

## 3.13 Bringing Chinese Culture Into Our Homes

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### SPEAKERS

Jasmine Bradshaw, Andrea Wang

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J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:00

You're listening to the First Name Basis podcast, Season Three, Episode 13: "Bringing Chinese Culture Into Our Homes" with children's author Andrea Wang.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:18

Teaching our children to be inclusive and anti-racist starts with us within the sacred walls of our home. First Name Basis is designed to empower you with the confidence you need to be a leader in your family and a change maker in your community. Together, we will wrestle with hard questions and use the answers to create the world we want: a world that reflects our values of inclusion, compassion, and courage. I'm your host, Jasmine Bradshaw, and I am so excited to be on this journey with you.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 00:53

Hello, First Name Basis fam. I am so glad you are here. Okay, I'm going to be honest with you. This is not the episode that I had planned for this week. Of course, you know that it's Black History Month, and I have been talking a lot about embracing Black culture and really leaning into Black joy. And I've been trying to do that in my own life. So one of the things that I did was I asked my dad to teach me how to make fried chicken, because fried chicken...even though there are lots of stereotypes surrounding it, a family's fried chicken recipe is really a point of pride. And it is a point of joy for so many Black families. And my grandmother was known for her fried chicken. So what I did was, we were whipping it up, my dad was teaching me how to do it, and I thought this needs to be an episode, everybody needs to hear this. So I whipped out my recording equipment, and I was asking my dad about the recipe and recording it for you, but also for my posterity. Like, I really want my children and my grandchildren to have this

recipe in their hearts and in their cookbooks. So anyway, all that is to say, I was supposed to be talking about fried chicken this week, but instead we need to be talking about the racism and the discrimination that is being perpetuated against the Asian American community.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 02:15

Similarly to other communities of color, the Asian American community has been subjected to widespread discrimination and violence and hatred from the founding of our country. And it has been especially ramped up since we have all been dealing with the Coronavirus. There have been terribly racist things said and done to the Asian American community, even to the point of murder. If you're not sure what I'm talking about, I would encourage you to consult a few of your trusted news sources in order to get yourself up to speed. And as I'm sure you know, I truly believe that anti-racism work starts in our homes. It starts with us as parents teaching our children. And that's why I wanted to pull this episode from the archives, this conversation that I had with children's author Andrea Wang, because she really describes what we need to do as parents to fight against the stereotypes that are facing the Chinese American community. And the thing is, once you start to really understand white supremacy, you'll realize that it looks like it's taking many different forms, but it's not. It really follows the same patterns over and over again, and that pattern is dehumanizing other people in order to position white people as superior.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 03:39

In the episode you will hear Andrea Wang share about Lunar New Year, and Lunar New Year is actually this week. It begins on Friday. The official first day is on Friday. But the celebrations start on New Year's Eve on Thursday evening. And I am just so frustrated. I'm just so mad. Thinking about the fact that our Asian American brothers and sisters are supposed to be starting to prepare for this amazing, sacred, special celebration in their community, and instead they are burdened with racism and violence. So before I share the interview with Andrea Wang about how we can bring Chinese culture into our homes, I want to share a few tips with you about what you can do and what your children can do, how you can teach your children to stand up against this anti-Asian racism. The quote that keeps coming to my mind as I'm thinking about what Asian Americans are experiencing right now is Dr. Martin Luther King, his quote, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere." And that means that we all have the responsibility to stand up whenever we see injustice, because it really threatens every single one of us. Even though you might not be feeling the effects immediately, it is affecting us as a community.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 04:56

I actually started to notice this discrimination against Asian Americans last year when we were at the Phoenix Chinese Festival. So each year, obviously not this year because of COVID, but each year, we usually go to the Phoenix Chinese Festival, and it is our favorite cultural festival out of all of them. There are some amazing cultural festivals here in Arizona, but the Phoenix Chinese Festival is outstanding. And I remember going to it and thinking, "Where is everyone? Like, why isn't there anyone here?" I was so shocked, because the first year we went, it was packed. You could hardly walk around. There were so many people experiencing the beautiful

culture and the amazing food. It was so cool. So the second year when we went and I thought, "Where did everybody go? Why isn't anyone here?" And then it hit me. Maybe they're not coming because they're afraid of the Coronavirus. And that broke my heart, because that meant that so many people were missing out on this amazing opportunity to experience Chinese culture. And this was before we even understood the weight of the pandemic. We didn't know how serious COVID was going to be. There was not even a thought of having a lockdown; that was nowhere near what we were thinking was going to happen. So I could see this racism and discrimination bubbling up, and I remember thinking, "I can relate to this." I know what it's like to be trying to prepare for an amazing celebration and helping your family experience joy in the midst of racism.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 06:28

