

## A Choose to Read Ohio Toolkit

Use this toolkit to plan library programs as well as activities for family time, day care, or the classroom.

Meet author Andrea Wang, who grew up in Yellow Springs, and illustrator Jason Chin, who lives in Vermont.

Engage children in conversations and activities that explore culture, home, memory, and more.

Explore fun activities that align with Ohio's Learning Standards for kindergarten through grade 3.

# Watercress

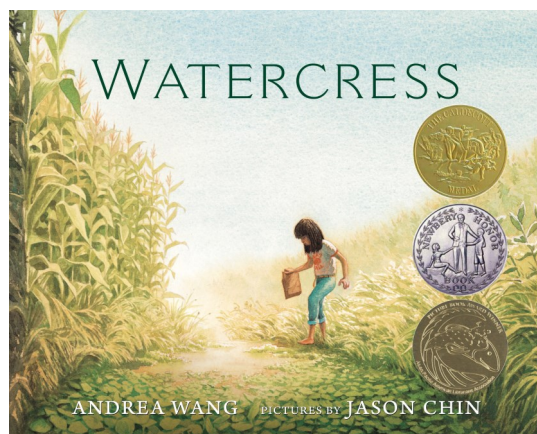
By Andrea Wang (author)  
and Jason Chin (illustrator)



## About the Book

Gathering watercress by the side of the road brings a girl closer to her family's Chinese heritage. Andrea Wang tells a moving autobiographical story of a child of immigrants discovering and connecting with her heritage. The book is illustrated by award winning artist Jason Chin, working in an entirely new style inspired by Chinese painting techniques.

Holiday House Publishing, Inc., 2021. ISBN 9780823446247. 32 pages. Ages 4-8. Leveled Reading: AR Points 0.5. AD610 Lexile. [holidayhouse.com/book/watercress/](https://holidayhouse.com/book/watercress/)



Permission to use book jacket image and book description granted by Holiday House.

Available as an eBook through the Ohio Digital Library: [ohiodigitallibrary.com](https://ohiodigitallibrary.com)

Available as a downloadable talking book through the State Library of Ohio Talking Book Program: [olbpd.klas.com](https://olbpd.klas.com)

## Get Ready To Read!

*Encouraging early literacy skill-building in young children.*

Many of the activities in this toolkit incorporate **five early literacy practices**, everyday activities that help children get ready to read. These practices are:

*Reading - Writing -  
Talking - Singing - Playing*

**Reading** to and with children is the most effective way to support reading readiness. Reading aloud develops comprehension and vocabulary, builds familiarity and comfort with books, and is fun for adult and child.

**Writing** (or drawing and scribbling) helps children learn about print, letters, and vocabulary, and supports fine motor skills.

**Talking** helps children learn oral language—a critical early literacy skill—and increases vocabulary and comprehension.

**Singing** slows language down so children can hear the different sounds that make up words, and helps develop vocabulary and phonological awareness.

**Playing** teaches children to think symbolically, practice self-expression, and put thoughts into words.

All of these practices lead to children being ready to learn how to read when they begin school.

Parents, teachers, and librarians can share these practices with children at home, in the classroom, or at the library. For more information, visit [ohreadytoread.org](https://ohreadytoread.org).



Author photo by Elaine Freitas Photography, courtesy Holiday House; used with permission.

**“This story is about the power of memory. Not just the beautiful memories, like the ones my mother and father had about eating watercress in China, but also the difficult ones, the memories that are sometimes too painful to share.”**

**–Andrea Wang**  
(From “A Note From the Author,” p. 32.)

## About the Author

Andrea Wang is the award-winning author of ***The Many Meanings of Meilan*** (a 2023 & 2024 Choose to Read Ohio selection), ***Watercress*** (winner of the Caldecott Medal and a Newbery Honor), ***The Nian Monster***, and ***Magic Ramen: The Story of Momofuku Ando***. Her newest book is ***Luli and the Language of Tea***.

