the death of Little Green. There comes a time when Yan says that she had lived as a frog in a well and that her entire view of the world had been what she could see of it from the bottom of that well.

Yan shows her deep love for Min when Min is chosen to participate in a film project. Min's participation is in danger by an investigation into the relationship between Yan and Min, but Yan arranges to have their accuser caught in a compromising position though it costs Yan her own position as commander and forces her back to a job as menial laborer. Yan later arranges for Min to witness a sexual encounter between Yan and Leopard Lee, a man from the farm, in an apparent effort to eliminate Min's dedication to Yan so that Min can move on with her own life. Yan's love for Min is not the only example of her softer side. When Min and Yan first meet, Yan is playing a small stringed instrument and Min follows the sounds to discover that the song being played is actually forbidden by the Communist Party.



The Supervisor

A man who is never named, likely because Min doesn't know his name or because she wants to protect his true identity. The Supervisor is in charge of the film project though he seldom puts in an appearance. When he gets to know Min, he becomes increasingly interested in her and eventually seems to fall in love with her though he tells her that he won't hesitate to replace her if she stands in the way of his goals.

Little Green

The young girl who is assigned to Red Fire Farm at the same time as Min and who loves bright colors. She is soon involved in a clandestine relationship with a young man, though such meetings are forbidden. She is eventually caught and the man is killed for his role. Little Green has a nervous breakdown after the death of her lover and never recovers. Her body is found floating in a canal.

Autumn Leaves

A teacher at the Long Happiness Elementary School who pays special attention to Min and refers to Min in a diary as being highly educable. Autumn Leaves has spent some time in America which apparently puts her under the watchful eye of authorities. Min is then told that Autumn Leaves is an American spy. Autumn Leaves never admits to the charges and her accusation becomes an important turning point in Min's life, seeming to initiate her dissatisfaction with the Communist Party as a whole.

Comrade Lu

The woman who greets Min as she prepares to depart for Red Fire Farm and who works at the farm. Her name is Ice Lu, reportedly chosen because the weather was very cold on the day she was born. She is a co-commander of Red Fire Farm who covets the higher position held by Yan Sheng. Lu becomes a back-stabbing person who seeks only to climb the ladder of the Communist Party. Min later holds Lu up as an example of the kind of person who feels no loyalty to others and seeks only to further herself, regardless of the cost to others.

Soviet Wong

Sound of Rain's assistant at the Shanghai Film Studio and a former film star who has been relegated to the role of teacher for some unnamed infraction against the Communist Party. Soviet Wong soon comes to favor Cheering Spear - a competitor for the position as star of Red Azalea - over Min, not because of acting ability or talent but because she says that Cheering Spear is a dedicated Communist. It seems more likely



that Soviet Wong favors Cheering Spear because the girl is willing to favor Soviet Wong with excessive compliments that play to Soviet Wong's vanity.

Min's Mother

Though never named, Min's mother is a woman who seems to resent their current situation under the rule of the Communist Party. Min at one point says that she has inherited her mother's sense of fairness and her tenacity. Min's mother clings to the ideal that life should be fair and wants desperately to rail out against situations that are not fair, though she also wants to protect her family.

Chain

The Party secretary who tells Min that Autumn Leaves is an American spy and who has Min write and present a statement to that effect. It's noted that Chain has risen among the ranks to reach his current position.

Coral

Min's sister who is two years younger than Min. When Min returns from Red Fire Farm to participate in the filming of Red Azalea, it soon becomes evident that Coral will have to take Min's place at the farm. Coral is angry at the requirement and Min initially worries though she comes to realize that she had been expected to simply go to the farm and behave as required without complaint, and comes to resent the fact that Coral seems to expect to be treated differently.

Blooming

Min's sister who is one year younger than Min. Blooming is sent to work at a boarding school as an adult.

Space Conqueror

Min's younger brother and the youngest of the four children, Space Conqueror is named partly for his father's love of astronomy and partly because of Chairman Mao's stated intention to a space program. He becomes a laborer in a tractor factory.