So there are a couple of articles that I want to point you to when it comes to standing up against this racism that is being perpetuated against the Asian American community. And I will link both of them in the show notes. The first one is called "Speaking Up Against Racism Around the New Coronavirus." It's by Learning for Justice. And if you haven't heard of them, it's just because they just changed their name. They used to be Teaching Tolerance, and now they're Learning for Justice. And it says "the New Coronavirus," because this article was written last March, but everything in it still applies today. And one of the things that Andrea shares in the interview is that we need to understand the history in order to start fighting back against stereotypes. And I felt like this article shared the history of discrimination against the Asian community really, really well. So I'm just going to read a little bit to you from the article. It says, quote, "Anti-Chinese sentiment in the United States related to disease goes back to when Chinese people began immigrating here. In efforts to bar Chinese workers from entering the country in the late 1800s, white labor unions argued that Chinese people carried diseases that were more virulent than those found in white people. In the same way junk science was used to justify enslaving Africans, junk science about people from Asia was used to justify laws leading to exclusion and exploitation of Asian immigrants. It solidified fear and phobia against Chinese people. The 'yellow peril' narrative was born. It's a racist term that plays on the idea that Asian people would disrupt or harm Westerners' way of life. These racist tropes are directly tied to the oppression of Asians and Asian Americans in the United States. They were used to justify the Page Act of 1875, which restricted East Asian women from immigrating to the U.S. And they served, in part, as justification for the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which banned most Chinese people from immigrating to the U.S. Coupled with racist tropes about health and culture, these laws led to racist violence against Asian Americans. The remnants of that legacy remain in public discourse today." End quote.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 08:40

Now I know that that was a lot to take in, but I think that it is so critical that we familiarize ourselves with the history of the discrimination against the Asian American community, because it is so often left out of the conversation about racism. So now that we know the history, we need to understand how do we respond when someone says something racist to or about Asian Americans. And this other article is also from Learning for Justice, aka Teaching Tolerance, and is called "How to Respond to Coronavirus Racism." And remember, I will link these in the show notes so you don't have to write them down or anything, but the thing that I loved about this article is that they outline a four step process that we can take when we are

speaking out against bias. So the first step in the four step process is to interrupt. So when someone says something racist about the Asian American community, you need to stop them in their tracks so that they understand that what they said was worth talking about, was worth unpacking, because they need to know that what they said was racist. So in the article, they give lots of examples of different things that you can say, but one of the ones that really stuck out to me was they said that you can just say, "Hang on, I want to go back to what you called the virus." And I love this quote, because I think that it speaks directly to what I've been hearing. So many people will say horrible things like "Chinese Virus" or "Kung flu." And those things are so hurtful. I think that a lot of people think that it's funny, but it's not funny at all. It's actually extremely racist, and really is kind of like the gateway for perpetuating violence against the Asian American community. So just by stopping someone and interrupting them and saying, "Hang on. I want to go back to what you called the virus." That will draw their attention to what they're saying. And then you can unpack it from there.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 10:36

They say after that, step two is to question. So they gave the example of saying, "Why did you call it the Chinese Virus?" And by asking these questions, you are giving the person an opportunity to explain, and maybe even come to it on their own, that what they're saying is inappropriate and racist. From there, you want to educate, so you might be able to explain to them if they don't understand why what they said was wrong. You can say, "There's actually a really long history of discrimination against and exclusion of Asian Americans, and by using derogatory terms for the virus, you are continuing that discrimination." And in the article they gave the example, quote, "You might explain that it's actually not common anymore to name a disease after its place of origin, that there's a long bad history of associating diseases with specific groups of people, and that the name COVID-19 was chosen very carefully to avoid repeating those mistakes." End quote. So we are first interrupting, then we're questioning. Third, we are educating. And the last step of the process is to echo. And when they say echo, what they're talking about is amplifying. So when you see someone talking about this issue, when you see someone bringing up the discrimination and the racism against the Asian American community, share that. Amplify their voices. Point people to Asian Americans who are speaking out about this so that we can stand in solidarity with our Asian American brothers and sisters. So I know this was like a mini episode before the episode, but I really, really want you to know that we are in the business of anti-racism for all. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere, and we need to speak up. So let's make sure we are interrupting, questioning, educating, and then echoing.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 12:31

