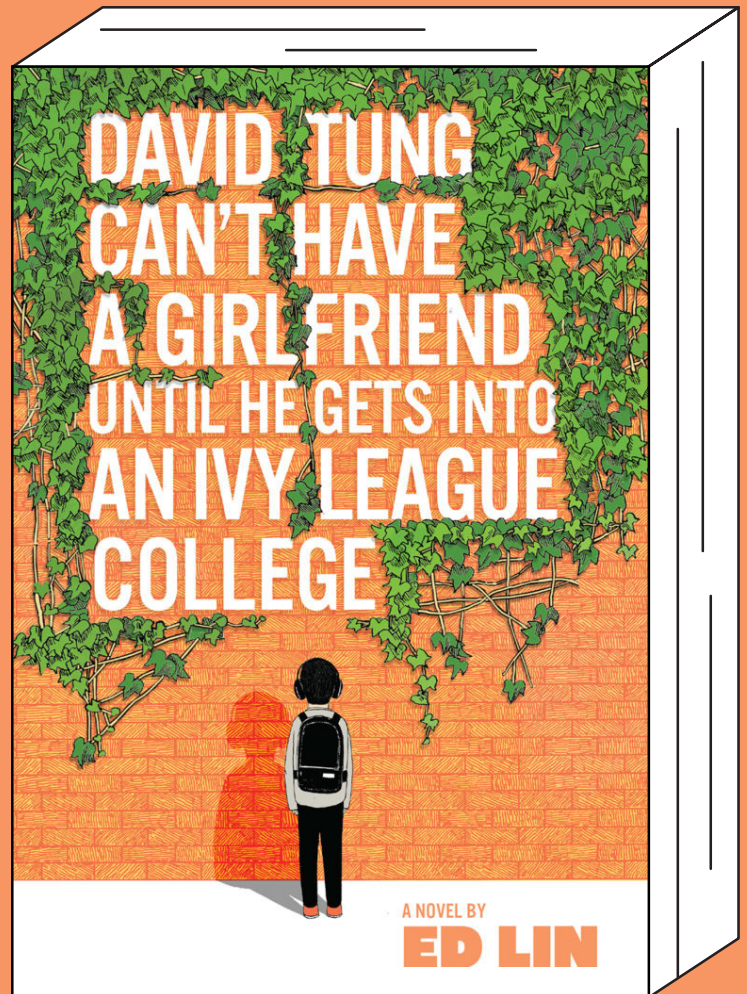


A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO ED LIN'S *DAVID TUNG CAN'T HAVE A GIRLFRIEND UNTIL HE GETS INTO AN IVY LEAGUE COLLEGE*



ED LIN



✧ About the Author

Ed Lin is a Taiwanese-American writer, actor and novelist who grew up in New York City. He graduated from Columbia University with a Bachelor of Science degree. He is the first author to win three Asian American Literary Awards. His first novel, *Waylaid* won a Members' Choice Award at the Asian American Literary Awards and also a Booklist Editors' Choice Award in Fiction in 2002. For more information, visit: edlinforpresident.com

✧ Synopsis

Complex and witty, Ed Lin's first young adult novel centers around David Tung, a young Chinese American boy grappling with his multicultural identity. This coming of age story features contemporary discussions on classism, ethnoburbs and ethnic enclaves, the model minority myth, and how these elements influence David's decisions in life. A refreshing perspective for young Asian American students, David Tung embodies a relatable character who navigates relevant AAPI issues.

🔗 How to Use This Guide

The relatable and honest passages of a high school Chinese American boy trying to deal with school, his family, and girls makes *David Tung* an excellent choice for middle schoolers, high schoolers, or youth in courses examining Asian and Asian American experiences, immigrant stories, or the complex relationships between race, class, culture, and society. This guide is intended to help educators more clearly frame their lessons, and includes questions, themes, quotes, and additional resources to use when discussing the stories, assigning classwork or homework, and facilitating engagement and understanding.

