



***Outsider Kids: A Parachute Kids Graphic Novel***

By Betty C. Tang

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# OUTSIDER KIDS

BY BETTY C. TANG

## The Story

**With family like this, who needs enemies?**

After seven months on their own as undocumented immigrants, the Lin siblings have settled into their new lives in California. Sis has a new job, Bro has a new crush, and Feng-Li (Ann) is excited to celebrate her eleventh birthday with her new friends. Their parents still await visa approval in Taiwan, so the trio is trying to take better care of one another and stay under the radar of immigration authorities.

But when their cousin Josephine—a violin prodigy—arrives with her privilege and demands, suddenly their world is turned upside down. Will they have to give up the life and the stability they worked so hard to achieve?

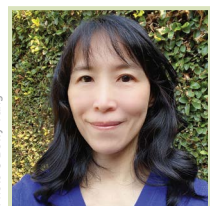
## Reading Group Questions

1. By the end of the story, the Lin siblings have been in the U.S. for almost a year. In what ways have they changed or grown? What new challenges are explored in this story? Did any of them surprise you? Explain and use evidence from the story to support your answers.
2. When we first meet Josephine, how is she different from the fun-loving cousin Feng-Li (Ann) remembers? Why do you think she treats Feng-Li as she does throughout the story? Choose three adjectives to describe each of the two girls. What motivates Feng-Li's act of revenge and Josephine's betrayal, and what do their actions say about them? Does the news Josephine's mother delivers change your feelings toward Josephine? Explain.
3. At the beginning of the story, Ke-Gāng (Jason) is still the most apprehensive sibling when it comes to acclimating to their new country. He prefers to go by his Taiwanese name at home, claims friends are overrated, and even blames their parents for abandoning them. What experiences inform these feelings and how do they evolve over the course of the story? Do you consider him a static or dynamic character? What evidence from the story supports this?
4. As the oldest child in the family, Jia-Xi (Jessie) shoulders more responsibility than most teenagers, including her siblings, as is culturally expected of her. How do you think the pressure to please her parents, get into a competitive college, and care for her siblings and cousin make her feel? What other differences do you notice between Taiwanese and American culture in this story? Choose one and share your thoughts on it.

## Reading Group Questions (continued)

5. At the end of the story, the Lin siblings discover they will be starting all over again in a new city—attending new schools, discovering a new neighborhood, and having to make new friends. Did the events that precipitated their move surprise you? Why or why not? How have the kids shown fortitude and perseverance throughout? Can you predict what's in store for them next? Write a paragraph explaining what you'd like to see happen in book three.

## About the Creator



**Betty C. Tang** is the creator of the multi-award winning bestseller *Parachute Kids*. She has also illustrated the *New York Times* bestselling Jacky Ha-Ha series of graphic novels by James Patterson and Chris Grabenstein. She has worked for various animation studios in Hollywood, including Disney TV and DreamWorks Animation, and codirected an animated feature called *Where's the Dragon?* She is a fourth-degree black belt in aikido, a Japanese martial art. Born in Taiwan, Betty immigrated to California as a parachute kid when she was ten. She lives in Los Angeles. Learn more about her work at [bettictang.com](http://bettictang.com).

## Creator Q&A

**As in *Parachute Kids*, you drew on personal experience to create *Outsider Kids*. What themes and challenges did you want to explore in this book? What were some of the struggles you faced, and that your characters face, during this limbo time after settling into a new life in the U.S. but still not being fully accepted?**

*Outsider Kids* picks up where *Parachute Kids* left off, and for the first time, the Lin siblings experience uniquely American celebrations such as Halloween and Thanksgiving, in addition to other daily nuances of American culture. Like the protagonist, Feng-Li (Ann), I was also a wide-eyed, curious kid, eager to absorb all the new things. My English improved, I finally made friends, participated in various school activities, and joined the school band. On most days, I felt like a regular kid, but there would inevitably be incidents that reminded me I was far from belonging, like fabricating excuses for why my parents could never be reached, nervously turning in forged permission slips and praying I wouldn't be caught, or misunderstanding some of the words in the Pledge of Allegiance (the incident in the book really happened to me, and I was mortified). Granted, these are things any kid could experience, but as a parachute kid, I lacked a sense of security, protection, and belonging.