Okay, I'm so excited to share Andrea Wang with you. But before I do, I have to remind you about Bite-Sized Black History. Oh my goodness, your response to bite size like history has blown me away. There are over 400 families and teachers using Bite-Sized Black History. I can't help but get emotional when I think about all of the children who are experiencing the amazing innovation, creativity, and joy of Black history for the first time. So if you don't already know, Bite-Sized Black History is your key to a meaningful Black History Month celebration in your home or in your classroom. So it is 12 bite-sized podcast episodes. All the episodes are eight minutes or less, because they're specifically for children. And each episode focuses on an amazing Black American hero. And I was really careful to pick people who aren't usually talked

about during Black History Month. I talk about inventors and dancers and scientists and doctors so that we can really start to understand the depth of the impact that the Black community has had on America. So it starts with the 12 Bite-Sized podcast episodes. And with each episode, there is an illustration of the person that you are learning about. So while you're listening, your little ones can color the illustration, and they are fantastic illustrations. I've colored some myself, that's how fun it is. And then after you've colored and you've listened, there are reflection questions, because I'm imagining you having these really deep, meaningful discussions with one another about what Black History means to our country, to our community and to your family, and how you can be inspired and learn from these amazing Black Americans. So I will put the link in the show notes so that you can invest in Bite-Sized Black History. And of course you can find it on our website as well.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 14:33

Okay, let's dive into bringing Chinese culture into our homes. The guest that we have on the podcast today is one of those people that I felt really starstruck reaching out to her. And I was so grateful when she said yes. Today we get to hear from Andrea Wang, and she is a children's book author and a mother of two. And she also is totally amazing and has her master's in infant mental studies. So she's been all over the board in terms of the things that she's done with her life, which I think is so admirable. I just absolutely look up to her. She, as I mentioned, is a children's book author. She's written both nonfiction and fiction books. And the book that caught my attention is a book called "The Nian Monster." I will let her tell you all about why she wrote the book. But I did want to tell you a little bit about what the book is about, just because I feel like we talked so much about the book and the details in the book that won't really make sense to you if you haven't read it. So I guess I should say, spoiler alert: I'm going to tell you what the book is about. It is a book about Lunar New Year. And in this book, there's a little girl. Her name is Xingling, and she is preparing for Lunar New Year with her family, and the Nian monster comes to her town. There's an ancient legend about this monster, the Nian monster, in which every Lunar New Year he comes to the town, and he would terrorize the town and eat the people, and it's totally awful. But the people figured out that the things that he was afraid of are the color red, loud noises, and firecrackers. So they would have all of those things on hand so they could scare the monster off. Well, in this book, Xingling comes face to face with this monster, and the monster tells her straight up, "I'm not afraid of that stuff anymore." So Xingling has to come up with a plan for how she's going to get the monster leave her town alone and not eat all of the people. So throughout the book, you follow Xingling along as she uses her traditional foods from Lunar New Year to get rid of the Nian monster. It is just so adorable and so hilarious.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 16:46

When I was asking Andrea to be on the podcast, in the email that I sent to her, I explained that I love her books so much, because it's not just for kids. Like, it's really hard to write a children's book that is super engaging and funny for the parents as well. So that's what I love about her writing style is that even though I'm reading it to Violet, and she's enjoying it, I'm loving it right along with her. So she's an amazingly talented writer, and I can't wait for you to get to know her. Before we jump into the interview, I just want to say that Andrea lets me know that it's important to call it Lunar New Year instead of Chinese New Year, because there are lots of

cultures that celebrate Lunar New Year. So I thought this was an amazing example of how I am on this journey too, and I am learning right alongside all of you. So in the episode, you might hear me say Chinese New Year, but what I really should be saying is the Lunar New Year.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 17:40

Okay, let's get into the interview with children's author Andrea Wang.

**A** Andrea Wang 17:44

Hi. Um, so yeah, I was born in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Both of my parents are immigrants from China. My dad was born in mainland China, as was my mom. My dad was Cantonese. And my mom was Hakka, which doesn't really tie into any province. They're sort of a migrant people from a lot of different provinces, and they immigrated to the United States in the mid-to-late 1960s, after the United States passed the Immigration Act of 1965. I don't know if you know, but up until then, there had been a visa quota of 105 visas per year for people from China, and in 1965, they finally did away with that. So they were able to come in on that first kind of wave of Chinese immigrants.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 18:39

And did they move to Massachusetts, straight from China?

