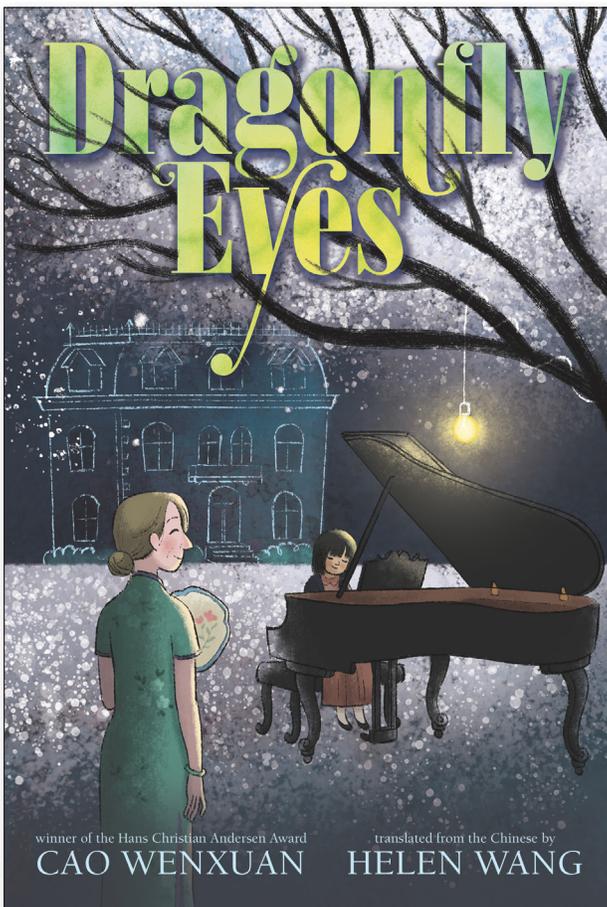


Dragonfly Eyes

CAO WENXUAN

translated by Helen Wang

From acclaimed Chinese author Cao Wenxuan, recipient of the Hans Christian Andersen Award, comes a compelling family saga spanning fifty years and three generations.



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Also available as an e-book

ABOUT THE BOOK

Ah Mei and her French grandmother, Nainai, share a rare bond. Maybe it's because Ah Mei is the only girl grandchild. Or maybe it's because the pair look so much alike and neither resembles the rest of their Chinese family. Politics and war make 1960s Shanghai a hard place to grow up, especially when racism and bigotry are rife, and everyone seems suspicious of Nainai's European heritage and interracial marriage. In this time of political upheaval, Ah Mei and her family suffer much—and when the family silk business falters, they are left with almost nothing. Ah Mei and her grandmother are resourceful, but will the tender connection they share bring them enough strength to carry through?

This multigenerational saga by one of China's most esteemed children's authors takes the reader from 1920s France to a ravaged postwar Shanghai and through the convulsions of the Cultural Revolution.

Common Core Connections

This discussion guide, which can be used with large or small groups, will help students meet several of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language Arts. These include the reading literature standards for key ideas and details, craft and structure, and integration of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL), as well as the speaking and listening standards for comprehension and collaboration and for presentation of knowledge and ideas (CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL). Questions can also be used in writing prompts for independent work.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. *Dragonfly Eyes* begins by stating how Ah Mei was different from other children. How was she different? How do these differences affect how others perceive and treat her? How do they make her the person she is?
2. Why did Nainai and Yeye move from Paris to the Blue House in Shanghai? How did their lives change after this move?
3. How is the novel structured? How does its structure add to the narrative of the book as a whole?
4. When did Nainai first see a red umbrella? Why were she and later Ah Mei drawn to it? What happened to their first red umbrellas? What do you think the red umbrellas represent?
5. What was the Chinese Cultural Revolution? How does it fit into the plot of *Dragonfly Eyes*?
6. Describe Ah Mei and Nainai's relationship. How does it grow and change over the years? How does it stay the same?
7. Before they decide to leave France for China, Nainai tells Yeye, "I'm a boat, and you're my port" (page 20). What does she mean by this statement? What does it reveal about Nainai? What does it say about Yeye? Does this statement hold true for both Nainai and Yeye throughout the novel? Why?
8. Themes such as familial bonds, change, fate, and hope run throughout *Dragonfly Eyes*. Think about these themes in relation to the novel as a whole and give two examples of each one. Then find another theme from the book and explain its significance.
9. Why was the little leather suitcase important to Nainai? Why did Ah Mei take it? What happened after she took it? Where else does it show up in the story?
10. *Dragonfly Eyes* is historical fiction: its settings and background events are real, but the story as a whole and its characters are made up. What real events did you learn about by reading this book? How does the fact that these events really occurred affect both the story and the reader?
11. What are dragonfly eyes? How do they relate to the story?
12. Note three examples of prejudice that characters in *Dragonfly Eyes* faced. Why do you think each one was targeted? What did you learn from each instance?



13. Symbolism is a literary device that uses an object or act to stand for something beyond its literal meaning. There is a lot of symbolism in *Dragonfly Eyes*. One example is when Nainai unraveled her own clothes to make sweaters for her family. Explain the symbolic meaning of this scene. Then find another instance of symbolism in the story and explain its symbolic meaning, too.
14. This novel has many of the qualities of a fairy tale. In what aspects is it like a traditional fairy tale? In what ways is it different?
15. Most of the characters in *Dragonfly Eyes* confront adversity with resilience. Choose three characters from the book, explain their hardships, and describe how they faced and overcame them.
16. The concept of home plays a significant role in *Dragonfly Eyes*. Using quotes and other evidence from the book, trace this concept from the beginning of the story to the end.
17. What story or chapter from *Dragonfly Eyes* was your favorite? Why?
18. Using examples from the book, explain why the author chose to name it *Dragonfly Eyes*. Come up with an alternate title and explain how your new title connects to the story.
19. Explain the ending of *Dragonfly Eyes*. Do you think it's a satisfying ending to the book? Why? If you could learn one thing about what happens to Ah Mei and/or her family after the book ends, what would you want to know and why?
20. *Dragonfly Eyes* was originally written in Chinese by Cao Wenxuan. The version you read was translated into English by Helen Wang. What are your thoughts about this? Do you think translated books are important to read? Why? Do you think there are ever any downsides to reading translations?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cao Wenxuan, author of the acclaimed *Bronze and Sunflower*, is the recipient of the 2016 Hans Christian Andersen Award. He has also won several of China's important awards for children's literature. A professor of Chinese literature at Peking University, Cao Wenxuan has seen many of his books become bestsellers in China, and his work has been translated into French, Russian, German, Japanese, and Korean.

These questions were prepared by Mary Kate Doman, a children's and young adult book consultant, author, and professor.

