

Morsels For the Mind Book Group

Date: June 21, 2012

Book Title: Girl in Translation by Jean Kwok

Hostess: Nancy Schellenberg

Food Served: "Annette's Tuna cheese spread with celery", "Harrison Prep olives", "Mrs. Avery's yellow cheese", fortune cookies, strawberry shortcake, Peach wine, iced tea, lemonade and coffee.

Props: A cockroach infestation, one rat, frozen soy sauce, Chinese lanterns, and chopsticks.

Book Synopsis: Kimberly Chang and her Ma emigrate from Hong Kong to begin their life in a Brooklyn tenement while working at Aunt Paula's sweatshop. Kimberly studies after school and her endless factory shifts to make a better life for the two. Despite the challenges of culture, language, and poverty, Kimberly excels academically, and earns scholarships to prep schools and prestigious universities.

Review: The group was mixed in their reactions to the book. Some thought there was too much of a focus on the filthy living conditions; others felt that was central to the plot. All agreed that the book mirrored Jean Kwok's life in many ways, and that we have no idea how difficult it is to assimilate, much less excel, in a foreign culture, especially given such challenges.

Highlights of Discussion: Hearing about the author's background gave us a deeper understanding of the character's life. We discussed the various experiences many of us have had as educators in working with those from other cultures and languages.

Attendance: 3 Nancys, 2 Annes, Julie, and Laura

Suggestions/Business: Kudos to Laura for our Morsels spotlight in the June 2012 "Book Bytes Newsletter".

Our next meeting is on the Lakeshore at Mary Grant's. We talked about maps and carpooling.