

# Homesick - My Own Story

by Jean Fritz

Illustrated by Margot Tomes

## Classroom Favorites

Teacher's Guide by Kathleen Greenholdt

A Perma-Bound Production

### Synopsis

Ten-year-old Jean was born in China, where her American parents moved to work with the YMCA. She longs to go to America to live, because she feels that the United States is her real homeland. She receives letters from her grandmother, and the two look forward to the day they will meet.

In Hankow, China, Jean keeps herself occupied by taking lessons at the British School, and later at home, as well as by playing with her best friend Andrea Hull and her nanny Lin Nai-Nai.

The China Jean knows, however, is ridden with internal strife as the new democratic government struggles against Communist aggressors. Additionally, Jean and her family experience their own difficulties, especially when Jean's new baby sister dies.

Despite the Chinese uprisings — many of which are directed at foreigners — Jean's family is able to leave for America when planned. As Jean leaves China forever, she realizes that she is also leaving behind a very special part of herself.

In America, though, when she finally meets her grandparents, she feels suddenly very much at home. And, while the adjustment to the new culture is difficult at first, Jean is very proud to be American.

### Biographical Sketch

Jean (Guttery) Fritz was born in Hankow, China, on November 16, 1915. She received a bachelor's degree from Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts, in 1937, and completed graduate work at Columbia University. She lives in Dobbs Ferry, New York.

In addition to her work as a children's author, Ms. Fritz has worked in a number of other capacities, including children's librarian, *New York Times* book reviewer, and university professor.

The author has earned many honors, including the following: *New York Times* Outstanding Book of the Year (*And Then What Happened, Paul Revere?*, 1973; *Why Don't You Get A Horse, Sam Adams?*, 1974; *Where Was Patrick Henry On The 29th of May?*, 1975; and *What's The Big Idea, Ben Franklin?*, 1976), *Boston Globe-Horn Book* honor for fiction (*Will You Sign Here, John Hancock?*, 1976, and *Stonewall*, 1979), Children's Book Guild Non-Fiction Award for "total body of creative writing" (1978), and American Book Award finalist (*Where Do You Think You're Going, Christopher Columbus?*, 1981, and *Traitor: The Case of Benedict Arnold*, 1982).

### Critic's Corner

*Homesick - My Own Story* was published in 1982. The book presents an entertaining autobiographical sketch of the author's early life in Hankow, China, and her eventual move to the United States, home of her parents. The story also shows a child's perspective of the Chinese revolution. The book won the Christopher Award and received starred reviews from *Booklist* and *School Library Journal*.

Following are author insights that shed light on the story:

"... Indeed, I think it is because I was so far away that I developed a homesickness that made me want to embrace not just a given part of America at a given time but the whole of it. No one is more patriotic than the one separated from his [or her] country; no one is as eager to find roots as the person who has been uprooted. . ."

"In the international community where we lived, 500 miles up the Yangtse River, my friends and classmates represented many countries — German, English, Italian, Russian, as well as American; going into their homes, celebrating their holidays with them, I had a miniature exposure to a wide world. I could see the different lifestyles of each country and enjoy them, yet I knew with the passionate chauvinism of an expatriated child that America was best. My friends, of course, were just as passionate about their loyalties. And I am afraid that we all felt fortunate that we were not Chinese because in those days to be Chinese might mean that you were impoverished to a degree that was hard to conceive even when the evidence was before your eyes. Every day as I walked to the British school that I attended, I passed lines of ragged, miserable, sick, filthy, often monstrously deformed beggars and I remember the confusion of emotion that never failed to sweep over me — pity, shame, repulsion, helplessness, wonder that human beings in such a condition could still be human beings, but always I ended up feeling guilty but lucky. Supremely lucky to be an American. Such a scene could never take place in America because there were two things I knew with certainty: America was the land of opportunity and America was moral."

(From *Something About The Author 29*, Gale, 1982)

### General Objectives

1. To learn about the history of China
2. To understand what it means to have pride in one's country
3. To develop respect for other cultures

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand the motivations of the character Jean
2. To learn about Jean's attitudes toward America and China
3. To see how Jean matures with the move to America

## Meaning Study

coolies, p. 9 - Chinese unskilled laborers  
junks, p. 9 - Chinese sailing ships with flat bottoms  
amah, p. 14 - nursemaid  
pagodas, p. 18 - Buddhist temples  
consulate, p. 20 - the official place where Americans went for assistance from or protection by the U.S. government  
sampan, p. 23 - Chinese boats with flat bottoms  
rickshas, p. 33 - Two-wheeled carriages pulled by coolies  
warlord, p. 43 - military leaders who fought to gain control of China  
agitators, p. 53 - people who caused the uprisings  
bobbed, p. 56 - a type of non-layered short haircut popular among American women during the 1920's  
plane trees, p. 78 - tall trees with spreading branches and broad leaves  
socks, p. 78 - tube-shaped, open-ended windsocks for showing wind direction  
flappers, p. 108 - women in the 1920's who exhibited bold behavior and wore unconventional styles  
marcelled, p. 148 - having artificially-created deep waves

