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Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story



Synopsis

Born in 1905, Anna May Wong spent her childhood working in her family's laundry in Los Angeles's Chinatown. Whenever she could afford it, Anna May slipped off to the movies, escaping to a world of adventure, glamour, and excitement. After seeing a movie being filmed in her neighborhood, young Anna May was hooked. She decided she would become a movie star! Anna May struggled to pursue an acting career in Hollywood in the 1930s. There were very few roles for Asian Americans, and many were demeaning and stereotypical. Anna May made the most of each limited part. She worked hard and always gave her best performance. Finally, after years of unfulfilling roles, Anna May began crusading for more meaningful roles for herself and other Asian American actors. Anna May Wong, the first Chinese American movie star, was a pioneer of the cinema. Her spirited determination in the face of discrimination is an inspiration to all who must overcome obstacles so that their dreams may come true."

Book Information

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Age Range: 6 - 11 years

Grade Level: 1 - 6

Customer Reviews

Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story by Paula Yoo and illustrated by Lin Wang is particularly apt in today's social political climate as it follows the career of performer Anna May Wong. It chronicles her career as an actress in Hollywood. For many years she struggled with a dilemma: the only roles offered to her as a Chinese-American were demeaning stereotypes. In order to fulfill her dreams and to help support her impoverished family she accepted the caricature roles. But, she worked consistently to demand better portrayals of Chinese characters in film. The book effectively

captures Anna May Wong's passionate dreams, her humiliations, her compromises and her ultimate success as well as the sacrifices her parents made when they immigrated to the United States. This riff on the immigration theme is a pertinent read for current times. *Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story* depicts a character immensely proud of her heritage. The daughter of Chinese immigrants, Anna May faced racial discrimination, gender limitations, knew poverty and hard labor. She spent a lifetime carving out a place for Chinese American performers. Through her efforts in the cinema, she helped to spread acceptance and understanding of her culture. This pride and willingness to stand up for one's roots is a key message for adoptees.--Gayle H. Swift, "ABC, Adoption & Me: A Multicultural Picture Book"

My daughters loved this story and the color pictures (especially the part about Anna's childhood and her daydreams where she imagined herself as the heroine in a Hollywood movie). An inspiring bio about someone my kids didn't know of before. Also, it says for ages 9-12, but my 7-year-old liked it as much as my 11-year-old.

I had never heard of Anna May Wong before I read this biography. She was one of the earliest Chinese-American movie stars. She was born in Los Angeles in 1905, and started working as an actress in the 1920s, during a time when movies portrayed Chinese people in a demeaning way. Because her family was poor and relied on her earnings, she played these kinds of parts for many years and became a successful actress. In 1936, Anna May visited China and learned as much about the culture as she could. While there, she vowed never again to act in a movie that portrayed the Chinese in a negative light. Starting in 1937, Anna May Wong accepted only roles that showed her character in a positive light. This picture book relates Anna's ambitions and struggles using text and pictures appropriate for children six years and older. I have included this title in my online Gender Equality Bookstore.

Winner of the Carter G. Woodson Book Award presented to exemplary books written for children each year, *Shining Star: The Anna May Wong Story* is another top-notch biography by Paula Yoo, who also wrote the popular *Sixteen Years in Sixteen Seconds*. *Shining Star* tells the little-known story of Anna May Wong, a Chinese-American born at the turn of the century. Since her childhood Anna was dedicated to becoming a movie star against everybody's wishes and expectations. Her parents forbade her from becoming an actress and Hollywood was not receptive to Chinese actors. These barriers did not hold Wong back; she persevered and after many years of

practice she was "discovered" by a director. After she begins earning money, her family has a change of heart and begins supporting her dream of becoming a movie star. Defined and limited by her ethnicity, Wong takes on some small roles and is frustrated by the discriminatory practices and negative portrayals of Chinese people in film. During her career, minority actors were not allowed to kiss Caucasian actors on screen and most films created roles that represented docile and obedient or sinister and conniving Chinese characters. Yoo's book portrays a strong female role model and shows an era that not only limited the success of females (women couldn't vote, own property, or attend many universities), but also limited the freedoms of many minority groups. The book has many valuable lessons for students as young as seven who can understand the concepts of following one's dream, perseverance, and standing up for what you believe in—all principles Wong demonstrates. Other themes represented in the book are forgiveness, the ability to change your mind and providing support to somebody who is following their dreams, as demonstrated by Wong's parents. The book importantly lends itself to starting a conversation about racism, discrimination, and stereotyping with young learners. Some questions to ask might include: How is the current reality for Asian-American actors similar and different from that experienced by Anna May Wong at the turn of the century? Why do you think Wong was turned down for the roles she sought? What assumptions were people making about her appearance and ability? *Shining Star* is a valuable addition to any diverse classroom library not only for its concise, powerful and ultimately inspirational story told with captivating illustrations, but for its ability to portray the damaging nature of stereotypes and harsh effects of discrimination.

This is a book written for children and it serves its purpose well. It is a "picture book" and in the local library is in the juvenile/child section of the library. If you are an adult looking for a biography of Anna May Wong, this is not it.

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