**A** Andrea Wang 18:42

They did. They both came, I think, maybe a year apart or so. But they both came for graduate school. My mom went to nursing school at Boston College, and my dad went to graduate school at Harvard University. So I was born there after they got married, and then, when I was little, around two years old, they moved to a tiny town in Ohio called Yellow Springs, which was very liberal for the times, but still majority white. I only remember there being one other Chinese American family in town and very few other Asians. And we lived there till I was 13. We moved back to Massachusetts when I was in middle school for eighth grade, where I lived for like the next 30 years. So I spent most of my life in in Boston and the suburbs. But we moved to Denver, my husband and my two kids and I moved to Denver three-and-a-half years ago.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 19:41

So your parents when you were young and you're growing up in these predominantly white communities, did they do anything to help you kind of hold on to your cultural roots?

**A** Andrea Wang 19:51

Absolutely. They spoke Chinese at home. They spoke Mandarin, and even though I responded in English, I still picked up a lot of Mandarin. I'm not fluent by any means, but there was a lot of

culture around. My mother used to read books in, you know, in Chinese and translate into English. And you know, we celebrated the holidays as best we could in Ohio in the 70s. You know, it was not like you could go to the grocery store and buy tofu back then. My mother made tofu in the basement.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 20:27

Oh, my goodness. That's amazing. Super Mom.

**A** Andrea Wang 20:31

Yeah, she was she really was.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 20:34

So tell us about your journey to becoming an author.


**A** Andrea Wang 20:39


I always loved to read. And I've been reading since I was teeny tiny. I remember being in first grade, and being completely terrified and shy of all the other children and hiding under my teacher's desk, and just reading books all day. And it was lovely, because she let me do that. She put a pillow under there. So I was more comfortable, and she eventually sort of coaxed me out so I could read books to the other children. Which was, you know, sort of my first, you know...I say that books were my first friend, and they helped me make friends. And, you know, as we started learning to write, I wrote lots of stories. I, when I go on school visits, I show the kids photos of those first stories that I did for school and on my own. And you could see the progression from handwritten and to when I started using my father's typewriter and typing them up and binding them into little books. So I've always wanted to be a writer. But that sort of, you know, that dream kind of fell by the wayside as I got older and went to college, and I studied environmental science. And my parents were very focused on my having a, like, sort of a lucrative, traditional career, you know, and writing was not a stable career. It's still not, but so I became an environmental consultant, and I cleaned up hazardous waste sites for about 10 years. And my children came along, and I decided I really wanted to stay home with them. And when I started reading them picture books, that's sort of when my love for children's books reignited. And I started, you know, thinking about stories and writing my stories and, and eventually, you know, got my MFA in creative writing. And here I am.


**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 22:36


Oh, that's amazing. So you have a handful of different children's books. But the one that I really latched on to was it is adorable. It's called "The Nian Monster." Am I saying that right?


**A** Andrea Wang 22:48


 Andrea Wang 22:10  
Yes, you are. "The Nian Monster."


 Jasmine Bradshaw 22:51  
And in this book, the little girl, her name is Xingling. Am I saying that right?

 22:57  
It's kind of like an S-H, between an S and an S-H. Xingling

 Jasmine Bradshaw 23:02  
Yeah. Okay. Xingling. She is brilliant. Because the monster comes back and is trying to terrorize the town, and she figures out a way to get rid of him. And it's hilarious. My favorite part is when he he's eating all the food, and he says, like, "Okay, I'll try this food, and then I'll eat you, and then I'll eat the town." So much fun. So what was your inspiration to write that book?

 Andrea Wang 23:27  
I think it was actually like, a combination of three things that happened kind of around the same time. The first thing was that we went as a family to Shanghai to visit my in-laws. And we were there for about three weeks. And that was, it was not my first time to Shanghai, but it was the first time we stayed there for so long. And my children were, I think three and five at that time. And we took them around. It was very eye opening. Shanghai is, you know, right now, it's a city of 26 million people. So it's incredibly modern and very cosmopolitan. And you know, we had an amazing time. And the second thing was that when we came back from that trip, you know, we've been gone a long time. And you know, I was going out to get the mail from the mailbox and a neighbor drove by and rolled down her window and said, "Welcome back to civilization!"

 Jasmine Bradshaw 24:29  
Oh, my goodness.

 Andrea Wang 24:31  
And I kind of looked at her, and I didn't know what to say. I just got my mail and kind of said "Thank you" and went back in the house and seethed about it for a very long time.

 Jasmine Bradshaw 24:45  
I'm sure I've been in that situation. I can feel that to my core.



A

Andrea Wang 24:50

Yeah, you know, I mean, I think people don't realize that China's one of the oldest continuous civilizations. It goes back to I mean, I think the recorded calendar would have us at 4700-something years.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 25:10

Wow.

