

This picture book biography chronicles Chiang’s love for food, culture, and cooking and her impact on introducing the rich variety of Chinese cuisine to American palates. As you explore the book with your students, the following are some possible engagements for interacting with the text and the topics it introduces for young readers.

I Used to Think, But Now I Know

Before reading the book aloud, have students brainstorm what they already know about Chinese food—what dishes or ingredients are they familiar with, what might they order at a restaurant, do they ever cook Chinese food at home? On chart paper or on the whiteboard, create a list of connections students have to Chinese cuisine. Have students craft an “I think...” statement about Chinese food. (This can be done individually or as a class.) Share with students that the protagonist in this book helped change people’s ideas about what Chinese food can be and that together you are going to also possibly change your ideas.

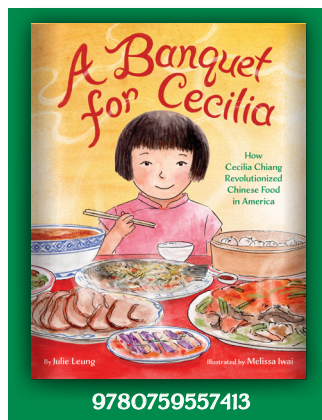
As you read the book aloud with students, add additional details, vocabulary, and facts you learn about Chinese cooking and recipes to your chart. After finishing the book, have students return to their original “I think” statements and add to them, with additional facts gathered from the text. Have students read aloud their revised sentences using the sentence frame, “I used to think _____, but now I know _____” about their new knowledge. This is a good comprehension and synthesis exercise that can be applied to other nonfiction texts as well.

Flavorful Language Study

The author’s text is full of rich descriptions of the food that Chiang enjoyed and created. While reading the book, collect sensory language used to describe the food and cooking processes featured in the book. You might include details such as ingredients, smells, tastes, cooking methods, etc. An example is included below as a starting point. In addition to expanding students’ background knowledge and vocabulary, collecting this language will be helpful for some of the other teaching ideas listed below including Menu Study and Writing a Review.

Ingredients and Cooking Tools (Nouns)	Sensory Details (Adjectives)	Cooking Methods (Verbs)
Ex: Scallions, Woks, Soybean Paste	Ex: Savory, Tangy, Chewy	Ex: Sauteed, Sizzled, Sliced





A Banquet for Cecilia

How Cecilia Chiang Revolutionized Chinese Food in America

By Julie Leung
Illustrated by Melissa Iwai



Mapping the Plot

Both the text and the illustrations offer important details about Cecilia Chiang's life journeys that eventually lead her to San Francisco's Chinatown. Together with students, list the journeys that Cecilia takes throughout the story, first within China and then, internationally. Using an online mapping tool such as MapQuest, track each leg of Cecilia's journey. As a mathematics extension, calculate the distance traveled on each leg and on her overall journey from Beijing to San Francisco so students can better understand the immense scope of her travel. To draw a student connection to the distances traveled, consider having students map what destinations are as far from them as Cecilia and her sister traveled (by foot) from Beijing to Chongqing, (approximately 1100 miles). Discuss how arduous that journey must have been and the determination it must have taken.

Genre Study: Menus

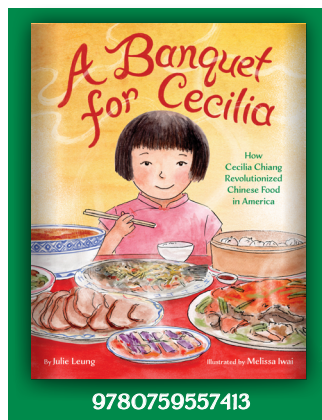
Cecilia Chiang created a menu with over 200 dishes for The Mandarin, her restaurant in Chinatown. Students can view some of The Mandarin's menus over the years online, including at [The Smithsonian](#), and [the Los Angeles Public Library](#). Have students discuss how the menus are organized—and what types of narratives are included for patrons ordering off the menu. *A Banquet for Cecilia* informs us that the original menu included the important line, "Imagine you are a Chinese family..." Do we see that in any of the online menus? What do we imagine we might want to order from the menus?

As a follow-up extension, encourage students to find menus from favorite local restaurants. (This can be done online with an image search.) As a class, create a list of what menus generally do or do not include. Example—courses, images, prices, descriptions of dishes, etc. Invite students to create a menu of a restaurant that features their family's or their own favorite dishes, similarly to how Cecilia did. What dishes would they want to feature and why—what foods do they hope to introduce others to the way Cecilia opened diners' eyes to the deliciousness of Chinese food?

Restaurant Review

After a newspaper columnist eats at The Mandarin and declares the food to be "The best Chinese food east of the Pacific," The Mandarin becomes an incredibly popular and well-respected restaurant that people flock to from around the world. His review likely included details about many of the amazing dishes described in the book, such as Tea-smoked Duck and Twice-cooked Pork. Together with students, look up restaurant reviews online of favorite local restaurants. Discuss what is usually included in a restaurant review. Consider bringing in a tasting dish that students can sample and write their own restaurant review from. Or have them consider the school cafeteria as a 'local restaurant' as a source of inspiration. For





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additional ideas about incorporating reviewing food into language arts curriculum, consider this ESOL lesson plan template for examining restaurant reviews from [The New York Times](#).

Soul of a Banquet and Other Visual Sources

Melissa Iwai's illustrations in *A Banquet for Cecilia* include beautiful details of Cecilia Chiang and The Mandarin. Together with students, explore some primary source documents, photographs, and video that inspired the art. A variety of photos of Chiang throughout her life can be found in the back matter of the book; additional photos can be found online as well as pictures of the interiors of The Mandarin and its patrons. Another valuable resource is the video documentary, *Soul of A Banquet*, about Chiang's life and legacy; consider showing students clips from the video after reading the book to answer further inquiry questions they may have.

Historical Allusions

Although much of the focus of the book is on Cecilia's contributions to Chinese cooking, the book includes several allusions to important historic events affecting the Chinese people during the decades of the 1930s and 1940s. With older students, consider a more in-depth exploration and discussion of the Second Sino-Japanese War and its connections to World War II (which led Cecilia and her sister to flee Beijing) and the later Chinese Civil War (where Cecilia and her family were able to escape to Tokyo on the last flight from Shanghai). Valuable teaching tools and resources for both time periods can be found at the [UK National Archives Site](#).



Teaching Tips, created by Marie A. LeJeune

