

A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan book discussions, library programs, or classroom activities.

Meet author Andrea Wang, who grew up in Yellow Springs and now lives in Colorado.

Select from a range of discussion questions and extension activities to deepen the experience of reading *The Many Meanings of Meilan*.

Discover articles, podcasts, websites, and readalikes to explore topics and themes in depth.

The Many Meanings of Meilan

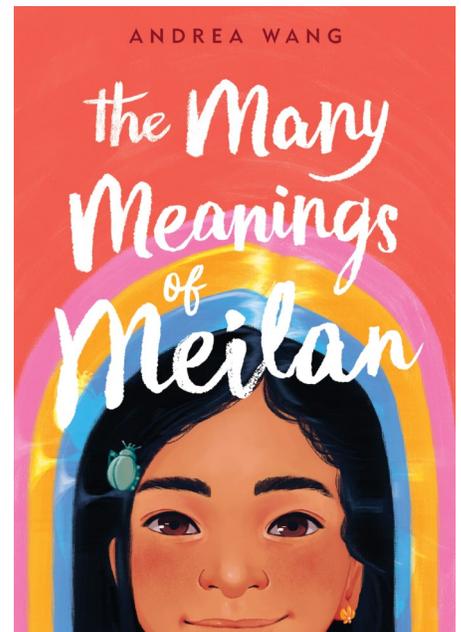
By Andrea Wang



About the Book

Meilan Hua's world is made up of a few key ingredients: her family's beloved matriarch, Nāinai; the bakery her parents, aunts, and uncles own and run in Boston's Chinatown; and the Chinese fairy tales Meilan loves.

After Nāinai passes, the family has a falling out that sends Meilan, her parents, and her grieving grandfather on the road in search of a new home, landing in Redbud, Ohio. Everything in Redbud is the opposite of Chinatown, and Meilan's not quite sure who she is—being renamed at school only makes it worse. She decides she is many Meilans, each inspired by a different Chinese character with the same pronunciation as her name. Sometimes she is Mist, cool and invisible; other times, she's Basket, carrying her parents' hopes and dreams and her guilt about not living up to them; and sometimes she is bright Blue, the way she feels around her new friend Logan. Meilan keeps her facets separate until an injustice at school shows her the power of bringing her many selves together.



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The Many Meanings of Meilan is an exploration of all the things it's possible to grieve, the injustices large and small that make us rage, and the peace that's unlocked when we learn to find home within ourselves.

Book Details

The Many Meanings of Meilan by Andrea Wang.
Kokila / Penguin Young Readers, 2021. ISBN 9780593111284. 368 pages. Ages 8-12.
Leveled Reading: AR Points 10.0. ATOS Book Level 4.7. 730 Lexile.
www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/635269

Available as an ebook and digital audiobook through the Ohio Digital Library:
ohiodigitallibrary.com

Available as a downloadable talking book from the Ohio Library for the Blind and Print Disabled: olbpd.klas.com



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**“My grandfather and grandmother named me...
Měilán means Beautiful Orchid in Mandarin.
There are thousands of varieties of orchids, but there is only one me.”**

About the Author

Andrea Wang is the award-winning author of the picture books **The Nian Monster** (Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature Honor), **Magic Ramen** (Freeman Book Award Honor), and **Watercress**, which won the Caldecott Medal and a Newbery Honor and is a 2023 & 2024 Choose to Read Ohio selection. Her newest picture book is **Luli and the Language of Tea**.

The Many Meanings of Meilan is Andrea's debut middle-grade novel. Among its other honors and awards, **The Many Meanings of Meilan** is a 2022 Chinese American Librarians Association (CALA) Best Book Award Honor Book, a 2022 Ohioana Book Award Finalist, and a Center for the Study of Multicultural Children's Literature Best Book of 2021.

The first character in Andrea's Chinese name is an archaic one that means fragrant, but her parents' friends all thought it was the character for jade, which sounds exactly the same. That sparked her lifelong interest in names and identity. She'd much rather be a rock than smelly. Andrea likes to write about family, food, and culture. She spent her childhood in Yellow Springs, Ohio, and Boston and now lives in Colorado with her family.

Author Resources

Andrea Wang's official website

andreyawang.com

Author page on Penguin Random House website

www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/2211318/andrea-wang

The Many Meanings of Meilan Explores Identity and Grief

diversebooks.org/the-many-meanings-of-meilan-explores-identity-and-grief

From the We Need Diverse Books blog.

The Many Meanings of Meilan Q&A with Andrea Wang

afuse8production.slj.com/2021/08/18/the-many-meanings-of-meilan-qa-with-andrea-wang

Betsy Bird interviews Andrea for *School Library Journal*.

Jason Chin & Andrea Wang on the 2022 Caldecott Medal Winner, Watercress (audio, 36 minutes)

abookishhome.com/2022/04/21/

Laura Szaro Kopinski interviews Andrea Wang and **Watercress** illustrator Jason Chin on the A Bookish Home podcast.

For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries:

For publicity requests, contact the Penguin Young Readers Publicity Department at youngreaderspublicity@us.penguinr.com

For speaking engagements, visit The Author Village:

theauthorvillage.com/presenters/andrea-wang

Talk About It!

Topics to share when discussing **The Many Meanings of Meilan** with young readers.

