

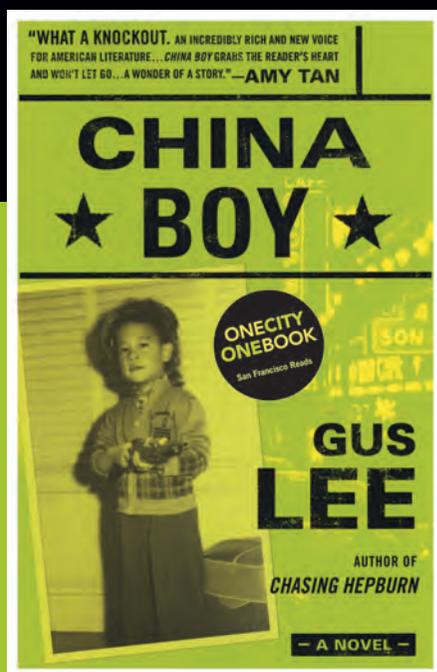
ONECITY ONEBOOK

San Francisco Reads

Fall 2005

A Citywide Book Club

www.sfpl.org



A message from Mayor Gavin Newsom

Welcome to the first **One City One Book: San Francisco Reads**, presented by the San Francisco Public Library. San Francisco prides itself on its strong literary and cultural traditions and it is essential that we as a city continue to foster a climate that encourages reading, especially among our young people, the future leaders of tomorrow.

Born and raised in San Francisco, Gus Lee writes in *China Boy* about life as a young boy in the Panhandle, a vibrant part of the city. His intense story will give you much to talk about at the book discussions which will be taking place at libraries, bookstores and schools throughout San Francisco.

You can find a copy of *China Boy* at your library or local bookstores. Whether you discuss it with family and friends, or attend one of the special events, I hope you will have a good time reading and talking about *China Boy*.



A message from City Librarian Luis Herrera



As City Librarian, I invite you to join in **One City One Book: San Francisco Reads**, our first citywide book club. I read *China Boy* this summer and I hope you'll join me in reading this book about a boy named Kai Ting growing up in San Francisco during the 1950s. His childhood story of being caught between cultures is both powerful and poignant.

We're honored to have Gus Lee participating in numerous events throughout the fall, from a reading and discussion at the newly renovated Excelsior Branch, to a conversation with the *San Francisco Chronicle* Book

Review Editor in the Main Library's Koret Auditorium.

I look forward to seeing many copies of *China Boy* in the hands of readers throughout the city, in libraries and bookstores, in coffee shops and on buses.

Thank you for participating in **One City One Book: San Francisco Reads** and I hope you enjoy the experience.

For updated event information, please visit

THE AUTHOR

"I was seven years old and simpler, shorter, and blinder than most. I enjoyed Chinese calligraphy, loved Shanghai food, and hated peanuts and my own spilled blood. It was all very simple, but the results were so complicated. God sat at a big table in *T'ien*, Heaven, and sorted people into their various incarnations. I was supposed to go to a remote mountain monastery in East Asia where I could read prayers and repeat chants until my mind and soul became instruments of the other world. I had a physique perfect for meditation, and ill-suited for an inner-city slum."

—From *China Boy*

"It would be hard to find a more all-American story than the delightful *China Boy*. Lee is a natural storyteller."
—*TIME*

"What a knockout. An incredibly rich and new voice for American literature... *China Boy* grabs the reader's heart and won't let go... a wonder of a story."
—Amy Tan

Gus Lee is the only American-born member of a Shanghai family. He grew up in San Francisco and attended West Point for three years until his failing performance in then-mandatory electrical engineering gave him the involuntary opportunity to become an enlisted man. After receiving his law degree from the University of California at Davis, he rejoined the army as Captain Lee and served as general counsel. He resumed civilian life to become a deputy district attorney in Sacramento, then served for some years as director of attorney education for the State Bar of California. He is married and lives with his wife and two children in Colorado Springs. *China Boy* is his first novel.

GUS LEE



<http://sfpl.org/news/ocob/onecity.htm> or call 415.557.4277

ONE CITY

Tuesday, September 27

6:30 p.m.

Meet the Author!

Join *China Boy* author Gus Lee at an Excelsior Branch neighborhood family book discussion, reading and signing! Excelsior Branch Library 4400 Mission St. (at Cotter), SF, 355.2868

Wednesday, September 28

5:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Big Book Sale Members' Reception

Gus Lee will be on hand to meet and sign books for members of Friends of the San Francisco Public Library. Festival Pavillion at Fort Mason, SF, 626.7500

SPECIAL EVENTS

October 2, 9, 23

Sundays at 1:00 p.m.