## Class Discussion Questions

1. In what historical context is the China in the story set?  
(See back of book for further details: China was ruled by emperors and empresses for centuries until Western nations took control and divided the country into concessions. A revolution took place in 1911, instigated by a man named Sun Yat-sen, who became president of the new democratic Republic of China in 1912. [Jean's parents went to China in 1913.] However, Sun Yat-sen required military assistance to succeed as ruler, and he made a deal with Yuan Shih-k'ai, a general, to overthrow the imperial government. In return for his help, Yuan became president. But he wanted to be emperor, and he did not help advance Sun's goals. Warlords fought with one another after Yuan's death, and Sun tried again to unite the country under the Nationalist Party banner. He died in 1925, and Chiang Kai-shek succeeded him as Nationalist Party head. In 1927 Chiang established Nanking as the capital of China. Mao Tse-tung, who had been organizing a Communist revolt since before the Nationalist Party took control, continued to build his forces and seized power from Chiang Kai-shek twenty-two years later. Mao was the first leader of what we know today as the People's Republic of China.)
2. Describe the area of China where Jean lives and how her family came to live there.  
(Jean lives in the French concession in Hankow, China. Foreign nations established concessions in China, whereby they ruled particular areas. There were also British, Japanese, Russian, and German concessions, although the latter two were returned to the Chinese. The buildings are neat and orderly in the concessions, compared to rickety structures on crowded streets in the Chinese part of Hankow. Jean and her family are among the wealthier people in the city, evident by the fact that they have servants. Jean's parents moved to China as missionaries, and her father is the director of the YMCA.)
3. Why does Jean want to go to America?  
(She knows that her parents are Americans, and she spends much time living American habits and visiting with American people in China. She receives letters from her grandmother in Washington, Pennsylvania, and the two look forward to the day they will meet. She wishes her name were "Marjorie," which sounds more American to her. Also, she knows that she is considered a "foreign devil" by the native Chinese who resent her presence and affluence in their impoverished country. She knows that her roots are in America, and she wants to find them.)
4. Explain Jean's relationship with the little Chinese boy down by the Yangtse River.  
(Even at a young age, the boy identifies her as a "foreign devil." After she gives him an orange, he calls her "American friend." However, when he becomes older, he again calls her "foreign devil," even though he recognizes her as the girl who once was his benefactor. The scenario is representative of the fact that the Chinese wanted their own land, and even a kindly foreign ruler was not as acceptable as self-government.)
5. How do you know that Jean is proud of her Chinese heritage?  
(When she is still in China she admires the beauty of the land and the river. She also has great respect for her friends, such as Lin Nai-Nai. After she leaves China, she stands up against prejudices against the Chinese people. For example, two little girls want to know if Chinese people (including Jean) eat rats. And, when a boy at school calls Chinese people "Chinks" and "Chinamen," Jean angrily corrects his derogatory remarks.)
6. How does Jean feel when her baby sister dies?  
(She is very sad, and she feels angry that she is supposed to behave well during the whole ordeal. She had imagined what it would be like to watch Miriam grow, and to tell her not to worry too much about always being good. She felt that she needed Miriam to understand that it is more important to be oneself than to worry about being perfect.)
7. Describe Jean's relationship with Andrea Hull.  
(Andrea is a year older than Jean, and she is also more worldly. Jean somehow always feels less "significant" around Andrea, who always knows things before Jean does. For example, Andrea knew how babies are made before Jean did, and Andrea wore silk stockings before Jean wore them. Jean feels that Andrea knows how to "get ready for life" and her career (on the stage) while Jean does not. Jean is wrong, however, since she is preparing herself to become a writer by reading and writing letters.)
8. Explain in what ways Jean changes from the time she leaves Hankow to the time she settles in the United States.  
(Jean begins to mature. For example, she begins to wear silk stockings and to take an interest in boys. Also, Jean begins to clearly see how much China is a part of her. Sometimes, we cannot tell how much we love something until we leave it. Jean experiences this feeling when she opens the embroidered gift from Lin Nai-Nai.)
9. How does Jean "fit in" in Washington, Pennsylvania?  
(Her relatives accept her readily and openly. However, children make fun of Jean's Chinese past. They are quick to joke about that which they do not understand. Even the teacher at school seems to be disrespectful of a different culture. For example, she

*insists on the incorrect pronunciation of the Yangtse, and she tolerates the use of derogatory nicknames for Chinese people. One boy at school, however, admires Jean's spunk and develops a crush on her.)*

10. Do you think that Jean will ever return to China?  
(Allow students to debate this point. First, she may not be allowed to return for a while due to the political problems in the country. But, if she is able to do so, perhaps she will go to visit Lin Nai-Nai and the Yangtse River. She will likely send letters to China if possible.)

