

**CYRM Resource Book  
Middle School/  
Junior High Nominees  
(Grades 6-8)  
2011-2012**

***Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel***

by Ying Chang Compestine

Henry Holt, 2007

***Waiting for Normal***

by Leslie Conner

Katherine Tegen Books, 2008

***Every Soul a Star***

by Wendy Mass,

Little, Brown & Co., 2008



California Young Reader Medal  
**Middle School/Junior High**  
**Ballot**  
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\_\_\_\_\_ *Revolution is Not a  
Dinner Party*

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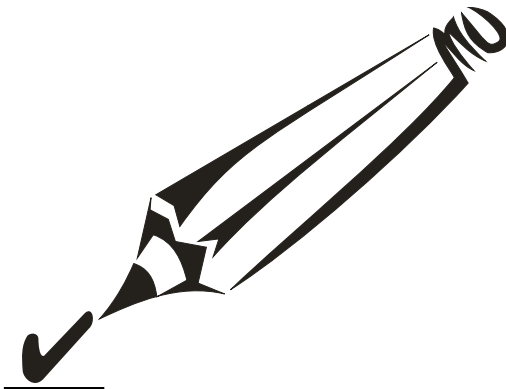
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# ***Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel*** by Ying Chang Compestine



## **Synopsis**

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Ling is nine years old. She lives in a comfortable apartment with her parents who are both doctors in the best hospital in Wuhan, China. It is 1972 and the Cultural Revolution under Chairman Mao is taking over the country. A room in her apartment is turned into living quarters for Comrade Li. It is his job to identify people who are not following the Mao policies.

This story takes place over a four year period and documents the many changes and restrictions that happen in the lives of Ying and her family, friends and neighbors. It is a very dangerous time for those who are not politically correct. They are all affected by the Cultural Revolution, but they survive it with hope and humor.

The story is based on the author's childhood experiences growing up in China during this time.



## **Hooks**

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- Can you imagine having a stranger living in your house whose job it is to spy on you and your family?
- Can you imagine having your daily needs rationed – and oftentimes unavailable?
- Can you imagine having secrets in your life that would be dangerous if they were to be found out?
- What do you know about the Red Guard and the Cultural Revolution?

## ***Revolution is Not a Dinner Party: A Novel***

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### **Meet the Author—Ying Chang Compestine**

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Ying Chang Compestine was born in 1963 in Wuhan, People's Republic of China. Growing up in such a tumultuous time, she valued sharing and reading books with friends. After attending school in China, she continued her education in the United States. She currently lives in California. She has written cookbooks, picture books, and novels for children, in addition to writing numerous magazine articles. While she loves the two places that shaped her—China and America—her greatest passion is children. *Revolution is Not a Dinner Party* (New York: Henry Holt, 2007) received numerous awards, including Parent's Choice Silver Honor in 2007, ALA Notable Children's Book designation in 2007, ALA Best Books for Young Adults designation in 2007, among others.

For more information, see:  
<http://www.yingc.com>

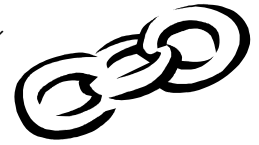
Other notable books by Ying Chang Compestine:

*The Runaway Rice Cake* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001)

*The Real Story of Stone Soup* (New York: Dutton, 2007)

*The Singing Wok* (New York: Dutton, 2009)

"Ying Chang Compestine." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2008. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.



## **Chinese Cultural Revolution**

Jiang, Ji-Li. *Red Scarf Girl: a Memoir of the Cultural Revolution*. Perfection Learning, 1998.

Li-Marcus, Moying. *Snow Falling in Spring: Coming of Age in China during the Cultural Revolution*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2008.

Online information:

[http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/cu/Cultural\\_Revolution](http://encyclopedia.kids.net.au/page/cu/Cultural_Revolution)

Provides a good synopsis of the events of the Cultural Revolution.

<http://www.pbs.org/kcts/preciouschildren/china/cultural.html>

Provides an excellent historical panorama of China, with a special focus on the Cultural Revolution and China's current cultural status.