STORY OVERVIEWS

David introduces the Asian-dominated, cutthroat nature of his high school (Shark Beach High), his aspirations for attending an Ivy League college, the struggles of being the son of immigrant restaurant owners, and the realities of the wealth gap between his family and the more privileged kids in his class. When David's pretty and popular classmate Christina Tau asks him to the Dames Ball, he accepts, but wonders how he's going to get to the dance when he knows his parents won't let him. Things between David and Christina come to a head when Christina asks David to rent a tux for the dance, but David's mom refuses to pay for it or allow him to see any girls. David is forced to confront Christina to tell her he can't go to the dance, and moves on to focus on his studies and his hopes for getting a coveted internship with Harmony Health.

On weekends, David attends Chinese school with his friends Andy, Chun, and YK. while working on a group project, a girl at Chinese school—Betty Jung—starts to catch David's attention. Betty is a stark contrast to Christina, but David begins to acknowledge his feelings for her. David begins to form a stronger relationship with Betty, and also learns more about his community through events such as helping his friend YK move after YK and his family are evicted. The Chinese school then gets a new principal—Principal Gao, who wants to remake the school in a new image and have David be the face of it. Amidst all of this, David finds out he has secured an interview with Harmony Health, but his world is further shaken up when Betty comes to his family's restaurant to tell him that she is leaving for Hong Kong, and he learns that her father is Mr. Yeung, his father's long-time friend.

David eventually finds out he got the Harmony Health internship, and also confronts Principal Gao to stand up for his beliefs. As the story closes, David is working at the Harmony Health internship, is on better terms with Christina and his classmates, and can spend time with Betty, who ended up returning from Hong Kong.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The environment that David describes at Shark Beach High touches on many elements of the Asian American immigrant experience, particularly the wealth gap, immigrant competitiveness, and the upholding of elite academics as a goal. Do you think David's description is accurate? Do you see any similarities or differences to you or your family's own educational and/or immigrant experiences?
2. Wealth and class comparisons play a significant role in how David sees himself and others. Have you ever engaged in similar thoughts regarding yourself or your peers? If so, when did you first become aware of wealth and/or class disparities?
3. The four Chinese delivery workers at Tung's Garden embody a complex intersection between race, foreign identity, and the realities of education, and show that appearances can be deceiving. Does this change how you view others around you or in your community?
4. Throughout the story, there are many references to common stereotypes about Asians and Asian Americans. Do you think those stereotypes are true? Untrue? Partially true? Explain your reasoning.
5. In chapter 8, David, referencing his Asian identity, states that "our people don't discuss mental health." Do you think this is true? In your culture, is mental health talked about? Why or why not?
6. When Auntie Zhang makes food for David (page 200), she is also referencing a cultural expression of care. In what ways is care, concern, and/or love for someone expressed in your culture?
7. Think about the intersection of race, class, and economic status. Do you have preconceived notions of who should be wealthy or poor? Who should be working a particular job? What makes a job a "real" job? Explain your thoughts.
8. Think back to when David saw his friend YK being forcefully evicted, or when he heard how Betty's father was mistreated after being injured at work. Why do you think YK and Betty's father were treated in the ways that they were? Do you think their treatment has anything to do with their race? Class? Other socio-economic factors?
9. What do you think of David's statement "I don't see her color" on page 270? Thinking more broadly about race, could this statement be problematic?
10. Think about Chun's outburst on page 296. Why do you think he says the things he does? Can you tie the ideas from Chun's statement to larger ideas of identity and representation?
11. In David's confrontation with Principal Gao in chapter 17, he voices the importance of his own happiness. What do you think are productive ways in which parents and children can have productive discussions on balancing expectations with personal goals and happiness? How might culture, immigrant status, or other socio-economic factors influence such discussions?
12. Does David's story as a whole support or detract from the idea of the American Dream? Why?

QUOTES OF INTEREST

The following are quotes, organized by theme and chapter, that can be used to help guide analysis. This is not an exhaustive list; rather, it is meant to be representational of moments in the book that touch on specific themes. Additionally, each quote is not tied to just one theme; many of the quotes reference multiple themes and ideas at once.