### Activities

1. Write sequel chapters to this book describing Jean's first year in America.
2. Read more about the history of China and, as a social studies project, write reports about its different imperial, Nationalist, and Communist leaders and political movements.
3. What is the Great Wall of China? Read about the wall and write short stories about living in China with the wall.
4. Learn simple words in Chinese, both in writing and orally.
5. In books, find examples of Chinese art and try to duplicate Chinese styles in drawings and paintings.
6. What would it be like if America had concessions ruled by other countries? Divide the country into geographic concessions and appoint specific countries to govern them. Then, assign one concession to each of several groups of students in the class. Each group should represent a revolutionary element in the concession who wishes to regain native control of the territory. The groups should outline plans about how they intend to take control without using violence for leverage.
7. Write autobiographies describing students' heritage, families, what they enjoy doing for fun, what is important to them, and what they would like to do with their lives.
8. "If I could visit another country, it would be . . ." Ask students to prepare short oral reports on this topic. Pictures from magazines, slides, or drawings should be used as visual aids for presentations.
9. Jean's parents were missionaries. Set up a small domestic missionary effort in your classroom. The mission could involve helping the homeless or hungry in your area by donating clothing or food to shelters or pantries.
10. In the author's comments at the beginning of this guide, Jean Fritz explains that she feels that America would never host such poverty and injustice as she saw in Hankow. With the number of people who are on the streets today, perhaps this could be questioned. How can America help its poor and homeless? Ask your students to think about this question and to research and write reports on the topic.

## Vocabulary Test

Fill in the blank with the correct vocabulary word.

1. Chinese sailing ships with flat bottoms are called \_\_\_\_\_ .
2. \_\_\_\_\_ trees are tall with spreading branches and broad leaves.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ hair has artificially-created deep waves.
4. A nursemaid may also be called an \_\_\_\_\_ .
5. Chinese boats with flat bottoms are known as \_\_\_\_\_ .
6. A \_\_\_\_\_ haircut was a non-layered short style popular among American women during the 1920's.
7. Chinese unskilled laborers were called \_\_\_\_\_ .
8. A person who causes an uprising might be called an \_\_\_\_\_ .
9. \_\_\_\_\_ were two-wheeled carriages pulled by coolies.
10. The official place where Americans in China went for assistance from or protection by the U.S. government was the \_\_\_\_\_ .

## Comprehension Test A

### Fill in the Blank (25 points)

Complete each sentence below with the correct word(s).

1. At the beginning of the story, Jean is \_\_\_\_\_ years old.
2. Jean's nursemaid is named \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Jean's father is a missionary who works for the \_\_\_\_\_.
4. Jean's grandmother lives in \_\_\_\_\_.
5. When she becomes an adult, Jean wants to be a \_\_\_\_\_.
6. Jean and her family live near the \_\_\_\_\_ River.
7. Andrea \_\_\_\_\_ is Jean's best friend.
8. Jean and her family live in \_\_\_\_\_, China.
9. Jean had a baby sister named \_\_\_\_\_ who died.
10. Two little girls in America ask Jean if she ate \_\_\_\_\_ while living in China.

### Chinese History (25 points)

From the list below, complete each sentence.

1. Today's People's Republic of China has a \_\_\_\_\_ government, founded by \_\_\_\_\_.
2. For thousands of years, \_\_\_\_\_ ruled the \_\_\_\_\_ government of China.
3. In \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_ idealist Sun Yat-sen died.
4. In \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ led a revolution to overthrow the imperial government.
5. \_\_\_\_\_ succeeded Sun Yat-sen as the leader of the \_\_\_\_\_ Party.

- a. emperors
- b. Communist
- c. Nationalist
- d. imperial
- e. 1911

- f. 1925
- g. Chiang Kai-shek
- h. Sun-Yat-sen
- i. Mao Tse-tung
- j. democratic

**Short Answer (25 points)**

In one or two sentences, explain the importance of each of the following in the story.

1. Chinese embroidery
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. concessions
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. foreign devil
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. butter pagodas
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. little boy by the river

**Essay (25 points)**

In paragraph form, discuss Jean's dual allegiance to America and China.

## Comprehension Test B

### True or False (25 points)

Mark each statement "T" for "True" or "F" for "False."