## **Living with Totalitarianism**

Sis, Peter. *The Wall: Growing Up Behind the Iron Curtain*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

Park, Linda Sue. *When My Name was Keoko*. Clarion Books, 2002.

Zusak, Markus. *The Book Thief*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2006.

## **Oppression & Transcendence**

Anderson, Laurie Halse. *Chains*. Atheneum, 2008.

Appelt, Kathi and illustrated by David Small. *The Underneath*. Atheneum, 2008.

## Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*

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- Why do you think Ying Chang Compestine selected the phrase “revolution is not a dinner party” from Mao’s teaching about class struggle for the title of her book?
- Is a revolution ever a good thing? What about the American Revolution? Couldn’t the English government have described the American Revolution as “an insurrection, an act of violence by which one class overthrows another?” What makes the American Revolution different from the Chinese Cultural Revolution?
- One of the first things Comrade Li says to Ling is, “You need to grow outside your greenhouse, little flower.” What do you think Li means when he says this? Do you think he means to give Ling a compliment when he calls her “little flower”? Why do you think he is trying to make Ling think he is her friend?
- When Ling hears her neighbor singing a song about how Chairman Mao is “more dear than our mother and father” she wonders how anyone could be “more dear” than her own father. Why would the leaders of the Revolution want children to believe that Chairman Mao loved them and that they should in return love and honor him above their own parents?
- Have you ever traded things like baseball cards with your friends? Would it be just as exciting to trade cards if they were of just one person? How excited would you be to trade buttons with only pictures of President Obama on them? How would you feel if every day you had to wear a button with the President’s face on it? Try to write a song about President Obama and remember it has to be about how *wonderful* he is.
- What do you think bourgeois means? At first Ling thinks that bourgeois means “evil things from the old days” and doesn’t understand why her doll, long hair, or flowered blouse are thought of as evil. Chairman Mao taught his followers that the bourgeois were the people who owned most of the wealth and took advantage of the working class. Ling’s parents were not what you could consider wealthy and her father believed in treating all patients equally, so why did the Red Guard target them as being bourgeois?
- When Dr. Chang begins burning all the things he believes might be considered bourgeois why can’t he bring himself to burn the picture of the Golden Gate Bridge? Why does he hide it even though doing so puts him and his family in danger? What does the picture represent?

## Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party*

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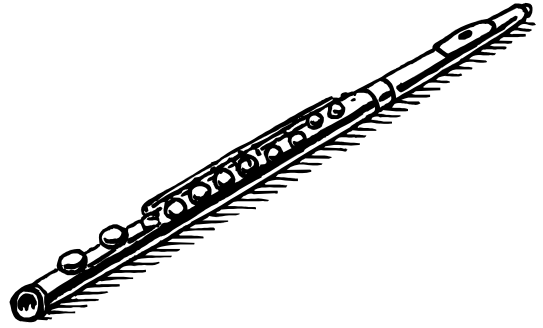


- How old do you think the members of the Red Guard were? Did you realize that the Red Guard was made up of young people not much older than high school students? Why do you think such young boys were chosen to become members of the Red Guard?
- After the Red Guard raids the Changs' apartment for the first time, Ling asks her mother why the family has to paste so many small portraits of Chairman Mao in every room. What does her mother mean when she replies, "It's like the incense we burn in the summer to keep the mosquitoes away?" How would you feel if you had to have a picture of the President in every room of your house, even your bedroom?
- What does it mean to "draw a class line?" Why do you think Niu Wong draws a class line and denounces his parents and Ling's family? Is Ling right to hate him? What do you think will happen to him?
- When one of Ling's classmates threatens to cut off her long hair, Ling threatens to kill the boy. When Ling's mother wants her to apologize to the boy to avoid trouble, Ling refuses. Do you think Ling should have followed her mother's wish to bend like "bamboo in the wind" or was staying an "angry tiger" the right thing to do?
- When Ling stands up to her classmates she is acting very much like her father who often stood up for what he believed. Still, what do you think Ling's father would have wanted Ling to do if he had been home? Do you think he would have wanted her to apologize? Why or why not? What would you have done if you had been pushed around and threatened like Ling?
- Just as Comrade Li suggests, Ling does spend four years growing outside her "greenhouse." By the end of the four years she is definitely not a "little flower" but in what ways do you think she has grown and maybe even blossomed?