**Can you talk about your aspirations for each of the Lin siblings in this second book? Why did you give them their particular challenges?**

*Outsider Kids* is essentially a story about kids struggling to be kids under the unique circumstance of being parachute kids. Being a tween or teenager is hard enough, as is navigating school, friends, and hormones. Also, being a new immigrant trying to find one's footing makes things extra hard—especially without parental guidance. The challenges I designed for each of the Lin siblings all have this premise in mind, and then I expanded from there.

All Feng-Li (Ann) wants is to fit in. She's doing pretty well at first, until her cousin arrives from Taiwan, and everything is upended. Suddenly, Ann is confronted with complicated feelings like jealousy and resentment, and what happens when these emotions are left unchecked.

Ke-Gāng (Jason) unexpectedly finds love. His biggest challenge of course is coming to terms with his sexuality, and then being unexpectedly outed. His storyline is perhaps the most heartbreaking of the three, as—spoiler alert—he soon loses the happiness he so desperately craves. But unlike in *Parachute Kids*, in *Outsider Kids*, there is hope on the horizon for him by the story's end.



## Creator Q&A (continued)

Jia-Xi (Jessie) is still reeling from the guilt of being scammed out of money the previous summer. She tries to redeem herself through her studies and work, at the risk of losing herself. Of all three siblings, I think Jessie is the least appreciated character who really should be applauded. Without any choice, she suddenly becomes responsible for her siblings simply because she is the oldest. Her commitment to her siblings' wellbeing is often taken for granted by them.

**You've shared that you have received many letters from kids around the world, asking for a second book and being especially invested in Ke-Gāng (Jason)'s fate. The resolution with Pete in *Outsider Kids*, as well as Ke-Gāng's relationship with Alex and the conversations he has with his sisters are so poignant. What inspired this storyline and why was it important to you to give it prominence?**

This is my way of supporting the LGBTQ+ community. I feel strongly that it is nobody's business who you love, and I am pained and infuriated by the prejudice and hatred the LGBTQ+ community faces. My sincere hope is that my stories will foster compassion and acceptance. Back in the 1980s, my gay friends didn't find the freedom to come out as the current generation can, and when bullied, they certainly didn't receive the kind of support they needed and deserved from adults. We've come a long way since then, but the fact that this is still a topic for discussion shows there's still a long way to go.

**Throughout the story, many deeply held traditional beliefs in Taiwanese culture come to light. Can you speak to some of these and why it was important to you to explore them?**

One such tradition is the centuries-old attitude of valuing sons over daughters, since only sons carry the family name. Incorporating this deeply rooted belief into the storyline further complicates Jason's desire to come out. Should he follow his heart or be the dutiful son that is expected of him? To Western minds, the answer is obviously the former, but for traditional Taiwanese families, the decision is far from easy. Even though this attitude has eased over the years, too many families unfortunately still hold fast to it.

I wanted to highlight the different cultural practices and ideas because they not only enrich the story, but also help expand readers' knowledge and awareness, and hopefully, foster empathy towards all people.

**The siblings have many tender, unifying, and even hilarious moments that counterbalance their difficulties. That's part of what makes these stories so rich and layered. How do you strike that balance between seriousness and humor?**

I think when the going gets tough, it is ever more necessary to find the humor in things, or life would become unbearable. I don't suggest one should trivialize serious situations, but to somehow release a bit of heaviness so there's room for hope to grow. When I write, I try to be mindful not to stretch out a heavy scene for too long without following it up with something lighter. Or at least insert a little levity into a serious scene, either in the text or drawings. One example of the former—spoiler alert—is that, after Jason ended things with Pete and probably disappointed many readers who were rooting for them, I followed it up with a lighthearted and flirty scene of a table tennis match.

**Can you speak to the title? What does it mean to you and how do you want readers to understand it?**

Even though *Outsider Kids* centers on an immigrant experience, I hope that many of the day-to-day struggles involved will be relatable to all readers. Every child growing up has probably felt like an outsider at some point—perhaps being the last kid picked for a team, being left out of a group, or feeling less smart, pretty, funny, popular, or what have you. And when the feeling strikes, one can feel small and lonely. It is important for readers to know that they are not alone in feeling this way, and if they were to talk it out with friends, siblings, or parents, they would likely find the much-needed common ground to help them get through it.