

**SYNOPSIS**

It is the month of August, 1964. Twelve-year-old Casey is moving into her Uncle Phil's house in San Francisco because Barney, her father, is injured and in the hospital and her mother died many years ago. Phil is a prominent Chinese-American lawyer in California while Barney is a ne'er-do-well professional gambler suffering a long streak of bad luck. Barney was beaten up and robbed after having, for once, won a bet on a horse. Phil is Barney's brother-in-law, but Casey considers Phil's family too stuffy and bourgeois. After fighting with Phil, his wife, and their children, Phil sends Casey to live with her slightly eccentric grandmother in Chinatown.

Although Casey is Chinese-American, she does not speak any Chinese. At first, Chinatown feels like a foreign country to Casey. Casey prefers to listen to pop music while Paw-Paw, her grandmother, likes the Chinese Hour on the radio. Paw-Paw sends Casey to attend a Catholic school which has many Chinese students and several hours of Chinese language classes each week. She does not get along with her classmates who make fun of her. Feeling miserable, she looks forward to the day when Barney will take her away from Chinatown. Occasionally, Barney calls her and promises to come get her when his luck changes for the better.

Paw-Paw works as a garment worker in a sewing-machine shop to supplement her social security income. Her apartment is poorly furnished and infested with cockroaches. One night, feeling lonely and in despair, Casey bursts into tears. Paw-Paw comforts her by telling her a tale about her jade owl which she wears as a charm hanging from a golden chain.

Jasmine and Peony are young owls trying to survive a drought in China. When a young man shoots their mother for food, the owls place a curse on his family. Soon, the family is starving. The young man begs the owls to forgive him but they mock him instead. Jasmine, however, pities the young man and asks her siblings to show mercy. Eventually, Jasmine takes the form of a human and becomes the wife of the young man. She brings great fortune to his family. Jasmine and her husband raise seven children. Although she loves her husband and children, after twenty years as a human, Jasmine longs to return to the jungle as an owl. As magically as she took the human form, she returns to her fowl state. Before leaving, however, she leaves her youngest son a jade charm. Paw-Paw tells Casey that she is a descendent of the Owl Spirit and the charm is the only thing that is passed through the generations.

The tale makes Casey feel good. However she wants Paw-Paw to tell her about her mother Jeanie since Barney almost never talks about his wife. Paw-Paw tells Casey that the two of them attended grade and high school together, and were the most popular couple in Chinatown. Paw-Paw

and Jeanie used to go see movies together and she suggests that she take Casey to the cinema. Casey enjoys watching the martial-arts movies with her grandmother although she has to read the English subtitles to understand the dialogue.

Paw-Paw introduces Casey to Mr. Jeh, who practices Tai-Chi, a meditative form of self-defense. Gilbert, Mr. Jeh's grandnephew, arrives. Casey nicknames him Pachinko. Gilbert works as a driver for a big-shot professional gambler and is a source of embarrassment for Mr. Jeh. However, Gilbert is generous and kind. His father, Sheridan, was Barney's childhood friend. Casey goes to look for Sheridan who works in a fast-food restaurant. From Sheridan, Casey learns that both Barney and Jeanie were very smart and successful in high school. When they graduated during the Depression, Barney could not find a job while Jeanie had no problems in finding employment. Sheridan explains that "American bosses are men who'll hire a pretty Chinese girl... but to hell with some uppity Chinese boy. Let him stay a houseboy." Barney took it very hard and eventually simply gave up trying to fit into mainstream society.

One Saturday, Casey finds a five dollar bill in her mailbox. She thinks Barney must have gotten one of his Chinatown friends to drop off some money. She goes off to buy some food at the delicatessen for her grandmother but is dismayed at her inability to communicate fully in Chinese with the shop assistants. She feels like a tourist in Chinatown. Returning home, Casey decides she wants to learn more about her heritage and culture. Paw-Paw teaches her how to use chopsticks and tells her that her Chinese name is Cheun Meih, which means "Taste of Spring." Casey tells herself that it is her real and true name.

The months in Chinatown pass quickly for Casey. Her Chinese improves and she can speak to the shop owners when she goes shopping. One day, Casey and Paw-Paw return to their apartment to find a burglar trying to steal her jade owl. A struggle ensues and the burglar hurts Paw-Paw. Casey is unable to see his face clearly but Paw-Paw apparently recognizes the burglar. Although she has to go to the hospital she refuses to call the police. Casey immediately suspects Pachinko to be the criminal. She and Mr. Jeh follow him. Pachinko leads them to the burglar — Barney. He has been trying to sell the stolen jade and has been hiding in Chinatown for some time. The revelation is a bitter disappointment to Casey.

