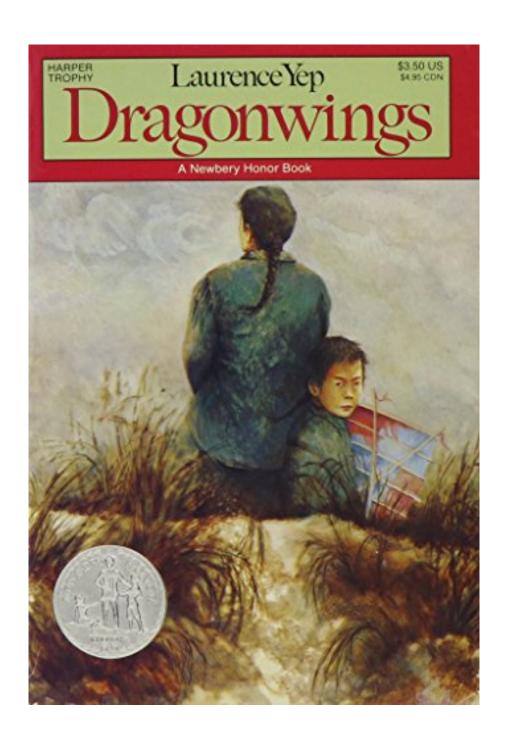


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From School Library Journal

Grades 4-7--Laurence Yep's Newbery Honor book (HarperCollins, 1975) offers insights into the lives of Chinese-Americans in early 20th century California. The story begins as eight-year-old Moon Shadow Lee journeys across the Pacific to join his proud and clever father at the family-owned laundry in San Francisco. The boy recounts their problems with prejudice, as well as the kindness of uncles and cousins. Father and son must leave the protection of the family to move out of Chinatown, but they find refuge with a generous and friendly landlady. Once they have successfully established a repair business, they turn their attention to making a flying machine. Though it's a modern invention, part of their motivation is the elder's belief in his own previous dragon existence. Yep draws heavily on his own heritage, but also includes figures such as Teddy Roosevelt and the Wright Brothers, and historic events such as the San Francisco Earthquake. The result is a heartwarming story set in a familiar time and place, but told from a new perspective. The quiet intensity of B. D. Wong's narration enriches the text as he creates memorable voices for a large cast of characters. Wafting, ethereal music signals the end of each side of the cassette, and the cover art is attractive. The only problem is the lightweight cardboard package, which is not sturdy enough for heavy circulation. That shouldn't deter libraries from purchasing this fine recording which will provide upper elementary and middle school listeners with lessons in history, and a gentle reminder of the value of a loving family and loyal friends.

Barbara Wysocki, Cora J. Belden Library. Rocky Hill, CT

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Review

"A fine, sensitive novel written with grace in a way that conveys the Chinese American's cultural heritage".

(Starred review) -- ALA Booklist

"A Chinese immigrant and his son build a flying machine in an unusual historical novel, unique in its perspective of the Chinese in America and its portrayal of early 20th-century San Francisco, including the Earthquake, from an immigrant's viewpoint."--"School Library Journal""A fine, sensitive novel written with grace in a way that conveys the Chinese American's cultural heritage." --"Booklist""A triumph."--"The New York Times

From the Back Cover

Will Windrider take to the skies?

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But Moon Shadow grows to love and respect his father and to believe in his wonderful dream. And Windrider, with Moon Shadow's help is willing to endure the mockery of the other Chinese, the poverty, the separation from his wife and country'even the great earthquake'to make his dream come true.

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Inspired by the account of a Chinese immigrant who made a flying machine in 1909, Laurence Yep's historical novel beautifully portrays the rich traditions of the Chinese community as it made its way in a hostile new world.

Supports the Common Core State Standards

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• Binding: Paperback

• 248 pages

Features

· Great product!

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Most helpful customer reviews

38 of 40 people found the following review helpful.

I want to get away, I want to fly away

By E. R. Bird

No one melds fact and myth into seamless storylines of historical fiction quite like Lawrence Yep. Like many of his tales, the remarkable, "Dragonwings", reflects on the Chinese experience in America. Says Yep in his author's note, "I have tried to make some of these dry historical facts become living experiences". The result is a book that certain kids will grow attached to and respect. Admittedly, it is not a book for all children, but for what it offers it is an impressive work.