ASIAN AMERICAN ISSUES



Chapter 1

"We're the only school on the East Coast where about 80% of the students are Asian American, nearly all Chinese, and many with immigrant parents. Twenty-eight percent of the student body are themselves immigrants. And immigrants are competitive as hell, if you don't already know." (2).

"When I was younger, I would have been embarrassed to be sitting with someone like Benson. I'm ashamed to say now, but in grade school I used to try to raise my own social stature by making fun of the new fobby kids and how they always smelled like Tiger Balm." (14).

Chapter 2

"The first time my mother told me to stay away from girls was around the same time she told me to stay away from electrical outlets. By seventh grade, when some kids were starting to couple up, I already knew that that was one rite of passage denied to me." (52).

"Mr. Norton springs pop debates, appraising us based on how much we talk, which makes up 20% of our final grade. Those students who exist in the "quiet Asian kid mode" carefully cultivated by their parents soon find themselves with a string of zeroes in class participation." (54).

Chapter 4

"Americans—white Americans, at least—probably wouldn't get a good impression of my Chinese school by meeting Principal Ho, but Chinese parents would never be so sim-

ple-minded as to judge him based on his appearance alone. Principal Ho had a PhD! From Harvard! An Ivy League school! He was smart! Maybe he could do something for my kid!" (75).

Chapter 8

"I hoped to do the same. The pressure to get high grades while working at a restaurant was probably just prepping me for a mental disorder that would be helpful for my chosen occupation. / I would thank my mother for putting me on that track, but our people don't discuss mental health." (164).

Chapter 11

"I'm paranoid? You know the IRS racially profiles people of Chinese descent for auditing, right? They think we're extremely shady." (223).

Chapter 17

"No. I'm the one who's confused. I'm supposed to get into a good college, but I'm also supposed to work here to help out the family. On top of that, I have to go to your school to learn some token amount of Chinese. All this just to make everyone happy. Everyone except me. Now, by some miracle, I've managed to get this internship. Something that I wanted and worked hard for. And I'm not going to compromise my time at the hospital in any way because it's the one thing I want to do. It's the one thing in my whole life that's for me!" (340).

IMMIGRANT EXPERIENCE



Chapter 1

"My parents expect me to get better grades by listening to them yell at me. Then again, even if they were willing or able to pay for a tutor, I wouldn't have time for lessons anyways. I work at the restaurant after school and on the weekends—basically, nearly all my waking non-school hours." (4).

Chapter 5

"Wang says that he was lucky to get into the U.S. at all, even if it was to attend a modest state university. The rich Chinese students—the kids of Internet billionaires and generals—all go to name-brand U.S. schools. Wang's father is a coal miner." (106-107).

Chapter 6

"You know how long I work here? How long your father works here? You want to run around with girls while we're spending day and night here making money so we can live?" (123).

Chapter 9

"I guess running a restaurant—one like ours—is considered manual labor, not a professional occupation. That makes me an outsider here in Shark Beach. Plus I don't go to the same Chinese school that everyone else goes to on Saturdays. I go to a Chinese school in the city. So that's another strike against me." (160).

"That seemed to be what had happened to my parents at least. They came to this country, respectfully married each other, and had a kid whom they expected to continue contributing to the family, following the heavenly ordained sequence of life events: get a good education, have children, and work as much and as long as possible so the next generation could be better off. What was romantic and beautiful about that?" (181).

Chapter 11

"The landlord tried to break our leases in court, but that didn't work, so now he's changed his tactics. He came in this morning, shut off the pipes in the basement, and removed the building doors. Now there's no water and anybody off the street can walk right into our building," said YK. "It's not safe here anymore." (229).

Chapter 12

"His landlord forced his family out, so we have to help take their stuff over to Confucius Plaza.' He meant the colossal subsidized-housing complex near the Manhattan Bridge, where a vast population of elderly Chinese lived." (233).