A

Andrea Wang 25:10

So it's a very old civilization. So I was, you know, I tucked that one away to use in something later, which happened to be "The Nian Monster." And the third thing was that I went to my children's school around Chinese New Year, which I like to do, you know. I dressed up in my traditional party dress, and went and read books about Chinese New Year to the students and answered questions and handed out red envelopes. And that year, I asked the students, you know, "What do you think kids in China wear?" And I, it was so interesting, because they all pointed to me. And I was wearing the, you know, the high-neck, silk, Manchu gown, you know, it's called the qipao, and they're like, "You wear that." It is like, no, no. This is...I could barely sit down in this, you know? I can't run in this. I can't play in this. This is not what we wear all the time in China. Most of the kids there wear t-shirts and jeans. And they were just, like, shocked. I was not their picture of Chinese kids at all. So when I looked at all the books that I had been reading to them, it became really clear that they were all showing that ancient China, you know? China with everybody living in, you know, villages, with dirt roads and thatched huts and open markets. And those probably still do exist in some of the more rural areas. But that...coming, you know, back from Shanghai, that was not my experience at all. And I thought there was a real need there to show contemporary China to kids in America.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 27:01

Oh, I love that. And I love how your books, even though they're fun and cute stories, like, they really are a form of activism. I mean, being an Asian American writer, like, you are using your own voice to tell your own story. And I think that's so powerful.

A

Andrea Wang 27:17

Thanks. Yeah, I'm really trying. And I think it's...the tricky part is to have a lesson that isn't didactic, right? You have to engage the children with the story first. And then, you know, the illustrations in "The Nian Monster" were done by the illustrator, her name is Alina Chau, and she is originally from Hong Kong, so she knew exactly how to draw it. You know, I didn't have to tell her anything other than I wanted it to be modern, and everybody wearing modern clothes. And you know, Hong Kong is also an incredibly modern city, so she knew all of the traditional touches to put in, as well as all of the modern stuff, too

J Jasmine Bradshaw 28:04

Yeah, she's amazing. You can go...I up on YouTube watching her paint for your book. It's so cool to watch her create your illustrations. And you have in there, like, references to places around the city that are super modern, so people can go, if they're paying attention, they can look those up and see how industrial and how modern China really is. And kind of dispel those stereotypes out of their mind.

A Andrea Wang 28:28

Yeah, I really wanted to put in some of those modern landmarks alongside some of the older ones, like the Yi Garden that they're in is very, very old with a zigzag bridge, but it exists in the middle of this very modern city.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 28:45

Yes, that's so cool. So when your children were growing up, I guess maybe before you were an author, did you, were you able to find books in which they could see themselves? Like, were you able to go to the library or to the bookstore, and find books where they could see themselves reflected in the characters?

A Andrea Wang 29:07

A few. I think, you know, Grace Lin's books are wonderful.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 29:12

Yeah.

A Andrea Wang 29:13

So she has a whole series of books with Chinese Americans in them, and they're just great. And, you know, I did not see myself in children's books when I was a child. I think there were two that stand out to me. One was "The Five Chinese Brothers," which I really liked at the time, because that was the only book set in China that you know, that I could kind of see myself in, and the brothers seemed kind of clever. But when I took it out to read it to my own children, my husband, who grew up overseas, had never read it before, and he was appalled. I when I look at it now, I do see that it's incredibly problematic. You know, it perpetuates a lot of stereotypes about all Asians looking the same

J Jasmine Bradshaw 30:06

Yes, the illustrations especially

**A** Andrea Wang 30:09

Yes. Yes. Right. I mean, why can't their own people tell them apart? That's just so...it doesn't make any sense to me.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 30:17

Yes! Okay, let me ask you about "Tiki Tiki Tembo." What do you think of that book?

**i** 30:23

I did not read that book a lot as a kid, but Grace Lin has an amazing essay on her website about how problematic that is. And the name itself, you know, even though it's fun to say, and a lot of people like to just memorize it, and kids like to roll it off their tongue, but Chinese names are two syllables, and then a surname. So three syllables maximum. So it's not authentic at all to the naming conventions of Chinese people. And it's also sort of a romanticized, exoticized story, right?

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 31:01

Yes, absolutely. Okay, thank you. That's so nice to get your insight on that. And I'm going to look up Grace Lin's essay and put it in our show notes for anybody who wants to read it. Awesome. Can you just tell us a little bit about Chinese New Year, because I know there are some listeners who maybe aren't as familiar with the holiday.

