

Child of the Owl Study Questions

The highlighted questions are the ones I think are the most important and/or interesting questions to reflect on and discuss.

Chapter 1

Part 1

- 1.** Describe Barney. What good qualities does he have? What bad qualities does he have?
- 2.** Describe Casey's personality.
- 3.** What is Casey's relationship with Barney like? What is her attitude toward his gambling habit? Does she think that his dream of good luck will come true?
- 4.** Barney and Casey know nothing about the "Happy God" figurine—what does this tell us about them?

Part 2

- 1.** Describe Phil, Pam-Pam, and Annette (the Hedgehog). How do they treat Casey, and what does this tell us about them?
- 2.** What is Phil's attitude toward Barney and toward Jeanie (Casey's mother)? Why is he taking care of Casey?
- 3.** What does Casey's behavior at Phil's house tell us about her personality?
- 4.** What is the family's attitude toward Paw-Paw, and why?
- 5.** What is Casey's first reaction to Chinatown? How does she feel about her own identity?
- 6.** What reaction do Casey and Paw-Paw have to each other? What "deal" do they make?
- 7.** How does Paw-Paw react to Casey's questions about her statues, and why?
- 8.** How are Casey and Paw-Paw different, and how will they learn from each other?

Chapter 2

Part 1

- 1.** How do Casey's classmates in Chinatown react to her, and why?
- 2.** Describe why Casey struggles so much in Chinese school. What does Casey's Chinese teacher think of her, and why? How does she treat Casey when she does poorly, and how does she treat her when she does well?
- 3.** What ability does Barney have that Casey wishes she had?

Part 2

- 1.** Why does Barney make a bet with the man in the park? What news does Barney have to tell Casey? What do these things tell us about him? Do you think Barney is just irresponsible and that he doesn't care about the effects of his decisions?
- 2.** What is different about Barney's life now that has made him get in such serious trouble so quickly?
- 3.** What does Casey say to Barney about life with Paw-Paw in Chinatown, and what does this tell us about her?
- 4.** Why does Barney tell Casey she has to stay with Paw-Paw longer, and how does Casey react to this?

Part 3

1. Why do you think Casey starts to cry?
2. Why does Paw-Paw decide to tell Casey the story about the Owl Spirit—what is the point of the story?
3. What lesson does the behavior of most of the owls teach? Who in the book might the owls represent?
4. How does the story make Casey feel?
5. Do you think Paw-Paw believes the story?

Chapter 3

Part 1

1. Describe Jeanie based on what Paw-Paw reveals about her at the beginning of this chapter. How is Jeanie different from Casey? Why hasn't Casey learned these things before?
2. Why is seeing the Chinese movies such an exciting experience for Casey?
3. What feeling does Casey suddenly have when walking around Chinatown? This is an important turning point in the book.
4. What is Paw-Paw's attitude toward her present situation? What does she think about how her life might be if the family had stayed in China? How does Casey view Paw-Paw's life in Chinatown, and what is her attitude toward living in Chinatown?

Part 2

1. Describe Mr. Jeh. What impresses Casey about him?
2. Describe the club—what do many of its members have in common?
3. What does Paw-Paw say at the end of Part 2 about the Chinese who have come to America? Do you agree with her opinion?

Part 3

1. What does Sheridan tell Casey about Barney's past? What logic does Sheridan say Barney used to justify his gambling?
2. What realization does Casey have about Booger's attitude toward Chinese culture, and what does she think the right attitude is?

Chapter 4

Part 1

1. Why does Casey decide to visit Booger?
2. What does Casey say that shows that she wants to be friends with Booger? Why does Booger "put the folder back more carefully than she had taken it out?"

3. What do Casey and Booger disagree about? What do you think of their opinions? What does Casey do right after she goes back upstairs that has to do with their conversation? Why do you think she does it? What reaction does she have?
4. Why does Paw-Paw treat Casey coldly after she comes home and finds the stove lit? What does she tell Casey to try to make her feel better?

Part 2

1. What do Casey and Barney discuss on the phone? What does he tell her about his past and his hopes for Casey?
2. What bad treatment does Casey experience at the delicatessen? What explanation does the clerk give Casey for the woman's behavior? What does Casey think about why the woman acts that way?
3. How does Casey handle the two clerks' dishonesty with her, and how does she realize she should have handled it—what important lesson does she learn about Chinese culture and manners?
4. What does Paw-Paw tell Casey about Barney and Jeanie's relationship?
5. What things does Casey ask Paw-Paw to teach her? Why is she interested in learning these things?

Chapter 5

1. What does Casey realize that Paw-Paw takes pride in, and how does she hurt Paw-Paw's pride? Why do you think Paw-Paw is so sensitive about this?
2. Why does Paw-Paw confront the thief, and what does this tell us about her personality?
3. Why do you think Paw-Paw decides not to report the thief to the police?
4. Why do you think Gilbert (the "Pachinko") seems so surprised that Barney is neither at the hospital nor with Casey?
5. Do you think Gilbert is being honest with Mr. Jeh about not knowing who took the charm? What "things" do you think he's planning to do after he leaves?
6. What method does Mr. Jeh use to find out about the owl charm?
7. How is walking around Chinatown with Mr. Jeh a special experience for Casey?

Chapter 6

1. What do you think is the meaning of Casey's dream?
2. What secrets do Casey and Booger share with each other? Why does Casey do this, and what effect does sharing this information have?
3. What trick does Gilbert use to make sure he has a good parking spot?
4. How does Barney try to explain his behavior?
5. How does Casey react to Barney's admission?
6. Why does Casey wish Barney had lied to her instead of admitting that he stole the charm?
7. What upsets Casey even more than the fact that Barney stole the charm and hit Paw-Paw?

Chapter 7

Part 1

1. What does Paw-Paw say to Casey to explain Barney's behavior and show that he should be forgiven?
2. How has Casey's attitude toward Chinatown changed?

Part 2

1. What differences does Paw-Paw see between Americans and Chinese? Do you think this analysis is accurate? Why is Paw-Paw so understanding toward Uncle Phil after he refuses to pay her hospital bill?
2. Why does Casey find it so hard to forgive Barney?
3. What shocking thing does Barney say to justify his stealing the owl charm?
4. What different views of the owl story do Casey and Barney have?
5. What does Paw-Paw's decision to sell the owl charm show about her character?
6. What does Paw-Paw mean when she tells Casey, "I'm afraid you already are like me...and that's a pity"?

Part 3

1. How does the museum director win Paw-Paw's trust and make her feel better about selling the charm?
2. Describe Gilbert's character based on what is revealed in this chapter. What significant change happens to him, and what do you think makes him change?

Part 4

1. What emotional note does the story end on, and how does the author express this? What predictions can you make about the future lives of the characters in the book based on the last section?