

Stargazing

Jen Wang

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Christine is a daughter of a traditional Chinese family in the United States. At an orchestra recital at her church, Christine's family hears about a Chinese widowed woman and her daughter who live with financial difficulty off of a plant nursery next door from the church. Christine also hears more about the family, especially the daughter, Moon Lin, who happens to be her age and is also rumored to have strange tendencies and violent temperament issues. Out of kindness and much to Christine's unease, her parents decide to lend the empty unit near their home for the struggling family. Thrusted into her parents' sudden decision, Christine reluctantly meets Moon for the first time, and the two surprisingly end up becoming good friends. Moon Lin is everything Christine wishes she was. Moon is spunky, passionate, and funny, and she lives a free and non-traditional life from the strict and religious ways of Christine's family. As Christine becomes closer to Moon, she starts to neglect her parents' pressures and responsibilities for her, and in addition, Christine starts to get jealous as Moon becomes well-known and well-liked around school. Their friendship starts to go downhill and when something terrible happens to Moon, Christine struggles with her regretful actions toward her friend as well as the pain of figuring out her own identity ever since Moon introduced her to a different and wonderful world outside of her former constricting life.

This novel is suitable for all ages but might be most appealing for readers age 9-14. The characters themselves seem to be in around 4th-5th grade.

I loved this book. This is actually a graphic novel and I adore graphic novels. I'm a huge fan of Jen Wang's other novels, so I was really excited to read this one, too. The art style is simple, yet charming. With graphic novels, the plot is mainly composed and developed through the events told in visuals and limited dialogue, instead of paragraphs of words with usual novels. And I think from this standpoint, both the plot, along with the support from the art, was well developed for the storyline. I think the biggest thing that I liked about the book was how much I could relate to Christine. I love the way the author incorporated cultural and personal elements to the story, which made the characters more genuine and the struggle of finding one's identity much deeper and stronger. Because of the relatable deep-rooted values and experiences we all somewhat have to grow up in because of our parents and backgrounds, I think most people, even those older than the intended audience of the novel, can connect with the characters on a personal level. There wasn't anything else that I disliked much about the book. The novel itself has a very casual and light-hearted tone. Yet its simplicity and truth is what makes it beautiful and uncommon among what I usually read.

This book really gave me a touch of magic and nostalgia. I think it's a wonderful pick if you're looking for a graphic novel and you don't mind a casual, but also genuine and bittersweet read.

Recommended Titles:

- American Born Chinese by Gene Luen Yang
- This One Summer by Mariko Tamaki, Jillian Tamaki
- Ghosts by Raina Telgemeier

- Sunny Side Up by Jennifer L. Holm
- The Prince and the Dressmaker by Jen Wang