# ***Waiting for Normal***

by Leslie Conner



## **Synopsis**

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Addie is a twelve-year old girl who lives with her unstable bipolar mother. Her father died when she was three. She adores her stepfather and two half-sisters, but her mother decides to divorce him and he gets custody of her sisters. Soon, they also lose their house. Her ex-stepfather has moved them into an old, tiny trailer near the railroad tracks and they are beginning their new life—just Addie and Mommers.

This is the story of how Addie makes new friends in her new neighborhood, deals with her mother’s ups and downs, and keeps an optimistic outlook on her life ... all the time hoping it will turn out to be normal.



## **Hooks**

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- Do you know anyone who has bipolar disorder? Can you imagine living with someone whose moods are always unpredictable?
- Have you ever had to move and start over in a totally new community? Was it difficult?
- Addie played the flute. Do you play an instrument? Would you like to play an instrument? Which one?
- What do you think a normal life would be like?



### **Meet the Author— Leslie Connor**

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Leslie Connor was born in 1959 near Schenectady, New York. She currently lives in Connecticut. Her first children's story, *Miss Birdie Chose a Shovel* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), won the 2005 Connecticut Book Award.

For more information, see:  
<http://www.leslieconnor.com>

Other notable books by Leslie Connor:  
*Miss Birdie Chose a Shovel*. Illustrated by Mary Azarian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004)

"Leslie Connor." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 1 Feb. 2011.





### Single Parents/ Cool Stepparents

Stead, Rebecca. *When you Reach Me*. Wendy Lamb Books, 2009.

Grabenstein, Chris. *The Crossroads: A Haunted Mystery*. Yearling, 2009.

### Abnormal Home life

Holt, Kimberly Willis. *When Zachary Beaver Came to Town*. Henry Holt & Co, 1999.

Klise, Kate. *Deliver us from Normal*. Scholastic Press, 2005.

O'Connor, Barbara. *How to Steal a Dog*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2007.

### Hope/Survival

Carmichael, Clay. *Wild Things*. Front Street Press, 2009.

Graff, Lisa. *Umbrella Summer*. HarperCollins, 2009.

Leal, Ann Haywood. *Also Known as Harper*. Henry Holt & Co, 2009.

### Unusual Friendships

O'Connor, Barbara. *The Small Adventures of Popeye & Elvis*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2009.

Lawrence, Iain. *The Giant-Slayer*. Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 2009.

## Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions

### *Waiting for Normal*

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- What does Addie mean when she describes her mother as “kind of an all-or-nothing person?” What are some examples of Mommers all-or-nothing nature?
- Mommers claims to have the “Love of Learning” but tells Addie that she doesn’t. Why does Addie believe her? Do you think that one of the reasons Addie believes her mother is because she has a learning disability? In what ways does Addie show that she just might have the ‘Love of Learning’? Do you have it?
- Addie tells Soula that she thinks everyone needs heroes and that maybe it is possible “that every person is a hero to someone.” If a hero is “someone who is strong or shows courage,” who do you think the heroes in *Waiting for Normal* are? Is Addie a hero? Do you have any heroes?
- In the beginning of the book Addie makes the best of her situation. She tries to find good things about living in the trailer and enjoys spending time with her stepfather and sisters, even after her mother begins leaving her alone. Why then does she start to change after she misses the concert? Why does she give back her flute and then refuse help from her teacher to get a new one? Why does she keep telling herself to “stick to the plan?” What is Addie’s plan?
- Addie believes that, “In my real life, Mommers was all I really had.” Is this true? What about the other people in her life like her stepfather, Dwight, her grandfather, and Soula?
- Do you think the other adults should have done more to protect Addie from her mother? Why does Addie try to keep the other adults from knowing just how bad things are for her? What would you have done differently if you had been in Addie’s situation?
- Addie tells Dwight that she is not “resilient.” According to the dictionary the word resilient means “able to withstand or recover quickly from difficult conditions.” Is it true that Addie isn’t resilient? Can you describe some of the situations where Addie proves she is resilient? In her own way, is Mommers resilient? How about Soula?
- Soula knows better than any of the other adults that Addie’s mother has been leaving her alone for long periods of time and neglecting her. She even admits to Addie that she should have called someone sooner. Why do you think she waited so long to call the authorities?