Educators: Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards, such as Social Studies: History and Geography and Social and Emotional Learning Standards: Social Awareness, may also apply. Discussion questions and educational activities for **The Many Meanings of Meilan** align with Learning Standards for Grades 3-8.

Librarians, parents, and others: These activities are also for library programs, family activities, and other projects. Learning Standards define what students should know and be able to do at each grade. For more information, see the Ohio Department of Education website, education.ohio.gov. From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

Spoiler warning! Some discussion questions refer to key elements in the book. Do not read if you do not want to find out what happens.

- Names are important. For Meilan to understand herself better, she unravels the meanings of her name. What's the history and story of your name? Why does that matter to you?
- How does Meilan feel when her principal renames her? Cite other details from the book that make Meilan and her family feel unwelcome in their new town.
- Logan and Anita become Meilan's friends. How do they help Meilan when she is bullied at school? Brainstorm some strategies for helping others speak up for themselves at your school.
- How do the communities of Boston and Redbud differ? Why does Meilan describe Boston as a community that understands her?
- Meilan's Gōnggong keeps family rituals and history alive. Talk with a grandparent or older relative about family traditions and history, or ask an elderly neighbor about their traditions. Share what you learned.

Go Further!

Ideas for extending the experience of **The Many Meanings of Meilan**.

Using online resources available to students through INFOhio (infohio.org) and to all Ohio residents through Ohio Web Library (ohioweblibrary.org), research one of the following laws or programs that has impacted immigration in the United States:

- Chinese Exclusion Act
- Alien Contract Labor Law
- Literacy Test
- National Origins Quota
- Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965

Then create an infographic, poster, or other graphic to highlight your results.

"Where are you from?" is a question many first and second-generation immigrants are asked. Yet, as Anita explains to Liam, we are all immigrants, unless we are Native Americans. Check out the Native Land site, <https://native-land.ca/>, and see what indigenous peoples were here first in your community. Consider the concepts that land is honored and sacred, and that no one truly owns it. The Native Land map intends "to bring an awareness of the real lived history of Indigenous peoples and nations." (Note that the map is a work in progress, and that it includes educator resources.)

Social media lets us show different "selves" to different audiences. Meilan curates her identity through symbols and metaphors depending on her setting. She's "Mist" at school, "Basket" at home, and "Blue" with true friends. What symbols and objects are you? Create a poem, art, or a mood board to show the many meanings of "you."

Explore More!

Additional ideas and resources to use with *The Many Meanings of Meilan*.

How Immigrants Shape(d) the United States

www.ted.com/talks/nalini_krishnankutty_how_immigrants_shape_d_the_united_states

In this TEDx Talk, writer and first-generation immigrant American Nalini Krishnankutty highlights the contributions of immigrants and shows how anti-immigrant sentiments have been similar throughout U.S. history.

Asian American Veterans and the Anti-War Movement

wosu.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/asian-american-veterans-anti-war-movement/asian-americans-video/

Gōnggong was assumed by others to be on the “wrong side of history” during the Vietnam War, yet he was a hero. Learn more about Asian American vets with this brief video from PBS. Educators, check out the lesson plans and activities.

Author Andrea Wang on Growing up Chinese-American in the Midwest

lesley.edu/article/author-andrea-wang-on-growing-up-chinese-american-in-the-midwest

Andrea Wang talks about *The Many Meanings of Meilan*, *Watercress*, and her own experiences in this episode of Lesley University’s Why We Write podcast (audio, 29 minutes).

It’s Time to Pronounce Asian Names Correctly

stopasianhate.medium.com/its-time-to-pronounce-asian-names-correctly-a1ae8e5a2ee1

Andrea Wang discusses the harmfulness of mispronouncing names, renaming, and nicknaming without the other person’s consent.

Windows, Mirrors and Glasses: Grace Lin on Seeing the World Through Diverse Books

www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/90101-windows-mirrors-and-glasses-grace-lin-on-seeing-the-world-through-diverse-books.html

In an article from *Publishers Weekly*, author Grace Lin reflects on how diverse books can “give kids a clear, true view of the world all around us.”

Check It Out!

Recommended for readers of *The Many Meanings of Meilan*.

Middle Grade:

Merci Suarez Changes Gears by Meg Medina

Maizy Chen’s Last Chance by Lisa Yee

Nothing Is Little by Carmella Van Vleet

Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe by Jo Watson Hackl

Refugee by Alan Gratz

Things Seen from Above by Shelley Pearsall (a Choose to Read Ohio selection)

Picture Books:

Watercress by Andrea Wang, illustrated by Jason Chin (a Choose to Read Ohio selection)

The Nian Monster by Andrea Wang, illustrated by Alina Chau

Amah Faraway by Margaret Chiu Greanias, illustrated by Tracy Subisak

Patchwork by Matt de la Peña, illustrated by Corinna Luyken

Choose to Read Ohio, a project of the State Library of Ohio, the Ohioana Library Association, and the Ohio Center for the Book, encourages public libraries, schools, families, and others to build a community of readers and an appreciation of Ohio authors, illustrators, and literature. CTRO is adaptable for use in classrooms, libraries, bookstores, by book discussion groups, families, and other community groups.

Explore Choose to Read Ohio resources & toolkits: library.ohio.gov/ctro.

Toolkit created by Children’s Writer, Educator, and Speaker Kathy Halsey, September 2022. Links and other information are accurate at the time of publication.