None of Paw-Paw's children, including Phil, want to help her with her large hospital bill. Barney shows up and begs for forgiveness. Paw-Paw readily forgives him but Casey will not. She tells him that she does not want to see him again. Paw-Paw sells the jade charm to a museum to raise money for her medical bills. The story ends with a hint of reconciliation between Casey and Barney. Casey calls Barney and asks: "Hi, Barney. How ya been?"

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### BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lawrence Yep was born on June 14, 1948, to Thomas Gim Yep, a postal worker, and Franche Lee in San Francisco, California. Both his parents had difficulties growing up as minorities in a predominantly white environment. His mother grew up in West Virginia while his father lived in a white neighborhood of San Francisco. Lawrence however, grew up in a black neighborhood and attended a bilingual school in San Francisco's Chinatown. Until his high school years, he did not have significant contact with white American culture. But even while viewing American culture as an "outsider," he was always fascinated by it. From his early years, he found American popular culture, from novels and films to science fiction and comic books, captivating.

At eighteen, he sold his first science fiction story. After graduating with a B.A. from the University of California at Santa Cruz, he went on to receive a Ph.D. from State University of New York at Buffalo in 1975. He taught at San Jose City College in California and was a visiting lecturer in Asian American Studies in the late 1980s at the University of California, Berkeley.

Early in Yep's career, a friend suggested that he write a science fiction story for children. The result was *Sweetwater*, a story about people living in a half submerged city. His next novel, *Dragonwings*, was about a Chinese American who built a flying machine in the early 1900s. As Yep explains, in *Dragonwings*, he finally "confronted [his] own Chinese-American identity." In his research, he had found a Chinese American, Fung Joe Guey, who manufactured and flew a plane over Oakland, California in 1909 and he based *Dragonwings* on this event. Apart from two contemporary newspapers which mentioned the flight, little is known about this aviator. Yep incorporates historical events into *Dragonwings*, including the rioting in Chinatown by white laborers who blamed Chinese workers for "stealing" their jobs.

Yep is concerned about the use of history in children's literature. He wants to show history as not just dry facts but a part of one's culture and still very much relevant. As a writer who straddles several cultures, Yep feels he can effectively draw on them to create unique stories.

### CRITIC'S CORNER

Yep is generally praised for his imagination, his use of history in children's literature, the humor in his writing, and sensitive portraits of children struggling with daily concerns. He has won numerous awards. *Dragonwings* won a *New York Times* Outstanding Books of the Year in 1975, the Newbery Medal Honor Book from the American Library Association, Children's Book Award from the International Reading Association, *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Award, Friends of Children and Literature Award and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award. *Child of the Owl* also won a *New York Times* Outstanding Books of the Year in 1977. In addition it won the *Boston Globe-Horn Book* Award for Fiction, and the Jane Addams Children's Book Award in 1978.

### GENERAL OBJECTIVES

1. To define racism and victimization
2. To discuss societal expectations of the roles children play and the respect they pay to elders
3. To examine institutional racism in America
4. To gain a better understanding of the Great Depression

and its impact on minorities in America

5. To discuss how children and adults cope differently with anger, disappointments, and stress
6. To discuss how families resolve conflicts
7. To define the meaning of being successful in America
8. To discuss filial piety
9. To compare growing up in an ethnic urban neighborhood with childhood in the suburbs
10. To research addiction to gambling

### SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

1. To discuss how Casey's opinion of her father changes
2. To note how Casey makes excuses for Barney's lies
3. To note Lawrence Yep's use of colloquial and non-standard English and to place such language in context
4. To describe Casey's future as a young woman
5. To contrast Uncle Phil's family with Barney and Casey
6. To appreciate and point to examples of the author's use of humor in *Child of the Owl*
7. To discuss the role of the fairy tale within the context of a larger narrative
8. To note how Casey describes Chinatown
9. To note Paw-Paw's love for Casey
10. To discuss how Casey describes Uncle Phil

### MEANING STUDY

1. "He said he was going through his law books, but five will get you two that he was really studying his back issues of *Playboy*..." (p. 23).  
(Several times in Casey's narrative, she uses language gamblers commonly use to describe odds. In Casey's disrespectful description of her Uncle Phil for example, she estimates the odds that Phil is not really as studious as he appears. "Five will get you two" refers to the kind of odds commonly used to assess the payoff for bets at the horse racetrack. Because her father is a compulsive gambler, Casey naturally picks up much of his language and attitudes.)
2. "I think I got the sounds right, I didn't know the tones. It was easy for the other kids because it was a story to them, but to me the test meant I had to memorize a pattern of pictures" (p. 42).  
(Tonal pronunciation is an important aspect of the Chinese language. Each word has a tone and sometimes the difference in tone between words may seem slight to the untrained ear. In addition, Chinese is written with a series of ideograms. Each word is represented by an ideogram or character and there is not an alphabet system. Consequently, for Casey, being tested in Chinese means having to memorize a series of "pictures" which often seem to have no relationship to the meaning of the word.)
3. "And for the second brother, they fed his graveside soul and burned the special paper money so that his dream-soul would have plenty of money in the kingdom of the dead." (page 77).  
(In traditional Chinese culture, families supply the dead with sacrificial food and burn artificial money specially printed for this purpose. The Chinese buy this fake money using real money to "give" to departed relatives for their financial transactions in the afterlife. During

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ancient times, elaborate funerals often included the burial of household goods and luxuries for the consumption by the dead. The Chinese invented paper money and naturally, they extended the concept to their kingdom of the dead as well.)