"He didn't have health insurance. His boss helped him find a doctor, but I'm using the term 'doctor' loosely. After he was patched up, he was fired. The asshole boss even claimed that the back wages they'd owed him had been used to pay the doctor. Can you believe that?" (258).

WEALTH & CLASS

Chapter 1

"Shark Beach offers an elite education that's tuition-free for whoever can afford to live and pay taxes here." (3).

"There was none of that for my family. We never had any vacations. We didn't know what it was like to do nothing while awake. I was at a birthday pool party just a few miles from my house, and knowing that I'd be at Tung's Garden soon enough, I couldn't even let go and have fun. And how did we celebrate my birthdays? At break time, I would blow out the candles and share the cake with the kitchen staff and delivery guys." (23).

Chapter 2

"Christina still had ski lift tags on the zipper of her winter jacket from a Christmas trip to the Alps. I'd never even been on a plane, never mind a vacation. Me sneaking out for the dance would be my first night off from Tung's Garden since my last winter track meet. The sheer incongruity of the whole situation caused me to redouble my efforts at blocking out all non-academic thoughts." (57-58).

Chapter 3

"I immediately went to the Men's Wearhouse site because it was the only place I knew that rented tuxes. Outfits started at \$100. I didn't have even that kind of money, and based on the links Christina had sent me, relatively basic outfits probably wouldn't cut it." (66).

"Honestly, if I had been free to date girls, I would never even have thought about asking out Christina. She was one of the rich and beautiful. My family was just getting by, and I was basically a manual laborer." (67-68).

Chapter 4

"You were saying you weren't rich, but that's a lie!' / 'My family isn't rich, Chun.' / 'Get outta here!' He held up his phone. 'It says people there make \$200k a year!' I sighed because most Wikipedia readers don't know the difference between median and average household incomes. / 'The median is \$200,000,' I said. 'That means more people earn that much than any other amount. The average is a lot lower.'" (73).

Chapter 5

"All four men are physics grad students at the state university in nearby Clairmont Township. They all teach undergrad classes as part of their fellowships, but they still find time to work our relatively crappy delivery jobs. I think with tips it comes out to \$20 an hour, \$30 during big nights. I used to think our delivery guys were just being greedy, moonlighting with us to hoard a little more money. It was only after Wang Yi, the funny one, told me that teaching paid 'shit,' that I realized their situation." (106).

"It made me think of a film I once saw in school where a retired baseball player said that although he'd grown up im-

poverished, he'd never thought of himself that way, because when you're a kid you don't think about money. Things are

different here and now. In Shark Beach, the kids who don't think about money are the ones who are loaded." (108).

STEREOTYPES

Chapter 6

"Does Shark Beach High have the best coding classes because of the actual aptitude of the majority Asian population, or did the state allocate those resources to us because of the perceived aptitude of the majority Asian population? Hard to say." (113).

Chapter 11

"Who's your mom to say that anyone's low-class anyway? Look at your family. You run a restaurant. That's not exactly white-collar work. Aren't you suburban Chinese supposed to have real jobs? Office jobs? Doctor and lawyer jobs?" (229).

RACE/ETHNICITY

Chapter 9

"Chinese people can be racist, too. People in Chinatown probably treat her like shit. The folks at school certainly do." (191).

"Are you kidding me?" said Chun. 'Chinese love white people because they leave decent tips! You ever wonder why the wait staff always goes out of their way to serve white people and make sure they're comfortable? Because their tips make it worthwhile.' (191-92).

Chapter 13

"I don't see her color,' I said, regretting my words immediately. / 'You don't see her color? Of course you do! You didn't want to go to the Dames Ball with Christina Tau because she's too yellow for you! Who's the racist now?'" (270).

CULTURE / IDENTITY

Chapter 10

"In our culture, you have to grab things and force your will on people to show how much you care. The more energy you put into it, the more love you are expressing. / If I had tried to fight Auntie Zhang by grabbing my plate back, she would have been devastated. The deed and the person are the same. Even if my only intention was to save her some trouble, she would have taken it as a rejection of her." (200).