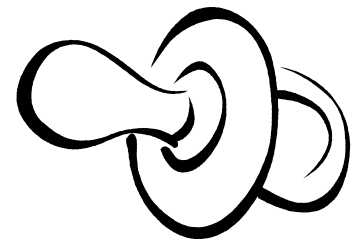
## **Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions**

### ***Waiting for Normal***

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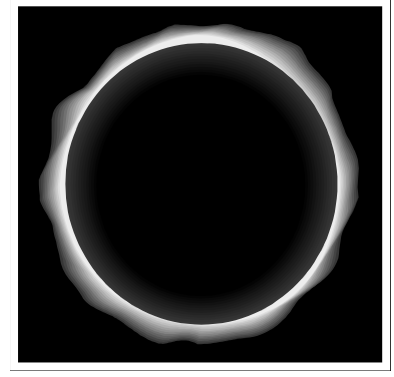


- How do you think Addie would have reacted if Soula had called the authorities when she first suspected something was wrong?
- When Mrs. Casey, the lady from Department of Youth and Family Services, asks Addie how long her mother has been away, Addie replies, “She’s been away forever.” What does Addie mean when she says “forever?” Is she talking about something more than her mother’s trips?
- At the end of the book Addie tells her mother that she just wants normal and that normal “is being able to count on certain things. Good things.” How would you describe normal?
- Do you think Mommers will change? Do you think she will take better care of the new baby? Would things have been different for Addie if she had been a boy?
- Even though Mommers has been a terrible mother, Addie is certain that her mother did love her and her two sisters. What, if anything, does her mother do to prove this?



# ***Every Soul a Star***

by Wendy Mass



## **Synopsis**

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This story has three main characters – Ally, Bree and Jack. Ally lives at the Moon Shadow Campground, run by her parents, out in the middle of nowhere. She is homeschooled and lives a fairly solitary, nature-filled life. Bree is beautiful – and knows it. Her whole life revolves around being popular and her goal in life is to become a model. Jack is a loner who considers himself a loser. He has given up trying to do well in school or make friends.

All three of them end up at the Moon Shadow Campground for the once-in-a-lifetime event of the Great Eclipse. This story follows each of the character’s different accounts of events that happen while they’re at the campground and how the experience affects their lives.



## **Hooks**

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- The three characters in this story are very different. Which one is most like you?
- Ally knows all about the constellations. Is there something you’re really good at?
- Bree really did not want to go to the Moon Shadow Campground. Have you ever had to do something you really didn’t want to do?
- Jack discovered new things about himself on this trip. Have you ever done something you didn’t know you could do?
- Have you ever gone away to camp? Did you like it? What did you learn there?

### **Meet the Author—Wendy Mass**

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Wendy Mass was born in 1967 in Livingston, New Jersey. After receiving a degree in English from Tufts University, she moved to Los Angeles, California to work in the entertainment industry. She went on to earn advanced degrees. She currently lives and writes in New Jersey. While she began her work in nonfiction, she has written ten novels for young adults. Her works have been translated into many languages. A prolific reader, she also enjoys collecting candy wrappers and searching for treasure with her metal detector. *Every Soul a Star* (New York: Brown, 2008) earned a National Parenting Publication Awards Gold Medal in 2008.

For more information, see:

<http://www.wendymass.com>

Other notable books by Wendy Mass:

*Mango-shaped Space* (New York: Little, Brown, 2003) ALA Schneider Family Book Award 2004; New York Public Library Best Books for the Teen Age designation.

*Leap Day* (New York: Little, Brown, 2004) International Reading Association Young-Adult Choice designation, 2006.

*Jeremy Fink and the Meaning of Life* (New York: Little, Brown, 2006) New York Public Library Books for the Teen Age designation 2007; *Booksense* Choice designation 2007.

"Wendy Mass." *Contemporary Authors Online*. Detroit: Gale, 2009. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 30 Jan. 2011.