Andrea was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts and lived in Yellow Springs, Ohio, for much of her childhood. She was inspired to write ***Watercress*** by her experience growing up in rural Ohio as a child of Chinese immigrants.

Andrea holds an M.S. in Environmental Science and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing for Young People. She lives in Colorado with her family.

---

## Author Resources

**Andrea Wang’s official website**

[andreyawang.com](http://andreyawang.com)

**Author page and interview on Holiday House website**

[holidayhouse.com/artist/andrea-wang](http://holidayhouse.com/artist/andrea-wang)

**Picture Book Builders: Andrea Wang**

[picturebookbuilders.com/author/aywang](http://picturebookbuilders.com/author/aywang)

Articles written by Andrea Wang for a collaborative blog co-created by several picture book authors and illustrators.

**For publicity and speaking engagement inquiries (for both Andrea and Jason):**

Contact Sara DiSalvo at [SDiSalvo@holidayhouse.com](mailto:SDiSalvo@holidayhouse.com) for publicity requests. For speaking engagements, visit The Author Village at [theauthorvillage.com](http://theauthorvillage.com).

---

## Talk About It!

*Open a conversation with children to increase comprehension and spark creativity.*

- The girl is caught between two cultures. How does she feel different? What is the first hint that she wants to belong in Ohio? Explain how her parents’ cutting watercress by the side of the road embarrasses her. Discuss how this is a typical feeling of someone who feels like an outsider.
- Setting is when and where a story takes place. Discuss the two settings in this book. Take a close look at the third double-page spread. How do the text and the illustration reveal the two settings?
- What is the main character’s attitude toward watercress? Her mother explains that it is “free.” How does this reveal that the girl’s parents are struggling to survive in their new world? What does “free” mean to the girl?
- The girl compares the taste of watercress and her mom’s memories as “delicate and slightly bitter.” Discuss whether the mother is “slightly bitter” about her previous life. How does this explain why her memories have been difficult to share?

Discussion questions from **Holiday House Educators’ Guide: *Watercress***. Used with permission. Find more discussion prompts in this educators’ guide:  
[holidayhouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/watercress-guide-des2.pdf](http://holidayhouse.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/watercress-guide-des2.pdf)

## About the Illustrator

Jason Chin is a celebrated children's book author and illustrator and winner of the Caldecott Medal for **Watercress**. His book **Grand Canyon** was awarded a Caldecott Honor, a Sibert Honor, and the NCTE Orbis Pictus Award. He wrote and illustrated **Your Place in the Universe**, and illustrated Miranda Paul's **Nine Months: Before a Baby is Born**, a Boston Globe-Horn Book Honor Book. He lives in Vermont with his wife and children.



Illustrator photo and biography courtesy Holiday House; used with permission.

## Illustrator Resources

**Jason Chin's official website**

[jasonchin.net](http://jasonchin.net)

**Illustrator page and interview on Holiday House website**

[holidayhouse.com/artist/jason-chin](http://holidayhouse.com/artist/jason-chin)

**Jason Chin on Identity and Belonging**

[www.vermontpublic.org/vpr-news/2022-01-31/south-burlington-artist-jason-chin-on-identity-belonging-in-caldecott-medal-winning-watercress](http://www.vermontpublic.org/vpr-news/2022-01-31/south-burlington-artist-jason-chin-on-identity-belonging-in-caldecott-medal-winning-watercress)

Interview with Vermont Public radio; link includes transcript and 6-minute audio clip.

## Author and Illustrator Together!

Andrea Wang and Jason Chin collaborated on several interviews and media appearances about **Watercress**, even interviewing each other!