**A** Andrea Wang 31:21

Sure, Chinese New Year is a celebration of the new year, just according to the Chinese calendar. And we call it the Lunar New Year as well, because many other cultures, especially many other Asian cultures, celebrate Lunar New Year also. And the Chinese calendar is not...I was, I was reading up on this, and it gets really complicated, but it's not strictly based on the phases of the moon. It has some, it takes into account some of the sun's movements too. So it's called a combined lunar-solar calendar, technically, but that's just probably getting way more into it than we need to, but it's based on the phases of the moon. And that's why it happens at a different time than the American New Year, right? Because we use the Gregorian calendar in most of the, the Western world. And so the Chinese New Year and the Chinese holidays are calculated according to the Chinese calendar, so they fall on different days of the year. And it's a big two week celebration of seeing family and friends and eating lots of good food. There's, you know, like the night before New Year's Day is sort of the big feast where you get together with your family. It's kind of like, you know, just a celebration of spring and renewal and rebirth and surviving another year.

**A** Andrea Wang 33:50

J Jasmine Bradshaw 32:58

I love that. And do you have any favorite memories or traditions, maybe, when you were growing up or with your own children from celebrating Lunar New Year?

A Andrea Wang 33:08

I do. When I was really little, my mother used to put me in the bathtub after the big feast, you know, with orange peels. And you know, she would tell me to rub the orange peels all over my skin, and they would make me smell good, which they did you know, so I was clean and fragrant for the new year. And orange is our symbol of good luck. So it was sort of like a fun little thing that we just did once a year. And we used to make dumplings as well as a family together, just learning to you know, we just bought the premade dumpling wrappers in the grocery store, because that's so much easier than making the dough and rolling it out yourself.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 33:50

Yes.

A Andrea Wang 33:52

But you know, learning to make those is kind of like both a craft activity and a meal at the same time. So that was fun. My kids' favorite thing was always receiving the red envelope, which is traditionally filled with money.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 34:10

Always nice.

A Andrea Wang 34:12

Absolutely. Absolutely. So yeah, it's just a fun, sort of time of reflection and enjoying each other and being grateful for what you have.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 34:24

That's amazing. We've talked with our listeners a lot about cultural appropriation. So my question is, is it okay for families who are not Chinese to participate in the celebration? And if it is, okay, then kind of what could that look like for families?

A Andrea Wang 34:40

I do think it's okay. I think it's evolved, you know, from I'm not sure that was ever really a religious holiday. There are certain days of those two weeks where offerings are made to

different gods, like the God of wealth, or ,etc. But I think it's sort of that has kind of been put off to the side. And it's much more just a celebration of family. So I think all families can get into that. And you know, who doesn't want to have a bit of good luck and good fortune in the New Year, right? There are lots of ways to get involved. Food is a huge part of the celebration, which is why I wrote that one of the ways that Xingling in "The Nian Monster" tricks the monster is with food. And those three things that she tricks the monster with are some of the traditional celebratory foods. And those are things that are easy to make at home, or, you know, you can always go to a Chinese restaurant, and they might have like a special Chinese New Year banquet that you can, you know, attend. And if you live in a city with a larger Chinese population, there probably will be a dragon dance or a lion dance somewhere that you can bring your family to, you know, go and watch, which is really fun. Those are the ways that you know, we celebrate. The lions, are, you know, traditionally used to scare off the Nian monster. I don't think they represent, they don't have a representation of the Nian monster in the lion dance anymore, but those are fun. I just want to add in a little caution that usually there are lots of firecrackers set off, so if you have children, like one of my kids was sort of sensitive to sound, then just, you might want to inquire. It depends on the town or the city and their firecracker rules, but there can be a lot of you know, firecrackers and drums and gongs and loud noises.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 36:50

So, and I love how at the end of your book, you have a page where you explain the symbolism of all the different foods that Xingling offers to the Nian monster. And the thing that well, there were a few things that really stuck out to me, but I could not believe that the sticky rice was actually used to build the great wall. That's insane.

A

Andrea Wang 37:13

Yeah, fun fact. And when I do my presentations I usually ask the students and the teachers whether they think that's true or not, and most of them don't think it is. So they're really astonished to find that it's true. And that those sections of the wall are still standing. Sticky rice is very sticky.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 37:32

Apparently. It's so crazy. Oh, wow. So we really try to encourage people to get involved with communities past just heroes and holidays, right? Like we're celebrating Martin Luther King Day right now, and we're about to celebrate Chinese New Year, but we try to tell our listeners, like don't just talk about Black history during Black History Month. So I'm wondering how can families get involved with their local Chinese community outside of Chinese New Year?