4. "The only thing vaguely Oriental that I saw in the window were the Japanese kimonos and geisha dolls they sold" (p. 89).

(In the souvenir shops of Chinatown, Paw-Paw and Casey found few things of Chinese origin. There were things like nude playing cards, knives, solar-powered fans, and other novelties. In the 1950s, 1960s and much of the 1970s, the United States was fighting a cold war with Communist China and the import of goods from China was forbidden. During the 1950s and early 1960s, Hong Kong and Taiwan were not the manufacturing centers they are now. Thus there were indeed few truly Asian goods to sell to tourists. Nonetheless, souvenir shops in Chinatown need to sell Asian souvenirs—thus, the kimonos and geisha dolls. Implicitly, the author suggests that the American tourist lumps all things Asian together, unable to differentiate between Japanese and Chinese. In addition, these Japanese souvenirs suggest that Americans want to buy things which caricaturize Asians, and in particular, Asian women. The author's description of the window display thus becomes not simply a critique of the shop owner but of the American tourist who exoticizes the Orient.)

5. "And we practiced it until I could sing my own name. My first name. My real name. My true name." (p. 143).

(During a pivotal moment in the novel, Casey learns of her Chinese name and comes to appreciate her Chinese heritage. For the author, the name as identity is a recurring theme. Uncle Phil is Phil the Pill because he seems always uptight. Tallulah is Booger because she once picked her nose in public. At first, Casey saw herself as more American than Asian. Chinatown was as alien to her as a foreign country. Slowly, as she learns about her family history and heritage, she comes to value her Chinese-American background. This realization of her culture comes when she becomes aware that Casey is not her real name, or at least not her first name. By repeatedly pronouncing her name, she at last reaffirms herself and her birthright.)

6. Before earthquake and fire, this used be some tough, fun place. All Tong men used come here, and there be some gambling games going on and girls singing.... Almost all men in Chinatown. Very few women (p. 158).

(Before the Great Earthquake of 1906, San Francisco's Chinatown used to be a much rougher neighborhood. The various Chinese Exclusion Acts of 1882, 1888, 1892, and 1924 restricted the number of immigrants from Asia. Many whites saw Asian immigrants as a potential threat to their job security because they feared the immigrants would work for less money. They petitioned Congress to pass restrictive immigration laws. Anti-Chinese immigration laws passed by Congress made it nearly impossible for Chinese women to come to the United States and difficult for Chinese men to settle permanently in America as well. Chinese immigrants could not obtain citizenship papers nor in many states

legally marry outside their race. Consequently, San Francisco's Chinatown had few women, and many of them who ended up there became prostitutes. Mr. Jeh uses the word "Tong" which means "Chinese" in Cantonese.)

7. And the whole street filled with queues that men cut off...Mr. Jeh pointed out other spots in Chinatown that reached back into the past...where Sun Yatsen stayed to speak of revolutions (pp. 163-4).

(The Manchus, nomads from a region north of China, conquered China in 1644 and required all Chinese men to wear a pigtail or queue as a pledge of allegiance to the Manchu rulers. The Manchus founded the Qing Dynasty and ruled China until they were overthrown in 1911 by Chinese revolutionaries advocating a republic. Some of the Chinese hated the Manchus and cutting off the queue became a political act of rebellion. However, before 1911, many of the Chinese who were already in the U.S. refused to cut their hair for fear of persecution should they need to return to China. Sun Yatsen, a Chinese American, brought revolutionary ideas back to China and helped to overthrow the Manchus. He is considered the father of the Chinese Republic although he eventually lost power to warlords and generals. Mr. Jeh refers to the moment in 1911 during his childhood when Chinatown became aware that the Qing Dynasty had been overthrown. The Chinese celebrated with fireworks and cut their pigtails off en masse.)