City Guides *China Boy* Walking Tours: North of the Panhandle

This tour explores the neighborhood described in *China Boy*. Walk the streets where Kai Ting spent his days and see how this part of San Francisco continues to change architecturally and ethnically, when we walk by mansions, Victorian houses, and small businesses in this modest neighborhood. Meet in front of the McKinley Statue at the eastern end of the Panhandle (Baker and Fell Sts.).

Saturday, October 15

3:00 – 5:00 p.m.

Meet Gus Lee for Dim Sum and Tea!

Sample dim sum, have tea and meet Gus Lee when he signs *China Boy* at Books Inc., an official sponsor of One City One Book.

*Books Inc. Laurel Village
3515 California Street, SF, 221.3666

*A portion of all *China Boy* copies purchased at Books Inc. during September and October 2005 will be donated back to the *One City One Book* program

Thursday, October 27

12:30 p.m.

Lunchtime Reading

Gus Lee will read from *China Boy* and sign books at Book Passage's San Francisco store.

Book Passage
Ferry Building
1 Ferry Plaza, #46, SF
835.1020

Thursday, October 27

6:30 p.m.

Meet the Author!

San Francisco School invites Portola, Bayview and all San Francisco residents to a reading, discussion and book signing with Gus Lee. San Francisco School 300 Gaven Street, SF 239.5065

Wednesday, October 26

6:30 p.m.

Gus Lee in conversation with Oscar Villalon

Join us for an in-depth conversation between Gus Lee and the *San Francisco Chronicle* book editor about Lee's experience growing up in San Francisco and becoming an acclaimed writer.

Koret Auditorium
Main Library, 100 Larkin Street (at Grove), SF
557.4400

Saturday, October 15

8:00 – 9:15 p.m.

Litquake Lit Crawl: San Francisco Stories

Gus Lee reads from *China Boy*, alongside other writers who explore San Francisco in their work, at one of this San Francisco Literary Festival's Mission District "Lit Crawl" venues; book signing to follow readings. The Marsh 1062 Valencia St. (near 22nd), SF, 826.5750

ONE BOOK

Wednesday, September 7

6:00 p.m.

For Teens! "Not Your Mother's Book Club"—a book club for 7th to 12th graders—discusses *China Boy*.

*Books Inc. Laurel Village
3515 California Street, SF
221.3666

Thursday, September 22

6:30 p.m.

Book discussion
Richmond/Senator Milton Marks Branch Library
351 9th Avenue (near Clement), SF, 355.5600

Thursday, October 6

6:00 p.m.

FOR TEENS!
826 Valencia, a unique educational work space for kids & teens, hosts a teen book discussion about *China Boy*.
826 Valencia, SF, 642.5905

Tuesday, October 18

7:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Borders Mission Bay
200 King Street, SF (across from SBC Park), 357.9931

Tuesday, October 18

7:00 p.m.

An East Bay book discussion
A Great Good Place for Books
6120 LaSalle Ave.,
Montclair Village, Oakland,
510.339.8210

Thursday, October 20

2:30 p.m.

Book discussion. Join the West Portal Book Club, currently meeting at the Ingleside Branch.
Ingleside Branch Library
1649 Ocean Avenue
(at Faxon), SF, 355.2898

Saturday, October 22

4:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Parkside Branch Library
1200 Taraval Street (at 22nd Avenue), SF, 355.5770

Tuesday, October 25

7:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Borders Stonestown
Stonestown Galleria, 233
Winston Drive, SF
731.0665

Tuesday, October 25

7:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Eureka Valley/Harvey Milk Memorial Branch Library
3555 16th Street (near Market), SF, 355.5616



BOOK DISCUSSIONS

Wednesday, October 12

7:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Park Branch Library
1833 Page Street (near Cole), SF, 355.5656

Tuesday, October 18

6:30 p.m.

Book discussion
Anza Branch Library
550 37th Avenue (near Anza), SF, 355.5717

Saturday, October 22

2:30 p.m.

Book discussion
Chinatown Branch Library
(English language)
1135 Powell Street (near Jackson), SF, 355.2888

Thursday, October 27

4:00 p.m.

Book Discussion
Bernal Heights Branch Library
500 Cortland Avenue (near Moultrie), SF, 355.2810

Saturday, October 29

4:00 p.m.

