

# i'm your neighbor books

## exploring this story & your own

These discussion questions were created by **I'm Your Neighbor Books** for the Welcoming Library. The **Welcoming Library** is a traveling collection of picture books set in our New Arrival and New American communities. From small towns to big cities, these immigration stories are helping readers (of all ages) Welcome and Belong. Consider bringing a [Welcoming Library](#) to your community.

Normally these questions would only be affixed to the inside cover of a Welcoming Library book. As a celebration of **Watercress'** Caldecott, Newbery, and APALA wins, we are offering them as a handout.

### WATERCRESS

By Andrea Wang and illustrated by Jason Chin (Holiday House)

When the parents first spot watercress on the side of the road, they exclaim with “two voices heavy with memories.” Why would their memories be “heavy”? Do you have memories that feel heavy?

Look at the illustration when the family first gets out of the car. The illustrator Jason Chin seems to have painted one scene that has two parts. Who do you think the kids on the right are? Are they in the Ohio cornfield or somewhere else? What do you think their appearance means?

In her author's note, we learn that Andrea Wang is the daughter of Chinese immigrants. Like the character, she grew up in a mostly White town and was embarrassed when her family collected watercress from the roadside. Not feeling like she belonged in her town made Andrea's “bad feeling” or embarrassment about the watercress “more intense.” Have you had the experience of feeling different from other kids or families? How does feeling different make other things feel “more intense”?

The mother tries to convince her daughter to eat the watercress by saying, “It is free.” Although her mother thinks “free” is positive, the girl thinks, “Free is bad.” Why do you think the daughter and mother feel differently? Could where and how the mother and daughter grew up give them different feelings about “free”?

After the mother shows the photograph from China, she tells her children what happened to her younger brother. The boy was just one of 15-45 million people who died because of famine in China between 1959-1961. Famine is hunger so widespread that families cannot fight it. Families like hers were not to blame for

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not being able to feed their children. It is hard for us to imagine the loss of 15 million people. Do you think it is important for you to know the story of just **one** boy and the effect his death had on his family? Why?

After understanding that her uncle died of hunger, the girl is “ashamed of being ashamed of my family.” Have you ever learned something that made you feel ashamed or embarrassed about your former feelings? Despite the embarrassment, are you glad you have a new perspective? Look at the girl’s face after she hears this story of her family. Do you think learning her family’s history has changed her?

Many families have pain in their past and even in their present. Families forced to emigrate because of war, conflict, or climate change have the pain of those events plus the pain of leaving home. Despite that pain, this family sits down to eat and to make new memories. How does your family make new memories?