8. Paw-Paw works as a seamstress in a clothing factory.

(Many immigrants, regardless of their level of education achieved in their country of origin, have to take menial jobs upon arriving in America. The language barrier remains a difficult obstacle. Without fluency in English, immigrants cannot easily take up jobs outside of their immigrant community, and if they do, are bound to poorly-paying jobs. Paw-Paw worked for many years as a maid outside Chinatown. Upon her "retirement," she is still required to work in a factory to supplement her social security. At the factory she is paid piecemeal for her work. Casey adds that since many of these immigrants do not speak English, they are unaware of minimum wage laws and employers take advantage of them.)

### COMPREHENSION STUDY

Answer these questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgement is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages from the work.

#### Questions 1-4 Literal Level

1. In what way does Casey give nicknames to people she meets?

(Casey often gives nicknames to people she does not like. Uncle Phil becomes Phil the Pill because he either acts like he needs a pill to calm down or he sounds like a real "downer." Annette is Hedgehog because she has pink curlers on her head to make her hair look curly and beautiful. To Casey, Annette seems haughty and spoiled. Casey calls Gilbert a Pachinko because he seems to her a cross between the pachukes she knew in Stockton and a Chinese kid. A Pachinko is also a Japanese pinball-type gambling game. In Japan, pachinko parlors are sometimes owned by disreputable

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people. At first, Gilbert seems entirely unsavory to Casey. Slowly however, Casey learns that Gilbert is a kind person and first impressions are not always valid.)

2. Why does Casey ask Booger about the religious figurines in Chinatown?

(Casey is curious about the Eight Immortals, gods in Chinese mythology. Casey's father, Barney, raised her "to be an American" and never talked much about her heritage. However, Casey wants to know about the Chinese cultural icons she encounters in Chinatown. But she annoys Booger when she asks her about them. Although Booger speaks Chinese, she refuses to accept or be interested in her cultural past and background. Instead Booger seems only interested in comics, boys, fashion, the Beatles, and losing weight. Although Casey is bothered that Booger tries to remove herself from her own heritage, she is afraid to tell her that. This episode between Casey and Booger illustrates their difficulties in conforming or fitting into mainstream white American culture.)

3. Why is Paw-Paw quietly reflective rather than critical of Casey after finding Casey asleep in the apartment with the stove turned on?

(When Paw-Paw walks into the apartment to find Casey asleep and a pot of burnt rice on the stove and the oven door opened, she thinks Casey has suffocated because of a gas leak. Casey expects her grandmother to be angry and to hit or yell at her. She assumes that Paw-Paw's "silent treatment" is part of this punishment. But Paw-Paw is not trying to punish her. She is simply quietly thankful that nothing other than burn marks on the pot resulted from Casey's mistake. She is glad that nothing drastic has happened.)

4. Describe some of the racial discrimination experienced by Asians.

(In *Child of the Owl*, the author mentions several examples of racial discrimination. Apart from the Chinese Exclusion Acts passed by Congress and mentioned indirectly by the author, Barney reveals that during the Great Depression, employers did not hire Chinese or blacks, keeping job openings for whites. Even during the sixties, some landlords were reluctant to rent to Asians, therefore confining many Chinese to Chinatown where they had to pay high rents for small apartments. But Barney considers his situation to be much better than what his father had to experience. During the nineteenth and early years of the twentieth century, white Americans rioted in San Francisco's Chinatown and lynching and beating of Asians was not uncommon.)

### Questions 5-6 Interpretative Level

5. Why does Gilbert not tell Casey and Mr. Jeh that Barney is actually the real thief?

(When the jade charm is stolen, Casey and Mr. Jeh immediately suspect Gilbert. After all, Gilbert is someone who has connections with the criminal underworld. After secretly following him for a while, Gilbert leads them directly to Barney who has been in hiding. Casey is crushed to learn that her father is the real thief. Gilbert hid this fact from Mr. Jeh and Casey so that they would not be disappointed. Gilbert turns out to be a considerate and kind person who sacrifices many things to help his

friends and family. Casey learns that it is Gilbert who has been secretly leaving money in Paw-Paw's mailbox. Her disappointment at Barney is expressed in her angry retort to her father: "That's a lie, Barney. All your life you've been telling yourself lies. And you've been telling me lies.")

6. What is the moral of the tale of the Owl Spirit as told by Paw-Paw?

(Paw-Paw tells the story of the Owl Spirit to illustrate the meaning of filial piety. Respecting and honoring one's parents and ancestors is an important characteristic of traditional Chinese culture. The author freely admits in an interview that owls have no special significance in Chinese history and the Owl Spirit tale springs purely from his imagination. However, the tale incorporates many elements from traditional Chinese culture and mythology. The sons of the village selling themselves into slavery or cutting flesh from their bodies to feed their parents are typical elements in some traditional Chinese tales. Jasmine's loyalty to both her husband and her family reflects what is valued in Chinese culture. In telling the tale therefore, Paw-Paw instills in Casey not just the meaning of loyalty and filial piety but also a sense of her heritage and culture.)

