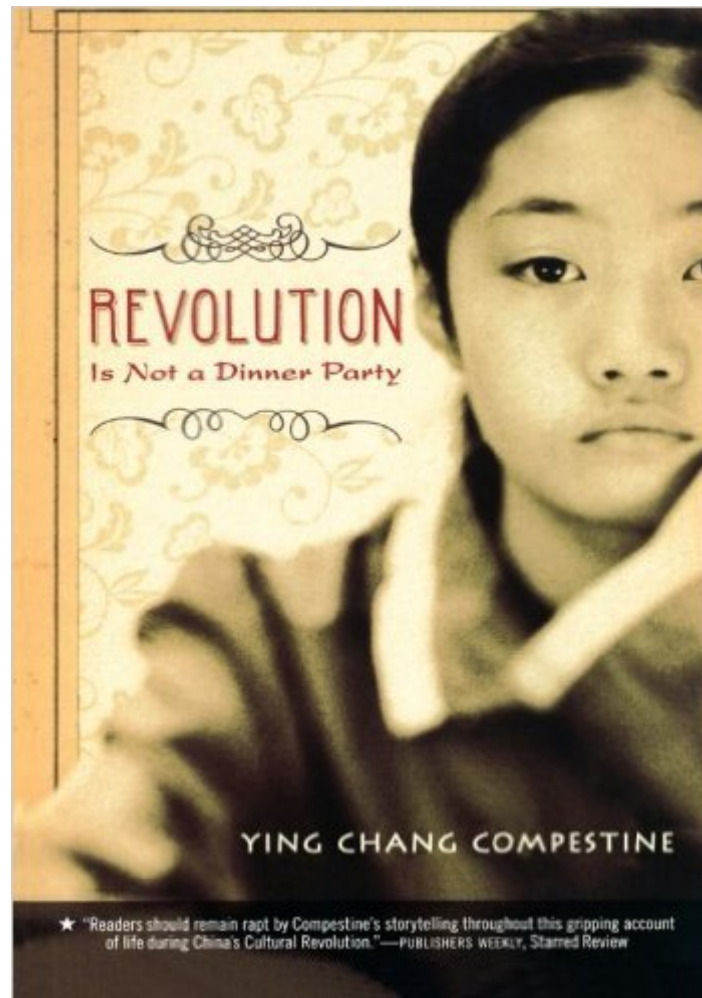


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# Revolution Is Not A Dinner Party



## Synopsis

The summer of 1972, before I turned nine, danger began knocking on doors all over China. Nine-year-old Ling has a very happy life. Her parents are both dedicated surgeons at the best hospital in Wuhan, and her father teaches her English as they listen to Voice of America every evening on the radio. But when one of Mao's political officers moves into a room in their apartment, Ling begins to witness the gradual disintegration of her world. In an atmosphere of increasing mistrust and hatred, Ling fears for the safety of her neighbors, and soon, for herself and her family. For the next four years, Ling will suffer more horrors than many people face in a lifetime. Will she be able to grow and blossom under the oppressive rule of Chairman Mao? Or will fighting to survive destroy her spirit and end her life? *Revolution Is Not a Dinner Party* is a 2008 Bank Street - Best Children's Book of the Year.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 740L (What's this?)

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Square Fish; Reprint edition (September 29, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312581491

ISBN-13: 978-0312581497

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 7.7 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (39 customer reviews)

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Age Range: 10 - 14 years

Grade Level: 5 - 9

## Customer Reviews

I was excited to hear that another book about the Cultural Revolution was published. I always believe there should be more books about this period of history which should never be forgotten. But I was so disappointed after reading it. This is a historical novel, but the author manipulated the fact to serve her purpose to make a melodramatic story, and totally ignored the accuracy of the