A

Andrea Wang 38:01

That's a really good question. And I think most towns or cities with an Asian population will have a newspaper that's in English or a magazine. Here in Denver, there's "Asian Avenue Magazine," and they list tons of events, from you know, foreign films to, you know, different

cultural festivals, etc. So look for that and attend those events. Many high schools, including my son's have ethnic festivals, and so usually there'll be the Asian Association or the Chinese Club, etc. And you can go and support them that way. There are dragon boat festivals. Have you heard of those? In many cities? Well, I think Denver has one. Also Boston definitely has a huge Dragon Boat Festival that goes up and down the Charles River. And that's a wonderful thing to do in the summertime to go and watch it there. And these giant long boats with you know, dragon heads are painted beautifully. And you know, like a team of maybe 12 people or so who row and race down down the water. And that's really exciting to watch. There's, I think they wrote to the beating of drums as well. So even, I suppose, if your children are super interested, you could even go as far as to send them to Chinese school on the weekends. There are many different Chinese schools that have you know, like, they happen on Saturdays or Sundays. They have Chinese language lessons or they have folk arts classes where you can learn Chinese ribbon dancing, or fan dancing, or take musical instruments, etc. So you can look for those where you live.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 39:59

That's awesome. Thank you. So many good resources, I can't wait to look them up. We know that when it comes to talking about culture and ethnicity, it can be really exciting and fun. But sometimes that also comes along with stereotypes. So what would, what advice would you give to parents about dispelling stereotypes within their homes, like teaching their children how to get rid of those stereotypes that we have about our Chinese American brothers and sisters?

A

Andrea Wang 40:28

Well, I think it starts with having kind of a basic knowledge of the history of Chinese Americans in the United States. And I just recently watched this incredible documentary put out by PBS called "The Chinese Exclusion Act," and you can stream it through the PBS website. And it's incredibly eye opening about, you know, how in 1882 the government passed a law that banned all Chinese people from immigrating to the United States. And after watching that, it really sort of forces you to examine your own implicit biases, because that's sort of where the stereotypes about Chinese people eating rats, and eating other disgusting things and being, you know, really sly or sneaky...that's where that came from. And the whole stereotype about Chinese people stealing our jobs, etc. So that, I think is a great place to start. And then just to be aware of your own biases, and talk to your children, read books to them that are authentic representations of Chinese Americans and Chinese people. A good way to do that is to, you can Google for Own Voices books, that's a hashtag in the children's literature world, where it's #ownvoices. And you can find lots of recommendations for books that are written by people from that marginalized community. So it's not just for Chinese Americans, it's for all, you know, authors from different marginalized communities writing authentically about their experiences, or just about that community in general. And, you know, I think, if you do go out to a Chinese restaurant, or if you're served a whole fish, or you're served, you know, chicken feet, just to teach your children. Prepare them in advance not to be disrespectful. It might seem gross to them, but when you understand the history of famine and hunger in China, it becomes, you know, much more understandable why they don't waste any part of the animal.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 43:01

Yes. Oh, absolutely. And helping them understand that different doesn't mean wrong. It's just different from what you're used to. I love that. And that Own Voices hashtag is amazing. I follow it on Instagram, and so many different books come up, and a range—like not just children's books; books for adults as well. And even like high schoolers, too. So I do recommend that as well.

A Andrea Wang 43:26

Great. And there's a website for the We Need Diverse Books organization, and they actually have an app, I think, where you can search for their recommended books.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 43:38

Oh, no way. That is so cool. I did not know about that. I'm about to go look that up. That's amazing. Thank you for telling me about that. Sure. Um, are you working on anything exciting right now? Like, how can our listeners connect with you? What are you up to? What's next for Andrea Wang?

A Andrea Wang 43:58

Wow. Well, my second picture book came out last year. I should have mentioned that earlier. It's called "Magic Ramen: The story of Momofuku Ando," and it is a picture book biography of Momofuku Ando, who invented instant ramen, and that's been doing really well. I'm really excited to see people are enjoying it. And I tend to write about food a lot. So my next two picture books are also about food. I have one coming out in 2021, and the title is tentatively "Watercress," and it's based on sort of a memory that I have that's been fictionalized. And what I remember is my parents taking me out, you know, we lived in Ohio when I was young, and they would stop by the side of the road, and we would climb into this ditch full of muddy water and collect watercress. And that was not my favorite thing to do because it made me feel very "other." And that book is sort of... the protagonist in it is, you know, she does not enjoy doing this. But she comes to understand why her parents, you know, because they have lived through famine in China, they will collect free food where they find it, you know. They're very pragmatic people. And then the fourth picture book, the next one that's coming out after "Watercress," is called "Luli and the Language of Tea." And it comes out in 2022, I believe. And it came from this interesting little tidbit I discovered about how the word for tea in many, many languages derived from the Chinese word for tea, because China was the only place where it was grown, when they discovered it. So as it was exported across the world through the global trade lines, the word for it in Chinese, which in Mandarin is Cha, but in different dialects sounds different, it morphed as it spread across the world into Chai, and che and tea and Tay. So that particular book has a child in sort of an English as a second language setting where there are many children from all over the world. And they aren't playing together because they don't understand each other's languages. But one child brings in some tea to share and to have a tea party and they all understand the word for tea.