### Questions 7-8 Critical Level

7. How does Casey see the world of the Chinese in America?

(Casey's view of the Chinese around her evolves in the year she spends away from Barney. Prior to leaving Barney, Casey lived a nomadic life with her father, meeting people of all races. However when Barney is injured she is sent first to live with Uncle Phil and later with her grandmother in Chinatown. For Casey, Uncle Phil represents the second or third generation of Asian immigrants who have "made it" and want to fit into bourgeois white America. Uncle Phil is a prosperous and well-known lawyer and his daughter Annette is the president of her sorority at the University of California in Berkeley. They represent Chinese Americans who have abandoned their "Asian family values." Phil's refusal to financially support his injured mother exemplifies a rejection of the tenet of filial piety in "Asian values." On the other end of this spectrum are the Chinese immigrants who are not successful in America. These are the poor immigrants who do not speak English or are uneducated and cannot climb out of their poverty. Casey comes to understand this second group and is annoyed at those Chinese who reject their heritage.)

8. Explain why the author shows some of the Chinese immigrants as set in their ways, and unable to successfully adapt to a new country.

(Through Casey, the author explains that some of the immigrants are stuck in their environment because they do not speak English. Without a knowledge of English, they could not get good jobs nor live outside Chinatown. In addition, some landlords outside Chinatown still did not want to rent to Asians. Hence they are doomed to menial jobs in Chinatown, never elevating themselves above their economic and social status. Living in an enclosed world, these Chinese immigrants do not even know about minimum wage laws. The author thus pro-

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*vides a critical insight about the lives of many immigrants to the United States. Rather than blaming the immigrants for their condition as mainstream America might tend to do, the author shows that the immigrants are victims also. In the scene where Casey walks out after confronting the store owner, she realizes that she, rather than the stubborn older woman, is the intruder in Chinatown. While the older woman need never change because she is stuck in Chinatown, Casey must adapt to live in her grandmother's neighborhood.)*

### Questions 9–11 Creative Level

9. Create a role for a social worker who visits Casey at her home in Chinatown. How would this person help Casey deal with problems she has with her father and her environment?
10. Write a skit dramatizing the difficulties of growing up as a minority in mainstream American culture. Describe some of the experiences of this person. What kind of societal expectations would this minority have to face? How would he or she cope with these expectations?
11. Write a prologue chapter featuring Barney and Jeanie as a young couple growing up in San Francisco's Chinatown during the 1930s. How would their experience be similar or different to what Casey is experiencing? How is Barney's adulthood shaped by his childhood?

### Literary Terms and Language

Students should be aware of the following literary terms and language. The notes below may help them better understand the work.

**First person narrative** occurs when the protagonist tells the story from his or her point of view using the first person pronoun. Journals, confessions, and diaries are examples of texts written from the first person point of view. Such narratives provide a very personalized and opinionated account of events. In *Child of the Owl*, we can better understand how Casey feels and what she thinks of people around her because the story is told from her point of view. With first person narratives, the reader often sympathizes with the narrator.

**Language** The author adopts an informal colloquial style with which young readers feel comfortable. In addition, the author uses Cantonese (one of the many dialects of Chinese) in a non-intrusive manner. The author usually translates these words into English, either by context or literally. Furthermore, Casey's language is colorful and makes poignant and funny observations about daily life and people around her.

**Historical milieu** is the setting of events within a time period. The 1960s saw the passing of legislation which made it illegal for landlords to refuse to rent to non-whites. Casey alludes to the fact that some landlords outside Chinatown still refuse to rent to Chinese. But she adds that the situation is changing and more landlords are now more fair-minded. There are several other events to note which are mentioned by the author. The great Earthquake of 1906 destroyed San Francisco, including the homes of many people in Chinatown. White San Franciscans saw the Chinese workers as a threat to their economic and job security and reacted violently, rioting in Chinatown. The various Chinese Exclusion

Acts passed by Congress from 1892 to 1924 prevented Chinese women from coming to America. Thus Chinatown in those years was populated by many lonely men. In addition, the author mentions both the Republican Revolution of 1911 which overthrew the Manchu rulers and the Communist takeover of China in 1949 which supposedly made Mr. Jeh poorer.

## ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

### Psychology

1. Discuss the problems associated with isolation and loneliness. How does Casey feel alienated? How does she react to it? Suggest possible solutions.
2. Barney tells Casey that he will quit gambling and join Gamblers Anonymous. Research how Gamblers Anonymous helps treat people addicted to gambling.

### Art

1. Research how the ancient Chinese create objects of art using jade stone. Create a soap sculpture of an owl.
2. Create illustrations for *Child of the Owl*. What do you imagine Casey and Paw-Paw look like?