Objects/Places

Red Azalea

The name of the book and also of a film to be performed by the troop for which Achee Min tries out. Red Azalea is the name of the heroine of the film.

Shanghai

The city where the author lives as a child.

South Luxuriant Road

The road where the author lives with her family until they are forced to move.

Long Happiness Elementary School

Where Min attends after her family moves from South Luxuriant Road and where Min accuses her favorite teacher of being an American spy.

The Red Fire Farm

The place where Min is assigned to work after she reaches age seventeen.

Company Thirty-Two

The company where Leopard Lee works.

Shanghai Film Studio

Where Min is taken to try out for movies.

Shanghai Museum of Natural History

Where Min's father works briefly though he is fired for disagreeing with a technical plan.



The Basement of the West Lake Hotel

Where Min smokes everyday during her term as film clerk and where she encounters the Superintendent.

Peace Park

Where Min and the Supervisor meet one evening for a sexual encounter and where they meet again after Chairman Mao dies.

Beijing

The capital city where the Supervisor lives.



Themes

The Need for Love

The need for love is an overriding theme throughout the book, though love becomes secondary to the will of the Communist Party. There are several examples of this, including the illicit affair of Little Green. The attitude of the Party is that whenever there is a man and woman involved in an unapproved love affair, the man is to blame. In the case of Little Green, the man is accused of rape and is summarily executed which drives Little Green insane.

The efforts to control the natural instinct of young men and women result in hidden affairs and efforts to find sexual release. For example, when Min meets for a sexual encounter with the Supervisor at a place called Peace Park, they find that there are many people hiding in the bushes. Some are also meeting for sexual encounters and some are merely masturbating. Min and Yan also engage in a relationship though to be caught together would be cause for severe punishment. Despite this, their desire and their need for love drive them to take the risk.

The Desire for a Better Life

The desire for a better life continues to be seen throughout the story though the Communist rule often takes away the opportunity for a single person to better himself. In some cases, this desire means that a person hopes simply to rise in the ranks of the Communist Party. In other cases, the desire for a better life prompts a person to question the rules of the Party. Lu is an example of the former and Min notes that there are people just like Lu everywhere she goes.

What's interesting is that, as a child, Min is like Lu though Min comes to see the injustice of the rules being forced onto the people by the Party. Lu is willing to bring false accusations and puts on the façade of one willing to do whatever is deemed necessary or admirable by the Party, all with the single aim of advancing as a commander at the farm where she is second-in-command. When Min arrives at the film studio, Cheering Spear - like Lu - is willing to do and say anything to gain favor.

Others who want a better life for themselves realize that rising in the Party won't accomplish what they see as a better life. An example of this is Min's mother who clings to her own ideas of justice and fairness but cannot win against the officials of the Communist Party.

Complete Control by the Communist Party

The efforts of the Communist Party to completely control the lives of the People of China during this time period become an overriding theme of the story because every



aspect of daily life is impacted by this level of control. One example of this is the fact that every family must provide at least one child who will work on one of the country's farms, such as Red Fire Farm where first Min and then Coral work. When Min reaches seventeen, she discovers that she is to be sent to Red Fire Farm and she goes without tears or any public outcry, though she doesn't want to go. When Min returns home as a potential candidate for the film Red Azalea, the family no longer has a member working the farms and Coral - who had hoped to be assigned to work in a local factory - is sent in Min's place.

There are many other examples of the control enforced by the Party. Min's mother is publicly chastised for having used a newspaper containing Chairman Mao's picture as toilet paper. This enforced reverence to the country's leader is another effort by the Party to retain complete control of the People. There are many other examples, such as the fact that the people who dare to ignore even the most minor rules are publicly chastised and give up their rights to the good jobs and better lives. At one point, Min is told that the person who wins the leading role in the Red Azalea will not be a wonderful actor, but will be a faithful Communist.