J Jasmine Bradshaw 46:44

Oh, that sounds so good. I cannot wait. That is so exciting.

Oh, that sounds so good. I cannot wait. That is so exciting.

A

Andrea Wang 46:50

And, and then I have, actually, my first middle grade novel coming out, also in 2021. So that's super exciting. And I have other projects in the works that are all about Chinese Americans, but I probably can't talk about them.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 47:07

Okay, well, we'll keep our eyes out. So how can people like get in touch with you or see more of your work.

A

Andrea Wang 47:15

So I have a website, which is [andreyawang.com](http://andreyawang.com). And you can see more about the books that I have out, as well as a couple of the, you know, there's just placeholders for the books that I have on the way. But on that on my website, you can also download teachers' guides and event kits for both of those books. I meant to mention that the event kit for "The Nian Monster" has this giant mask of the Nian monster's face with an open mouth that you can print out and have kids color. And they can pretend to feed the Nian monster with different things like yarn for noodles, or, you know, rice cakes for the sticky rice, plastic fish, etc. And so they can kind of have an interactive storytime. So there's also an origami craft too, if your kids are, you know a little bit older and can fold the paper, it makes a bookmark of the Nian monster's face. And so he sort of munches on a corner of your book where you're, you know, to keep your place. But I'm also on social media. I'm on Instagram and Twitter and Facebook. And if you go to my website, you'll see links to those. I don't post very often, but I am occasionally there.

J

Jasmine Bradshaw 48:39

Well, is there anything else you want our listeners to know? Anything you want to leave us with?

A

Andrea Wang 48:46

I think I may have mentioned this, but I think it bears repeating that many other cultures celebrate Lunar New Year. And I think that is probably the preferred term for it now is Lunar New Year. And to be inclusive, I think a wonderful thing to do would be to go take out children's books about the different celebrations. And each of those different cultures that celebrate Lunar New Year might be fun to compare and contrast and to talk to your children about the different ways that different Asian cultures celebrate because we are not a monolith. Right? People tend to lump Asians and Asian Americans all together. And we are very, very different cultures.





**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 49:31

Yes, absolutely. Thank you for adding that. That is so important. I had just learned that more cultures celebrate Lunar New Year, so thank you, because I'm learning too on this journey, you know,

**i** 49:44

Right. And I think the learning doesn't stop.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 49:50

Definitely. Well, thank you so much for coming on and sharing your wisdom. We are so grateful for you.

**A** Andrea Wang 49:57

Oh, thank you. It was a pleasure.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 49:59

Isn't she just absolutely fantastic? You need to own her books if you don't already, of course, I will link those in the show notes. And I will also link the documentary that she talks about the Chinese Exclusion Act documentary that was on PBS, I was able to find it streaming totally for free. So I'm going to link that, because that's something that we are going to be doing this week. And I would encourage you to watch it too. Please speak out, my friends, when you hear a racist comment that is directed towards the Asian American community. We need to speak up and speak out because we are anti-racist in all instances. You can do it. We are doing this together. And of course, before we go, I have to remind you about Bite-Sized Black History. You need this in your home. It is going to be such an amazing resource to create this environment of joy and excitement around Black history. I want to scoop out all of the resentment that anyone in your family might feel towards Black history and really transform that into joy. So visit the link in our show notes and grab your copy of Bite-Sized Black History.

**J** Jasmine Bradshaw 51:13

My friends, thank you for being here. I hope you can feel how much I believe in you, and how deeply I know that when we work together, we can make real change in our communities. Any of the books, podcasts, or articles that I reference will be linked in the show notes. If you are looking for more detailed notes, be sure to head over to our Patreon community. On our Patreon site. I provide all of the outlines that I use to make the episodes and everything is linked there. So you don't have to take furious notes while you are listening. And don't forget to join us over on Instagram at [firstname.basis](https://www.instagram.com/firstname.basis). If you're interested in partnering with First Name Basis or doing some kind of collaboration, please email us at [hello@firstnamebasis.org](mailto:hello@firstnamebasis.org). All right, have a great week my friends, and I will talk to you again soon.