Book discussion
Potrero Branch Library
1616 20th Street (near Connecticut), SF, 355.2822

For updated event information, please visit

<http://sfpl.org/news/ocob/onecity.htm> or call 415.557.4277

How to Read a Book for a Book Discussion

The best books are those that insinuate themselves into your experience: they reveal an important truth or provide a profound sense of kinship between reader and writer. Searching for, identifying, and discussing these truths deepen the reader's appreciation of the book.

READING FOR DISCUSSION

Reading for a book discussion—whether you are the leader or simply a participant—differs from reading purely for pleasure.

Asking questions, reading carefully, imagining yourself in the story, analyzing style and structure, and searching for personal meaning in a work of literature all enhance the work's value and the discussion potential for your group.

1 Make notes and mark pages as you go. Ask questions of yourself and mark down pages you might want to refer back to later. Making notes as you go along slows down your reading but saves you the time of searching out important passages later.

2 Ask tough questions of yourself and the book. Asking questions of yourself as you read means you don't know the answer yet, and sometimes you never will discover the answers. Don't be afraid to ask hard questions because often the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose. Look for questions that may lead to in-depth conversations with your group and make the book more meaningful.

3 Analyze the themes of the book. Try to analyze the important themes of a book and try to consider the author's starting premise. Imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking himself, "what if ..." questions.

4 Get to know the characters. When you meet the characters in the book, place yourself at the scene. Think of them as you do the people around you. Think about their faults and their motives. What would it be like to interact with them? Are the tones and styles of their dialogues authentic? Read portions aloud to get to know the voices of the characters.

5 Notice the structure of the book. Sometimes an author uses the structure of the book to illustrate an important concept or to create a mood. Notice how the author structured the book. Are chapters prefaced by quotes? If so, how do they apply to the content of the chapters? How many narrators tell the story? Who are they? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Is it written in flashbacks? Does the order the author chose make sense to you?

6 Make comparisons to other books and authors. Compare the book to others by the same author, or to books by other authors that have a similar theme or style. Often, themes run through an author's works that are more fully realized by comparison. Comparing one author's work with another's can help you solidify your opinions, as well as define for you qualities you may otherwise miss.

Tips are courtesy of the
Washington Center for the Book

China Boy Discussion Questions

- 1 Discuss the children's roles in Kai's family before Mah-mee dies. What is the importance of birth order in the family? Why is Megan treated differently? Why is Kai protected and favored? In what ways does Mah-mee prepare for or leave them unprepared for the realities of American life? In what ways are Kai's sisters more prepared than he is?
- 2 "I think I know why my father became a soldier, a professional fighter, an iconoclast. My mother was not impressed with Father's career choice" (p. 33). Why does Kai's father become a soldier? Why does Kai sympathize with this decision? Why would Mah-mee not be impressed? In what ways are Kai's parents fundamentally different? What does each bring to Kai's life?
- 3 Kai's mother longs to return to China, but the family stays in San Francisco. Why? Why is Kai's father so obsessed with America? How does this play out while Mah-mee is alive and then after she dies? In what ways is Kai's father blinded by his desire to have an American family?
- 4 Before she dies, Mah-mee's main source of company is Kai. She takes him with her everywhere and does not let him go outside to play with the neighborhood children. How does this keep Kai from adapting to American culture? How does this hurt him later? Do you think Mah-mee was wrong to keep Kai so close to her? Why or why not?
- 5 Discuss Mah-mee's obsession with education and writing. How does Uncle Shim later maintain her traditions? Do you think it is important for Kai to remain in touch with his Chinese roots in this way? Do you think that it will ultimately help or hinder him?
- 6 After Mah-mee dies, Edna throws Kai out onto the San Francisco streets where he is beaten by other children. Why is Kai a target for these children? Why does Edna keep him out of the house? Why is Edna herself so violent toward Kai and Janie? Why doesn't their father intercede?
- 7 Kai speaks often of the difference between meals before and after Edna. How are traditional Chinese meals different than meals with Edna? Why is Edna so opposed to them eating Chinese food? Ultimately, what is the importance of food to Kai? How does he learn to love food and those who feed him?
- 8 Why does Edna send Kai to all the churches in the Panhandle? What does religion mean to the various people in his neighborhood and to the men at the Y? Do you think Kai ever really learns faith?