Style

Point of View

The story is written in first person with a perspective limited to that of Min's views and thoughts. This is an acceptable limitation in this case because the story is meant to be a self-portrait of a girl's life under Communist rule in China. The limitations are complete in that only Min's viewpoints are presented. For example, when Min is selected to go to the Shanghai Film Studio, Lu's jealousy of both Min and Yan prompt Lu to launch an investigation into the relationship between Min and Yan. Yan tells Min not to worry but Min remains in the dark as to Yan's plan to stop Lu's interference. At one point, Min is so angry at Yan's apparent inaction that she criticizes the woman she worships as a hero and a lover. When Yan takes action, Min is caught almost completely off guard but follows Yan's instructions and the plan stops Lu's interference.

Another case in which the limited view is clearly seen is in Min's reaction to her mother and father. She describes her mother's lack of understanding of the Communist rule and notes that her mother is willing to argue against the rules she views as unfair though the People are expected to bow down completely to the Party. Min describes her mother's actions and reactions solely from her own point of view rather than from her mother's perspective. For example, Min says that her mother doesn't understand their world and clings to her ideas of justice and fairness, presenting examples to uphold these statements. She never presents her mother's direct words saying that the Communist rule is unfair.

Setting

The author begins the book by saying that the story is true, but that she has changed some names in order to protect identities. She doesn't say which identities those are but it seems possible that the man she identifies only as the Supervisor might be one of them. At least some of the places and the people included in the book are real. For example, Chairman Mao was head of the Communist Party in China during this time period as was his wife, Jiang Ching. Shanghai and Beijing really exist and there were farms created during this time period with the goal of providing food for the entire nation, though the majority of these did not produce as were expected. The farm where Min is assigned to work is described in detail which makes it seem possible that the setting is real. The same is true of other settings, including the school Min attends and later the film studio where she works.

The time period and control of the Communist Party is also true. The author's inside look at the impact of this control on the lives of individuals and families is sometimes touching seems to come from the heart. An interesting aspect of this book is that the author continues to blame her misfortunes on the rules and dictates of the Communist



Party. Some readers may find this theme overly repetitive, though there seems to be no way to distance the life of the author from the rule of the Communist Party.

Language and Meaning

The overall tone of the story is of hopelessness created largely by a lack of control. The People under the rule of the Communist Party are held to impossible standards and this inability to rise above the poverty and fear prompted largely by Communism creates despair among many of the people that is presented in stark reality by this author. While the story is technically categorized as fiction, the author's statement at the beginning assures the reader that this is a true story but with some names changed to protect identities. The copyright is listed as 1994 which is only ten years after the author's escape to the United States. It seems reasonable that Min remained concerned about the safety of those she mentions in her book to the point that she felt it necessary to change names, though she doesn't specify her reason for changing names. Min notes that she uses the English versions of the names rather than the phonetic translations, though she doesn't explain her reasons for doing so.

The despair and hopelessness becomes a major part of the story though there are moments of hope and happiness. For example, Min and Yan spend an enjoyable afternoon together in Shanghai, eating out and visiting a public bathhouse. While they have a good time together on this impromptu outing, the knowledge of their current situations provides an attitude that resembles desperation.

Structure

The book is divided into three parts that are titled simply "Part One," "Part Two" and "Part Three." Each part begins with a title page that includes a depiction of a flower that could be a red azalea, though the pictures inside the book are shown in black and white. The same flower appears on the cover where the colors are red, black and white. The parts are of varying lengths with Part One ending on page 45, Part Two ending on page 172 and Part Three on the final page of the book, page 336. The parts cover specific periods of Min's life. Part One describes her childhood and schooling up to the time she is assigned to go to Red Fire Farm. Part Two covers her life at the farm up until her departure for the film studio. Part Three ends with the information that she remains at the film studio until she goes to America in 1984.

The parts are further divided into small sections, though these are not named or numbered. Instead, there are brief white spaces equivalent to about two lines of type between these sections. The sections typically begin and end with specific scenes. For example, one section describes how Min comes to be aware that Little Green has died in one of the canals on the farm. The following section describes Yan's reaction to Little Green's death. While some readers may be annoyed with the lack of chapters as convenient stopping places, the use of these sections seems an acceptable method of dividing up the story line.