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. Jean and her family live in the American concession.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. Jean attends the British School.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Jean's best friend is Andrea Hall.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. When she is old enough to wear them, Jean's mother gives her wool stockings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. One of the servants at Jean's house carves butter pagodas with his fingernails.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Lin Nai-Nai gives Jean a beautiful piece of embroidery when Jean leaves China.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Jean's father is a missionary at the YWCA.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. Jean and her family live in Shanghai for most of their duration in China.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Jean looks forward to meeting her grandmother in the state of Washington.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Lin Nai-Nai gives Jean a gift of embroidery.

### Short Answer (25 points)

In one or two sentences, explain the importance of each of the following in the story.

1. eating rats
2. letters
3. warlords
4. Marjorie
5. sharing an orange

**Multiple Choice (25 points)**

Complete each sentence with the letter of the correct answer.

1. In the story, some of the Chinese call Americans "foreign \_\_\_\_\_."  
a. traitors                      b. devils                      c. invaders
2. Jean once had a baby sister named \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Marjorie                      b. Muriel                      c. Miriam
3. Jean is \_\_\_\_\_ years old at the beginning of the story.  
a. eight                      b. nine                      c. ten
4. Jean's family lives near the \_\_\_\_\_ River.  
a. Hankow                      b. Yangtse                      c. Shanghai
5. While Jean lives in China, uprisings are taking place between the Communists and the \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Nationalists                      b. emperors                      c. Republicans
6. The author's last name is \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. Fritz                      b. Frank                      c. Fryer
7. \_\_\_\_\_ became the first Communist leader of the People's Republic of China.  
a. Chiang Kai-shek                      b. Sun Yat-sen                      c. Mao Tse-tung
8. After she opens Lin Nai-Nai's gift on the ship, Jean becomes very \_\_\_\_\_.  
a. happy                      b. sad                      c. angry
9. \_\_\_\_\_ ruled China for thousands of years.  
a. Nationalists                      b. Emperors                      c. Republicans
10. The revolution in \_\_\_\_\_ was led by Sun Yat-sen.  
a. 1911                      b. 1925                      c. 1927

**Essay (25 points)**

In paragraph form, discuss Jean's friendship with Andrea.



## ANSWER KEY

### Vocabulary

- |              |               |
|--------------|---------------|
| 1. junks     | 6. bobbed     |
| 2. Plane     | 7. coolies    |
| 3. Marcelled | 8. agitator   |
| 4. amah      | 9. Rickshas   |
| 5. sampans   | 10. consulate |

### Comprehension Test A

#### Fill in the Blank (25 points)

- |                   |            |
|-------------------|------------|
| 1. ten            | 6. Yangtse |
| 2. Lin Nai-Nai    | 7. Hull    |
| 3. YMCA           | 8. Hankow  |
| 4. Washington, PA | 9. Miriam  |
| 5. writer         | 10. rats   |

#### Chinese History (25 points)

1. b, i
2. a, d
3. f, j
4. e, h
5. g, c

#### Short Answer (25 points)

1. Chinese embroidery - Lin Nai-Nai gave Jean a gift of the amah's embroidery when Jean left China. It made Jean cry, because she realized that she had left a country behind that she loved.
2. concessions - China was divided into concessions, ruled by foreign powers. Jean lived in the French concession.
3. foreign devils - Some Chinese natives called foreigners this name because they resented the foreign rule of their country.
4. butter pagodas - One of Jean's family's servants made these with his hands and dirty fingernails. Jean's mother always requested that he not make the pagodas, but he was proud of his masterpieces, and they were always eaten so as not to offend the creator.
5. little boy by the river - Jean made a friend by the Yangtse River by giving him orange pieces. He later turned on her by calling her "foreign devil" as he had when they first met.

#### Essay (25 points)

Answers will vary.

### Comprehension Test B

#### True or False (25 points)

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

#### Short Answer (25 points)

1. eating rats - Two little girls in the United States thought that Jean and other people in China ate rats.
2. letters - Jean and her grandmother wrote letters and looked forward to the day the pair would meet in the U.S.
3. warlords - Warlords controlled various factions of the Chinese people during the very tumultuous time that Jean lived in China.
4. Marjorie - Jean thought that "Marjorie" sounded like a more American name than "Jean" and she wished that she could change her name to it. She also wanted to name her baby sister Marjorie for the same reason.
5. sharing an orange - Jean won the friendship of the boy down by the river by sharing an orange with him.

#### Multiple Choice (25 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. b | 6. a  |
| 2. c | 7. c  |
| 3. c | 8. b  |
| 4. b | 9. b  |
| 5. a | 10. a |

#### Essay (25 points)

Answers will vary.

## TEACHER'S NOTES

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