CHINA BOY

For updated event information, please visit

- 9 How does Toussaint's friendship change Kai? What does he offer Kai? Why is he willing to take Kai on as a friend when no one else is?
- 10 "Kids learned to make their own music, without radios. . . . Kids, even poor and unhappy ones, loved to sing, warbling the purity of expression, the unsullied and miraculous of a child's honesty" (p. 105). Were you surprised by this passage? Why does the author place this passage in the story? What other nonviolent expression exists in Kai's world?
- 11 Where does Kai find sanctuary? What do these sanctuaries come to mean to him? How, in the end, do they help him to survive?
- 12 When Tony asks Kai his first name, why does he reply, "china boy" (p. 220)? Why not tell his given name? How are names used and adapted in Chinese culture? In what ways does Kai relate more to the street name he is given by his enemies than to the name his mother gave him?
- 13 Why does Uncle Shim take Kai to the chess club? Why is it important for Kai to go? What is Uncle Shim trying to show him?
- 14 Kai considers the anger of boxers, and how they need this to be good and to win. Does Kai have this anger? Why? When he finally takes on Willie Mack, who and what else is he fighting for?
- 15 How does Kai's need for Uncle Shim conflict with the life he's created at the Y? In what ways are the men at the Y "chinese uncles" to Kai? How does Kai finally rationalize using violence, even when Uncle Shim tells him not to? How does Kai learn to reconcile these two very different forces in his life?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Questions are courtesy of Penguin Group (USA)

- 16 Why does Kai take on Willie? How is he proving himself to the other children in the Panhandle? What does he prove to himself? Do you think it was the right thing for Kai to do? Was there any way for Kai to end the violence toward him without resorting to violence himself?
- 17 How does the Y change Kai? What do his coaches there give him that he can't get at home? Besides the ability to fight, what does Kai learn from the art of boxing?
- 18 Have you known a Toussaint, a Mrs. LaRue, a Hector, an Angelina or a Tony in your life? What impact did they have on you? On your values? On your behaviors? On your selection of friends? Have you known an Edna, a Big Willie or a Devil? How did they impact your life? Have you ever been a Toussaint or a Tony? What would that mean for the person you helped? What would it mean for you?

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"San Francisco is possessed with its own atmosphere, proudly conscious of its untempered and eccentric internationalism. With grand self-recognition, it calls itself 'the City.' It is foreign domesticity and local grandeur. It is Paris, New York, Shanghai, Rome, and Rio de Janeiro captured within a square peninsula, seven by seven miles, framed by the vastness of the Pacific Ocean and the interior half-moon of satellite villages rolling on small hills with starlight vistas of Drake's Bay."

—From *China Boy*

SAN FRANCISCO NOVELS

More San Francisco Novels: A Selected List

If you enjoyed reading about life in 1950s San Francisco in *China Boy*, you might also enjoy these historical and contemporary novels, all set primarily in San Francisco:

Confessions of Madame Psyche: Memoirs and Letters of Mei-Li Murrow
by Dorothy Bryant

Free Enterprise: A Novel of Mary Ellen Pleasant by Michelle Cliff

1906: A Novel by James Dalessandro

The Seahorse Year by Stacey D'Erasmus

The Other Side of Haight by James Fadiman

The Monk Downstairs by Tim Farrington

Sister Noon by Karen Joy Fowler



The Confessions of Max Tivoli by Andrew Sean Greer

Ambrose Bierce and the Trey of Pearls by Oakley Hall

The Maltese Falcon by Dashiell Hammett

The Night Garden by Pamela Holm

The Dim Sum of All Things by Kim Wong Keltner

The Subterraneans by Jack Kerouac

Martin Eden by Jack London

Brown Glass Windows: A Novel by devorah major

Winners by Eric B. Martin

Tales of the City by Armistead Maupin

The Distance by Eddie Muller

Bone by Fae Myenne Ng

McTeague by Frank Norris

A Collection of Beauties at the Height of Their Popularity
by Whitney Otto

Fogtown by Peter Plate

The Ultimate Rush by Joe Quirk

The Golden Gate by Vikram Seth

You Can Say You Knew Me When by K.M. Soehnlein

On a Night Like This by Ellen Sussman

The Joy Luck Club by Amy Tan

Valencia by Michelle Tea

The Silver Cloud Café by Alfredo Veá

The Lost Daughter of Happiness by Geling Yan



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Hut Landon - Northern California Independent Booksellers Association
Laura Lent - Collection Development Manager, San Francisco Public Library
Dan Schiffrin - National Foundation for Jewish Culture
Marcia Schneider (Chair) - Chief of Communications, Collections and Adult Services, San Francisco Public Library
Oscar Villalon - Book Review Editor, *San Francisco Chronicle*

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