The plot follows Moon Shadow, a boy sent from his native China to live with his father in the Land of the Gold Mountains a.k.a San Francisco in 1903. While there, Moon Shadow learns a great deal about the ways the white settlers (referred to in this text, without exception, as demons) reacted to the Chinese in California. Yep does not play down the characters' difficulties, but Moon Shadow and his father, Windrider, learn the ways in which they may live their lives acceptably. They befriend their white employers, survive the great

San Francisco earthquake, and finally Windrider follows his dream of making a flying machine just as the Wright Brothers did. This portion of the book is based on the true story of a Chinese immigrant that on September 22, 1909 flew from the hills of Oakland, California. As Yep points out in his author's note, this book is a historical fantasy and not an actual factual construction. Nonetheless, Windrider's quest is such that you feel just as caught up in the excitement of the moment as he is when at last he is able to test his creation.

What is so impressive about Lawrence Yep's writing is how he accepts that there are no hard and fast rules about the ways in which people act and react. The Chinese are constantly set upon by the white majority, yet there are good Tang people and bad Tang people just as there are good whites and bad whites. The sentence that really drilled this home for me was one referring to a white female friend Moon Shadow and his father made the acquaintance of. Miss Whitlaw befriends our heroes, as well as the patriarch of their company, referred to mostly as "Uncle". The section I love reads, "I won't say that Miss Whitlaw and Uncle became the best of friends, but they came to like each other as much as two such difference people could". To me, this is an eloquent description of how two people from remarkably different backgrounds can become close without ever reaching the closeness that comes from being with someone like yourself.

So here's the real test of this book; Do kids actually like reading it? Published originally in 1975, I remember hearing about this story when I was in elementary school. And, admittedly, I never so much as picked it up. For those kids that do glance through it, or are assigned it in school, what is their reaction? Honestly, I thought the book began rather slowly. Yep is introducing his subject honestly and with tact and feeling, all of which make the beginning a small slog for the average child reader. Those kids that stick with it, however, will find fights, natural disasters, and attempted throat slittings galore. To my mind, Yep's "Child of the Owl" is a lot more kid friendly than the well-written but ultimately measured "Dragonwings". So if I were to give a child I knew a good, if more contemporary, book reflecting the experiences of Chinese-Americans, I'd probably offer them the former. None of this is to say that there aren't children out there that consider "Dragonwings" to be their favorite book ever. I just suspect they are a minority.

In the end, "Dragonwings" has won more awards and garnered more praise than I think Lawrence Yep could have ever hoped for. It is a fine noble creation and well deserves the attention it has received. Whether kids will ever willingly open its pages is open to debate, but it is definitely a fascinating look into the lives of a people that could well have remained unknown but for the superb prose and experienced writing of one of the finest American writers of our day and age.

19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

This is a good book. I like it very much.

By A Customer

Laurence Yep's novel DRAGONWINGS was the book that our teacher assigned to read for ESL studend. Like most of my classmates, at first I did not like this book. I thought both its story and language were so strange. But later on, I felt that the story more and more interesting, the language better and better. This novel is unusual historical novel. It describes the Chinese immigrants' life at the early of this century in San Francisco. It introduces a lot of Chinese culture and tradition to its readers which remind me what experience in my motherland China. On the other hand, it also introduces a lot of American culture from a Chinese child. It is a great reading book for ESL. Especially for Chinese students. All in all, it is worthy to read, even again. I'll suggest my son who is in third grade to read this book.

20 of 21 people found the following review helpful.

Dragonwings

By Greg Deal

This was an excellent book written through the eyes of a Chinese boy who comes to America and lives among white people, adjusting to their ways and making new friends. Laurence Yep does a wonderful job of

portraying the world through the eyes of and immigrant in a new place. He shows the hardships as well as the good times. After reading this book I looked at life a little bit differently. Moonshadow and his dad shared the same dream of flying. And Windrider his father is being tested in this life to become a dragon in the next and by flying he might be able to accomplish this. Windrider shares wonderful dreams woth Moonshadow about being a dragon. The story is filled with love, trust and dishonesty. This is a book I would reccommend to anyone. This book helped me in my personal life as well. Now i know what it's like to be in a new place, and I will help people in a similar situation out and not make fun of them because I know I wouldn't want to be treated that way myself.

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