Quotes

"I was an adult since the age of five. That was nothing unusual. The kids I played with all carried their family's little ones on their backs, tied with a piece of cloth. The little ones played with their own snot while we played hide-and-seek." Part One, Page 4

"I led my schoolmates in collecting pennies. We wanted to donate the pennies to the starving children in America. We were proud of what we did." Part One, Page 28

"Placing them next to me showed the generosity of the Communist Party. The Party abandoned no sinners. The Party saved them. I represented the Party." Part Two, Page 72

"That night she said to me, When I die, I will be sliced into pieces by the demons in hell. She said she could see it clearly now." Part Two, Page 90

"You have not clean beams or studs in the house of your mind. They were eaten up a long time ago. And now your termites are hungry, they are climbing out from your eyes, earholes, noseholes and asshole to eat up other people's houses." - Yan to Lu, Part Two, Page 144

"My father was no longer the ambitious astronomer who had named his son Space Conqueror. He was crushed under the unit Party secretary's feet, trampled upon. He was timid as a mouse in shock." Part Two, Page 160

"You have been behaving properly as a big sister. You have never caused any trouble since you were born. I did not tell my mother that being a big sister wore me out." Part Three, Page 177

"Soviet Wong said to me, You see, it is not a matter of acting technique. It is a matter of who has more feelings for Chairman Mao. We need a real Communist to play a Communist." Part Three, Page 199

"It seemed that I could never escape from Lu. There were Lus all over China. I was reminded of the old saying: 'Poverty gives birth to evil personalities.'" Part Three, Page 248

"I suddenly remembered an old saying. It said: 'It is difficult for a snake to go back to hell once it has tasted heaven.' I was that snake now." Part Three, Page 257

"He asked me to give opinions on the model operas. I said, How could anyone have any opinions? The Party's opinion is the People's opinion. How dare I have my own opinion? I was eliminated by Soviet Wong because I had opinions." Part Three, Page 261

"The fall of a kingdom is always the fault of the concubine. What could be more truthful? Why should Comrade Jiang Ching be an exception?" Part Three, Page 274



Topics for Discussion

Describe Min's childhood. Is her life as a child unique? What is the impact of the demands society places on these children? Do you believe this to be a positive situation? Explain why or why not.

Who is Autumn Leaves? How does Min come to know her? How does Min come to believe that Autumn Leaves is guilty of a crime? What is the evidence against Autumn Leaves? Why is Min chosen to confront Autumn Leaves publicly? Describe this confrontation. What is Min's mother's reaction to Min's role in the situation?

What is the Red Fire Farm? Is it successful in this role? Why or why not? Who is Lu? How does Lu impact Min's life on the farm? After she leaves the farm? Who is Yan? What is Min's initial reaction to Yan? How and why does this change over time?

What is Red Azalea? How does Red Azalea become important in Min's life? What are the reactions of others (including Lu, Yan and Min's father) when Min becomes involved with Red Azalea? What is Min's reaction? Who in Min's family is forced into a worse situation because of Min's good fortune at being selected for this role? Why does this happen?

Who is Cheering Spear? Firewood? Be OhYang? Little Bell? One Ounce? Sound of Rain? Soviet Wong? Describe the personalities of each from their actions and reactions to situations? Choose two who have the greatest impact on Min's life and describe the interactions between these two and Min.

What is the relationship between Yan and Min? What is the sacrifice Yan makes in order to ensure that Min is allowed to tryout for the film? How does this sacrifice impact Min? Describe, in depth, all those who are impacted by Min's participation, including Leopard Lee, Coral and Min's Mother.

Who is the Supervisor? Give possible reasons Min chooses to identify this person as the Supervisor. What is the impact of the Supervisor on Min's life? What is the Supervisor's fate after the death of Mao? What is the favor he does for Min after the death of Mao? Why do you believe he does this?

The rules and ideals of the Communist Party play important roles in the lives of the people. Give three examples of situations that arise only because the Communist Party is in charge. Compare what Min describes with how the same situations would have played out in a less restrictive environment.