year, the political condition and how Chinese would react at that time. Here are some clarifications. The Cultural Revolution started in 1966 and the first few years was the most turmoil. It was common for ransacking people's home, having struggle meeting to condemn the class enemies. But after the first three years, the situation was much calmer. So the many things the author described were almost impossible to happen after 1972, such as, the teacher disappeared, doctors committed suicide, people got arrested, a public meeting held to humiliate the main character after Mao's death, etc. If there were only one or two mistakes, I could understand. But the inaccuracy was consistently throughout the book. Because the book was about an important piece of Chinese history, the accuracy of the political situation should be the essence of such a book. Since I lived through the Cultural Revolution, I found the characters were not authentic. Eg: Mother wore a pearl necklace in 1972 (no one dare wear jewelry then); Father listened to Voice of America pretty openly which was a dead crime; educated people often drank coffee on the street in a western pastry; "I" longed to come to America and told Father "I love you," and even trying to whip a Red Guard with a metal belt in public..... All of these sound inauthentic. And, at age of thirteen or fourteen, the main character had such a clear view about Chairman Mao, even felt happy for his death. That was impossible even for most the adult. I felt the author wrote the book with a strong desire to tailor the story to American's taste, which made this book less worthy. And the continuous mention of Golden Gate Bridge and the longing for it became annoying. This book could be misleading to Americans who want to know about China and the Chinese people.

I have been looking for books for our literature curriculum written by and based on Asian cultures. Unfortunately, it isn't terribly easy to find something that both fits those categories and is a worthwhile book to read in class with middle school students. Oh, there are books out there, but so many of them are written by American or European authors about Asian cultures. I was happy to find *Revolution is not a Dinner Party* by Ying Chang Compestine, a story about a young girl growing up in China at the end of Mao Ze-dong's Cultural Revolution. Ling is nine years old and her biggest dream is to see the United States. Her father teaches her English in secret, shows her pictures of the Golden Gate Bridge, and they sing English songs and read English books. But something is happening in China that threatens her family's way of life. Both her parents are doctors- her father of Western medicine and her mother of traditional Chinese medicine. During the Chinese Cultural Revolution, if you weren't working class, you were considered extravagant and wasteful, and Ling's parents fell into that category. When a Maoist officer moves into their apartment building, everyone in the building is careful because he has the power to make them all disappear if they are thought to

be an anti-revolutionist against Mao. When Ling's neighbor, another doctor, disappears, Ling begins to slowly understand the severity of the situation. Then the neighbor's wife is taken and their son moves in with Ling's family. When he is found trying to escape to Hong Kong, he turns on Ling's family and turns them in to save himself. Ling's father is arrested and Ling and her mother must survive on their own with ration dollars becoming fewer and fewer and food in the black market more and more unreliable. Trying to protect her mother, Ling takes over getting food for the family and tries to stay out of trouble. Unfortunately, she has too much of her father in her and can't bear to swallow her pride when confronted by bullies at school and their Maoist parents. Will Ling's fate be any better than the millions of others who were murdered or disappeared during the Cultural Revolution? This is a fast, small book that really blew me away. It reminded me a lot of Marjane Satrapi's graphic memoir *Persepolis* in that the main character is a young girl dealing with very mature, life threatening situations she doesn't completely understand. I feel like this perspective is important for students because they can see how the events that unfold are wrong through an innocent child's eyes. It is also interesting to see students critically analyze the naivete of the main character, especially since they are children themselves! It is important for children to relate to a culture they don't know much about, so having a common thread helps make the book more meaningful to them. I have read some reviews on this book that criticize it for being "historical fiction" rather than a memoir, but I am not sure what is wrong with this. The author grew up in China during the Revolution and based the characters and events off her own experiences. Despite being fiction, the story is steeped in the author's life, making this just as powerful a story even if it isn't a memoir. I still think it is a valuable tool for exposing students to a culture they might not have been exposed to. This is a perfect book for middle reader students, although the subject matter is serious and it could be used for an older, low-skilled student who likes historical fiction. I imagine this book being appropriate for grades 5-8 for the most part. At the end there is an explanation from the author of how the events in the book relate to her own life. There is also a brief explanation of the historical background, which might be better if read with students first, before the story. This would be a valuable book for any student to read!

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