**Author Andrea Wang & Illustrator Jason Chin talk about Watercress** (video, 11 minutes)

[youtu.be/HJbl-kixdkc](https://youtu.be/HJbl-kixdkc)

**In Conversation: Andrea Wang and Jason Chin**

[www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/85817-in-conversation-andrea-wang-and-jason-chin.html](http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/childrens/childrens-authors/article/85817-in-conversation-andrea-wang-and-jason-chin.html)

## Practice It!

*Extend the story to include the five practices for younger children.*

**Talk.** The story takes place in Ohio. Have children talk about whether the story takes place in a city or in the country. How do you know? Ask them to show evidence from the images in the book.

**Sing.** In an acrostic poem, the first letter in each line spells out a word. Using the word "HOME," invite the children to each write an acrostic poem. If the children are not yet proficient writers, have them dictate to you. Make sure to model what an acrostic poem is, using another word.

**Read.** The author, Andrea Wang, uses adjectives, similes, and figurative language to describe things. Have children pick out some of their favorite examples and draw a picture of what they think each means. Some examples: "The tops of the cornstalks make lines that zigzag across the horizon" and "Mom's eyes are as sharp as the tip of a dragon's claw." While simile might be an unfamiliar concept for the 4-8 age range, this would be a great time to introduce children to a "big new vocabulary word."

**Write.** Have the children write about a food they didn't like at first but now they love. Why didn't they like it? What made them change their mind? Have younger students dictate their stories to you.

**Play.** The illustrator, Jason Chin, used watercolors to create the images in this book. Invite children to paint a scene from their lives using watercolors, then take turns describing and acting out their scenes.

## Tie It In!

Using this book with Ohio's Learning Standards.

**Educators:** Every CTRO book may be used to support Ohio's English Language Arts reading, writing, and speaking and listening standards. Other Learning Standards also apply. These activities using **Watercress** align with Ohio's Learning Standards for Kindergarten – Grade 3.

**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](http://education.ohio.gov). From the Topics dropdown menu, click on "Learning in Ohio."

**These activities are also great for library programs, family time, and playgroups.**

### Social Studies

**Geography: Spatial Thinking and Skills.** Place a large world map on a table and have students, as a group, come up to the map and locate the United States and China. What are their observations about distance, size, and surrounding countries and bodies of water? Record their findings on chart paper. Next do the same activity, but this time use Google Earth, recording the students' observations. Create a class Venn diagram or a T-chart comparing and contrasting the students' observations and the map types.

**Geography: Spatial Thinking and Skills.** Give the students some time to explore physical maps and political maps of China and of the United States. As a group, compare and contrast the size, cities, and borders of the two countries. What other features are noted on the maps? Compare and contrast any additional features that the students find interesting. Chart the students' observations on a class T-chart.

**History: Historical Thinking and Skills: Heritage (K).** After reading **Watercress**, follow up by reading **Yoko** by Rosemary Wells. This book is about Yoko, a young cat whose mother packs all of Yoko's favorite things for lunch. However, when Yoko starts to eat them, some of her classmates make fun of her. The book does a wonderful job of showing how important it is to not make fun of another's food and to be proud of your heritage. After sharing the story, have students either write, dictate, or draw how they would feel if they were Yoko or how they could be a good friend to Yoko. This activity may be used with other grade levels to support Social and Emotional Learning skills.

### Social and Emotional Learning (K-2)

**Social Awareness: Recognize, identify and empathize with the feelings and perspective of others.** Give students time to study the illustrations in **Watercress**. Discuss the emotions the characters show. How can you tell from the illustrations what feelings are present? How do the illustrations make the viewers feel? At what times during the story do characters empathize with each other? Discuss how to identify feelings and empathetic responses in real-life situations the students have experienced.

**Relationship Skills: Demonstrate the ability to prevent, manage and resolve interpersonal conflicts in constructive ways.** Discuss the conflict that takes place at the dinner table in **Watercress**. How did it develop over the course of the story? Do the characters practice listening and attention skills at the dinner table? How is the conflict resolved?

**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](http://library.ohio.gov/ctro).

Toolkit created by Kelly Silwani, Olentangy Orange Middle School. September 2022. Links and other information are accurate at the time of publication.