### Science and Health

1. Investigate why older people need a longer time to heal broken bones. Research the effects of osteoporosis on the human body.
2. Although Booger is still a young girl, she seems obsessed with her body weight. Research anorexia and bulimia, illnesses which affect many young people today.

### Language Arts

1. Keep a personal journal detailing your daily activities. Report on your relationship with your family members and friends. What would you add to the journal about them? What would you leave out of the journal?
2. Compose a definition of family. Compare your definition with that written by others in the class. Do different cultures have different definitions of family?
3. Create a list of Chinese words which appear in *Child of the Owl*. How well do they work in the context of the narrative? Do they disrupt the flow or your understanding of the story? Why or why not?

### Mathematics and Social Science

1. What is the science of demographics? Take a look at the latest national census. What percentage of the population is Asian or Pacific Islander? What percentage is above the age of sixty-five? How do you expect the changing demographics to affect your future?
2. Investigate the term "socialized medicine." How is health care an important issue for families? Investigate why Paw-Paw's hospital bill is exorbitant. How does Barney pay for his hospital bill?

### Multimedia

1. Review a movie which features Asian Americans in the United States (e.g., *Joy Luck Club*, *Eat a Bowl of Tea*). Present an oral report about the movie.
2. Interview an older member of your community with a video camera. Create a list of questions to ask him or her. Present this video to the class.

## STUDENT INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITIES

1. Draw a time line from August 1964 to July 1965 depicting the major decisions made by Barney and Casey.

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Discuss how their decisions lead to Casey's climactic resolution.

2. Create an oral history project which records the older members of your family reminiscing about an event or period before you were born.
3. In a small group, discuss the meaning of filial piety. Is this predominantly an Asian value?
4. Research some of the special needs older people have. What kinds of health problems can impede their daily activities?
5. Write an obituary for Casey's mother. What kind of life did she lead?
6. Invite a retiree from your community to talk to your class. What can you learn from an older member of your community?
7. Compose a scene in which Uncle Phil hears about how he has been depicted in *Child of the Owl*. How would he defend himself?
8. Discuss the character of Gilbert. What is his role in this story? How does the reader's perception of him change?

### ALTERNATE ASSESSMENT

1. List examples of how Paw-Paw sacrifices for her family.
2. Throughout most of the story, Casey believes the lies and excuses her father tells her. Discuss how her opinion of him changes. Describe the confrontation she has with him and Paw-Paw. Do you think they will reconcile?
3. Make a list of adjectives which describe each of the following characters: Casey, Barney, Uncle Phil, and Booger.

### OTHER WORKS BY LAURENCE YEP

*Sweetwater* (1973)  
*Dragonwings* (1975)  
*Seademons: A Novel* (1977)  
*Sea Glass* (1979)  
*Kind Hearts and Gentle Monsters* (1982)  
*The Mark Twain Murders* (1982)  
*Dragon of the Lost Sea* (1982)  
*Liar, Liar* (1983)  
*The Serpent's Children* (1984)  
*The Tom Sawyer Fires* (1984)  
*Dragon Steel* (1985)  
*Shadow Lord* (1985)  
*Mountain Light* (1985)  
*Monster Makers, Inc.* (1986)  
*The Curse of the Squirrel* (1987)  
*Dragon Cauldron* (1990)

### RELATED READING

Sharon Hart's *Addy: A Visit from Great-Grandma*  
Lee Bennett Hopkins's *Mama*  
Maxine Hong Kingston's *China Men and Woman Warrior*  
Jacqueline Roy's *Soul Daddy*  
Robert Kimmel Smith's *The War with Grandpa*  
Amy Tan's *Joy Luck Club*

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pp. 245-252.  
*Contemporary Literary Criticism*, Volume 35. Detroit: Gale, 1985.  
*Washington Post Book Review*. May 1, 1977. p.E1ff

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### VOCABULARY TEST

Using the terms below, complete each citation or description with one or more details from *Child of the Owl*.

barnacles	fences	inquisitiveness	pompous-looking	swagger
chassis	glistening	linoleum	queue	Tai Chi
fedora	immense	pomaded	seamy	umpteenth