Chapter 14

"I don't care,' said Chun. 'It's just fucked up that Joe Suburb, who's probably even whiter than Betty on the inside, is going to represent our school. Which is in Chinatown! He's not even Cantonese!' / 'I'm not Cantonese, either,' said Andy. / 'So what?' said Chun. 'You're working class. Actually, you look like an illiterate Chinese peasant!' / 'I'm glad the show got cancelled,' said Betty. 'Now I don't have to work with an asshole like Chun.' / Chun scratched his sides. / 'The feeling's mutual, Betty White!' She turned and left hastily." (296).

THEMES

The following list, though by no means exhaustive, defines and contextualizes some of the major themes present in *David Tung*. Many of these themes also share similarities and overlap with each other, and are not mutually exclusive—each chapter, specific quote, or scene can have elements of a number of different themes at once.

Asian American Issues

This is a broad theme that encompasses many different topics that have often come to define the experience of being Asian American in America. This includes but is not limited to: relating to or referencing stereotypes of Asians (e.g. as overachievers, quiet, or concerned with academics), specific elements of Asian culture, heritage, language, or things specific to one's "people," or describing the tensions between Americanized Asian Americans and the overseas or recently arrived Asians.

Immigrant Experience

Although *David Tung* focuses on the Asian American immigrant story, the ideas in this theme also relate broadly to being an immigrant of any race or background, and the universal ideas that define such experiences. This includes the economic struggle of an immigrant family trying to make ends meet, the fallback to "typical" blue collar immigrant professions such as being janitors, repair workers, or small-scale restaurant owners. This topic also includes the generational and cultural conflicts between generations, as older immigrant generations tend to hold on to more of their original culture, while their Americanized children navigate conflicting or oppositional perspectives based on more "American" viewpoints.

Wealth & Class

This theme includes topics such as the wealth comparisons between different individuals and who is included or excluded based on such comparisons, the economic and

social realities of what one or one's family can afford, and the differential treatment individuals receive based on their real or perceived economic or class standing.

Stereotypes

A stereotype, broadly speaking, is a fixed and often oversimplified idea that is used to describe or represent a person, group, or idea. This theme is closely tied to Asian American issues, but focuses not just on Asian American perspectives, but on discussions of stereotyping across all societal groups, how stereotypes affect the ways in which we treat others, and society itself is often organized around stereotyped conceptions of who people are.

Race/ethnicity

Race refers to one's physical traits, and ethnicity refers to one's cultural definition and identification. Both are closely related, and in this context, refer broadly to the ways in which race and/or ethnicity inform the ways that individuals identify, relate to, or perhaps discriminate against each other.

Culture/Identity

Identity is a broad category that includes elements of race, class, ethnicity, immigration status, and other factors that define an individual's sense of self. The ways in which different facets of identity interact to inform the ways in which individuals perceive and understand each other, and how an individual sees themselves.

RECOMMENDED FOR THESE CLASSES

David Tung is ideal for a wide range of classes because of its considerations of race, class, the immigrant experience, and Asian American identity. As a young adult novel, it is particularly relevant to Middle School, High School, or youth classes examining and discussing portrayals of Asian and Asian American experiences, immigrant experiences, cultural differences, and the intersection of wealth, class, and social status.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources are intended to help contextualize *David Tung* within the larger landscape of discussions concerning Asian Americans, the immigrant experience, and issues of culture, wealth, and class.

Asian American

The Making of Asian America: A History by Erika Lee

Self Evident—podcast: <https://selfevidentshow.com>

Ethnic Enclaves vs Ethnoburb

<https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2011/03/10/rise-of-the-ethnoburbs>

Ethnoburb by Wei Li

Generational differences

“Tigertail” A film by Alan Yang

The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston

Immigrants

FOB by David Henry Hwang

Wealth and class

The New Chinese America: Class, Economy, and Social Hierarchy
by Xiaojian Zhao

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