

Eyes *that* Speak *to* the Stars

Discussion Questions

1. In the beginning of the story, a troubling event occurs; this is called a microaggression. What happens? Why do you think this microaggression is so hurtful to the young boy? Why do you think the two eyes drawn like slits made such a harmful impact?
2. Who is Baba and how does he comfort the young boy? What do Baba's eyes tell the young boy? What do you think the young boy learns about himself through his relationships with Baba?
3. We often resemble people in our families. Who are you most like in your family? How are you most like them? Who makes you feel like you can "soar above the clouds" and in what ways?
4. Why is it significant that Baba's eyes resemble someone else's in the young boy's family? What is this individual's relationship to the young boy?
5. What stories do Agong's eyes tell the young boy? What do you think it means when Agong looks at the young boy like he's "the only answer that matters?" What does the young boy learn about himself through his relationship with Agong?
6. The young boy goes for early morning walks with his Agong. What are some everyday rituals you do with a member of your family? Who do you share the special time with? Why do you enjoy this special activity?
7. Whose eyes do Agong's look like? Describe this person's relationship to the young boy. How do you know? How does this person impact the main character?
8. The boy in the story has a moment of heartbreak in the beginning of the story. He also mentions that his eyes and those of his loved ones allow him to realize that he can "break through dark and doubt." What do you think this means? Have you had moments where you had doubt? What did you do and how did you overcome it?
9. What are some "impossibilities" that you dream about? What dreams are nurtured by the people in your family? What hopes do you have for the future? How does your family help you to dream big and be "visionary"?
10. Dung Ho captures the wonder and love the young boy has for his family. Looking at the beautiful illustrations by Dung Ho, which are your favorite? Why? What strengths do her illustrations bring to the young boy?

Extension Activities

1. **Speak to the Stars.** The young boy's eyes "spoke to the stars." If you could speak to a star, what would you say and why? Sometimes people make wishes on stars. Cut out some stars and write some of your wishes on them. Hang your stars on a hanger or sticks to create a mobile that you can hang in your room.
2. **The Power of Story.** The young boy's Agong has the perspective of his ancestors and can "gaze into the distance." Interview a member of your family who is much older than you. Create a list of questions to ask about their life as a child and the lives of their parents before them. What was it like for them growing up? What parts of history can be shared from their perspective? What lessons can you learn from their "gaze"?
3. **What Is Your Superpower?** Everyone has treasures inside that unfold when our loved ones remind us that we have them. We sometimes forget about them because they are a part of us. What is your superpower? How are you strong? What are the ways you "soar into the clouds" with your natural talents? Create a superhero costume highlighting your superpower. Draw, build, or sew your design and explain to the class how your design choices showcase your strengths.
4. **Little Lights.** Grab a flashlight and create a fort! The young boy in the story has a playful relationship with Di-Di, his younger brother. They share a loving bond, full of joy and laughter. Do you have a younger sibling, cousin, or neighbor who you can shine a flashlight together with? Who is it? What are ways you can encourage them and show them they are special too? With permission from a parent, ask if you can share your flashlight with them under the fort. Perhaps, you can even share a snack together!

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Dear Reader,

First, thank you so much for your support of *Eyes that Kiss in the Corners*. I wish I could give each of you a (germ-free) hug and look you in the eye to tell you what your support has meant in a particularly challenging year. I'm thrilled to be able to introduce its companion book, *Eyes that Speak to the Stars*. This is a book that showcases the strength of family relationships, history, and culture in the face of racist microaggressions at school.

Like its predecessor, *Eyes that Speak to the Stars* is ultimately a story about love. It is the story of the love shared between generations, the love we must develop for ourselves, and the love that we use to create change in the world.

The anti-Asian violence in Atlanta and around the country has heightened national consciousness of the racism faced by a diverse Asian community. As many have noted, this racism and violence is not new, but the history and stories of the Asian community have been rendered all but invisible in curriculum and culture. Too many of us have endured the pain and humiliation of classmates pulling up their eyes into slants and chanting gibberish meant to imitate our ancestral languages. Only when we learn the language and tools of disruption can we build toward a different future.

The lyrical prose of *Eyes that Speak to the Stars* flows with the narrator from a hurtful incident at school to empowering moments with his father, inspiring talks with his Agong, and silly antics with his baby brother. Each moment helps the narrator develop a stronger sense of identity, a greater pride in his heritage, and a deeper connection with family. Together, these moments help the narrator step into his own power.

Confronting racism, both interpersonal and structural, requires eyes that can see new possibilities. It requires finding and creating light in spite of the darkness. It requires us to be visionary.

I hope *Eyes that Speak to the Stars* can open critical dialogue about matters of race, history, invisibility, power, and responsibility. I hope it pushes us to see and build toward a future of shared humanity and liberation. I hope it helps us become visionary.

With love,

Joanna Ho