## Stargazing

Cottrell, Frank Boyce. *Cosmic*. Walden Pond Press, 2010.

Paterson, Katherine. *Same Stuff as Stars*. Clarion Books, 2002.

Saint-Exupery, Antoine de. *The Little Prince*. Harcourt Children's Books, 2000.

Online information:

<http://www.kidsastronomy.com>

[www.surfnetkids.com/stargazing.htm](http://www.surfnetkids.com/stargazing.htm)

## Family Loyalty

Law, Ingrid. *Savvy*. Dial, 2008.

Law, Ingrid. *Scumble*. Dial, 2010.

L'Engle, Madeline. *Wrinkle in Time*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux (BYR), 1962.

## Homeschooling/Alternative Living

Korman, Gordon. *Schooled*. Hyperion Book CH, 2007.

Spinelli, Jerry. *Stargirl*. Knopf Books for Young Readers, 2000.

Wood, Maryrose. Jon Klassen, illustrator. *The Incurable Children of Ashton Place: Book I: The Mysterious Howling*. Balzer + Bray, 2010.



## Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Every Soul a Star*

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- Why do you think Wendy Mass decided on the title, *Every Soul a Star* for her novel? In what ways do you think Ally, Bree, and Jack might be considered a “star” before and/or after the eclipse? In what ways are you a star?
- Which of the three main characters can you identify with and why? Before their experiences leading up to the eclipse, which of the three would you rather sit next to on a long bus trip? How about after the eclipse?
- How would you react if your parents told you that your life was about to change as drastically as Bree and Ally’s life were going to? Who do you think will have the harder time adjusting to their new way of life, Ally or Bree? Why?
- Before the move to Moon Shadow Campground, Bree has to put everything she can part with in boxes for a garage sale. Try making a list of the things you *could* part with if you had to and then make a list of the things you *couldn’t* part with? Were you surprised by any of your choices?
- In order for Ally and Kenny to survive in their new life they receive advice from Bree and Melanie. Bree’s advice is to become popular by learning the rules of the school and making people think you fit in. Melanie thinks the trick is to know whom you are, what makes you happy, and not be afraid to show it. Who gives the best advice? Is it possible that neither of them is completely right or wrong? What advice would you give them? Do you think that Jack might also do well to follow some of their advice?
- Each of the main characters in *Every Soul a Star* has an item that is very special to them. Ally has her grandfather’s meteorite, Jack (no, not his Game Boy or dream journal) has his father’s stuffed rabbit, and Bree has her Wish Book. Why is each of these things special or important to their owners and what, if anything, do they represent? Do you own something similar and what makes it special to you?
- In the beginning of the book Bree states, “We all have things to offer the world. My beauty is what I have to give.” Is it true that her beauty is the only thing she has to offer the world? What are some of the other things she has to offer? What are some of the things both Ally and Jack have to offer that they might or might not be aware of?



## Writing Prompts / Discussion Questions for *Every Soul a Star*

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- When it comes to deciding who is the prettiest, Ally or Bree, Jack and Ryan are on opposite sides. Why do you think Ryan is more attracted to Bree and Jack to Ally?
- At Moon Shadow Campground there is a labyrinth, an ancient series of spiraling circles created on the ground with stones that you walk through while pondering some big question. Why do you think Bree has such a hard time trying to walk the labyrinth? What would you think about if you had a chance to walk a labyrinth?
- On one of her attempts to walk the Moon Shadow Campground's labyrinth Bree has a brief conversation with Stella (Pink Sweat Suit Lady) which ends with Stella saying, "Life is short, but it's wide." What does Stella mean by this? How are the lives of the main characters "widened" before, during, and maybe even after their two weeks together?
- Their experiences together at Moon Shadow Campground seem to change Ally, Bree, and Jack. Who do you think changed the most? Do you think the changes will last for all of them? What do you think it will be like for them if they do meet again at the "Star Party" the summer after the eclipse?
- According to the author, Wendy Mass, the next total solar eclipse in the mainland United States will occur on August 21, 2017. The path of the eclipse will extend from Oregon all the way across the country to South Carolina. Do you think you might (as the author suggests) "get up from that chair and go see it?"