1. "That's Mr. Jeh. He's doing \_\_\_\_\_, the Grand Ultimate Exercises."
2. His heavily \_\_\_\_\_ hair swept back and up and was arranged into winglike sides.
3. He took the corner on two wheels, the \_\_\_\_\_ slamming back down as he turned up the street.
4. Gilbert moved in a slouching \_\_\_\_\_ like Errol Flynn trying to walk after getting kicked in the gut.
5. Only Phil took it out on poor Booger, saying it was her great-aunt's fault for not lighting the apartments better and for putting \_\_\_\_\_ over the floor instead of carpets.
6. "Suddenly this man, he stood up and shout 'Up Revolution' and he started sawing off his \_\_\_\_\_ with his penknife."
7. Describing Mr. Fong who trades in stolen goods, Mr Jeh says: "He's one of the biggest \_\_\_\_\_ in Chinatown."
8. I struck at the reflection with my hands and saw how the water dripped, \_\_\_\_\_ from the tips, washing away the blood.
9. I used to get mad at people being so nosy. But many of the people in Chinatown easily accepted that kind of \_\_\_\_\_ between friends and kin.
10. Right now was the drowsy time when the shops unlocked their doors one by one and slid back their folding iron fences — opening to the sunlight like \_\_\_\_\_ opening up to the first wash of the sea.
11. The driver, a fat, \_\_\_\_\_ businessman, hit the brakes, coming to a screeching halt.
12. His luck stalled. I'd heard that excuse \_\_\_\_\_ million times.
13. Phil took a little breath and squared his shoulders. "I have no doubt that Barney lets you watch that \_\_\_\_\_ violence."
14. He wore rimless glasses and a funny little straw hat shaped like a \_\_\_\_\_.
15. She gripped my fingers tightly in her hand for a moment with what seemed like an \_\_\_\_\_ strength.

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**COMPREHENSION TEST A**

**Part I: Matching (30 points)**

Match the following descriptions with characters. Choose your answers from the list below. You may use some answers more than once and some not at all.

- |            |             |            |            |           |
|------------|-------------|------------|------------|-----------|
| A. Casey   | D. Booger   | F. Mr. Jeh | H. Jeanie  | J. Barney |
| B. Phil    | E. Sheridan | G. Gilbert | I. Annette | K. Ethel  |
| C. Paw-Paw |             |            |            |           |

- \_\_\_ 1. is a lawyer in California.
- \_\_\_ 2. works as a driver for a professional gambler.
- \_\_\_ 3. is beat up and injured after winning a bet on a horse.
- \_\_\_ 4. is a member of the girls' drum corp.
- \_\_\_ 5. asks her grandmother what her real first name is.
- \_\_\_ 6. is Casey's cousin who attends college at Berkeley.
- \_\_\_ 7. steals Paw-Paw's jade charm.
- \_\_\_ 8. is Barney's childhood friend and now works in a fast food restaurant.
- \_\_\_ 9. practices Tai-Chi.
- \_\_\_ 10. leads Mr. Jeh, Booger, and Casey right to the thief who stole the jade charm.
- \_\_\_ 11. is on the run from his creditors.
- \_\_\_ 12. works in a factory sewing clothes.
- \_\_\_ 13. wants to learn about her Chinese heritage
- \_\_\_ 14. is Casey's mother who died when Casey was still very young.
- \_\_\_ 15. Is Casey's aunt.

**Part II: Short Answer (20 points)**

Write a word or phrase to complete each statement.

- 1. The story opens with Casey \_\_\_\_\_.
- 2. Casey calls her uncle Phil the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 3. Casey's grandmother lives in \_\_\_\_\_.
- 4. Barney never comes to pick up \_\_\_\_\_.
- 5. Casey learns about Owl Spirit from \_\_\_\_\_.
- 6. At a fast food restaurant, Casey befriends \_\_\_\_\_.
- 7. At the end of the story, Barney tells Casey he'll get treatment at \_\_\_\_\_.
- 8. Gilbert did not want to tell Casey who the real thief is because he did not want to \_\_\_\_\_.
- 9. The story ends with \_\_\_\_\_.
- 10. Paw-Paw thinks Casey is dead when she walks into her apartment and finds \_\_\_\_\_.



## CHILD OF THE OWL

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements as either **T** for true or **F** if any part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. Barney takes Casey to New York.
- \_\_\_ 2. Paw-Paw works hard to support her family.
- \_\_\_ 3. Barney could not find work and turns to gambling.
- \_\_\_ 4. Casey learns to like Chinatown.
- \_\_\_ 5. Barney makes promises that he always keeps.
- \_\_\_ 6. Casey is curious about the Chinese deities.
- \_\_\_ 7. Uncle Phil is proud of his accomplishments.
- \_\_\_ 8. Paw-Paw is injured by the robber.
- \_\_\_ 9. Gilbert is not as dangerous as he looks.
- \_\_\_ 10. Uncle Phil wants to pay Paw-Paw's medical bills.

### Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare and contrast Casey and Booger.
2. In what ways have Uncle Phil and his family abandoned their Chinese heritage?
3. Discuss how Casey matures during her stay in Chinatown.

## CHILD OF THE OWL

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Use a word or phrase from the lettered list to identify each of the people referred to in the boldfaced words below. You may use some answers more than once.

- |             |            |            |               |
|-------------|------------|------------|---------------|
| A. Paw–Paw  | C. Gilbert | E. Jasmine | G. Uncle Phil |
| B. Sheridan | D. Booger  | F. Barney  |               |

- \_\_\_ 1. **She** tells Casey about the origins of the jade owl charm.
- \_\_\_ 2. Although she apparently saw the **robber**, she won't tell Casey who it is.
- \_\_\_ 3. Casey nicknames **him** Pachinko.
- \_\_\_ 4. **He** is addicted to gambling.
- \_\_\_ 5. **He** was a former district president of the California Bar Association.
- \_\_\_ 6. **She** saves a little money to give money to her children regularly.
- \_\_\_ 7. **His** son Gilbert works as a driver for a professional gambler.
- \_\_\_ 8. **She** wants Casey to call her Talia.
- \_\_\_ 9. The **owl** who takes a human form and marries a villager.
- \_\_\_ 10. **She** works in a clothing factory.

#### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Underline an answer to complete each statement below.

1. Barney moves around (New York, Texas, Arizona, California) to avoid his creditors and to raise funds to be with his daughter again.
2. Paw–Paw sends Casey to (attend a Catholic school, work in a factory, go with Barney, stay with Phil).
3. Booger enjoys talking (in Chinese, about fashion, about her parents, about the Eight Immortals).
4. Gilbert is (Mr. Jeh's grand–nephew, Sheridan's brother, Casey's cousin, Booger's brother).
5. Casey runs into problems (at the bus station, with Sheridan, with the Chinese shopkeepers, at the movies).
6. Gilbert won't (tell Mr. Jeh and Casey who stole the jade charm, give money to Casey and Paw–Paw, go see Jefferson Airplane perform, wear a pomaded hairdo).
7. Mr. Jeh works in a (factory, post–office, restaurant, community center).
8. To raise money, Paw–Paw sells her jade charm to (Mr. Jeh, Gilbert, a museum, a rich art collector).
9. Sheridan is Barney's (enemy, brother, childhood friend, cousin).
10. Booger's rich great–aunt named her (Talia, Booger, Tallulah Bankhead, Frenchie).

## CHILD OF THE OWL

### Part III: Identification (20 points)

Place an X by any statement that is true of Casey

- 1. refuses to attend school.
- 2. learns to speak and write in Chinese.
- 3. finds out who stole the jade charm.
- 4. calls Booger Talia.
- 5. enjoys eating a hamburger now and then.
- 6. moves out of Uncle Phil's house.
- 7. befriends Gilbert at the end of the story.
- 8. is injured by an unknown robber.
- 9. travels around California with her father.
- 10. is obsessed with her weight.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences

1. Do you think Casey and Barney will eventually reconcile? Why or why not?
2. Explain how people cope with stress. How does Casey deal with difficulties in her life? How does Barney deal with his problems?
3. In what way is Casey typical of young people you know? In what way is she not typical?

## CHILD OF THE OWL

### ANSWER KEY

#### Vocabulary Test

- |               |                     |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1. Tai Chi    | 9. inquisitiveness  |
| 2. pomaded    | 10. barnacles       |
| 3. chassis    | 11. pompous-looking |
| 4. swagger    | 12. umpteen         |
| 5. linoleum   | 13. seamy           |
| 6. queue      | 14. fedora          |
| 7. fences     | 15. immense         |
| 8. glistening |                     |

#### COMPREHENSION TEST A

##### Part I: Matching (30 points)

- |      |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. B | 6. I  | 11. J |
| 2. G | 7. J  | 12. C |
| 3. J | 8. E  | 13. A |
| 4. D | 9. F  | 14. H |
| 5. A | 10. G | 15. K |

##### Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

- visiting her father in the hospital
- Pill
- Chinatown
- Casey
- Paw-Paw
- Booger (Sheridan is also an acceptable answer).
- Gamblers Anonymous
- disappoint her
- Casey talking in a friendly tone with Barney over the phone
- Casey asleep and the gas stove on

##### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T  |
| 2. T | 7. T  |
| 3. T | 8. T  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. F | 10. F |

##### Part IV Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

#### COMPREHENSION TEST B

##### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. A  |
| 2. F | 7. B  |
| 3. C | 8. D  |
| 4. F | 9. E  |
| 5. G | 10. A |

##### Part II: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- California
- attend a Catholic school
- about fashion
- Mr. Jeh's grand-nephew
- with the Chinese shopkeepers
- tell Mr. Jeh and Casey who stole the jade charm
- restaurant
- a museum
- childhood friend
- Tallulah Bankhead

##### Part III: Identification (20 points)

- |      |      |
|------|------|
| 1.   | 6. X |
| 2. X | 7. X |
| 3. X | 8.   |
| 4. X | 9. X |
| 5. X | 10.  |

##### Part IV Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.

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