

# When You Trap a Tiger



Genre: Magical Realism  
Audience: Young Adult  
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## Summary

A HANDOUT EXPLORING NEW LITERACY STUDIES IN YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE!

“When you trap a Tiger” is about a bi-racial girl, Lily, whose sister, Sam, and mother move in with their Korean Halmoni (grandmother) in California. Lily has a superpower to be “invisible” and can see a magical tiger, she recants stories during her childhood. Although, she knows she’d be crazy to tell anyone except her Halmoni. Lily struggles with her identity as a young teenager and strikes a deal with a tiger to save her Halmoni. Her story is rich in her Korean heritage filled with folklore as she explores her identities. Navigating life through her world, she makes friends and learns that she isn’t “invisible,” rather a girl who see’s invisible things. She overcomes obstacles and learns bravery, develops deeper family connections, and holds the power to rewrite her family’s past and future.

## About the Author

**Tae Keller** grew up in Honolulu, Hawaii as an Asian American being told stories by her Halmoni. She is a Newbery-Award winning author and New York Times Bestseller. She graduated Bryn Mawr College and eventually moved to New York City to pursue a career in publishing. At present, she lives in Seattle Washington with her husband. You can read more about her at: [TAEKELLER.COM](http://TAEKELLER.COM).

## Characters

### Main Characters

**Lily:** Is a young, American-Korean teenager struggling with the loss of her American father. She is quiet, observant and has an inner dialogue. She confides in her Halmoni about an invisible tiger she saw after she moved with her mom and sister to live with her.

**Halmoni:** The family matriarch who is a well-respected grandma and friend in her town. She worked her way up and learned English as a second-language. She remains close to her Korean Heritage and passes it along to her family. She is genuine ideal grandmother who is fashionable and remains grounded in her Korean spirituality and honors spirits and stories. She is slowly dying.

**The Tiger:** Magical tiger that appears only to Lily. The tiger is Halmoni’s mother.

### Minor Characters

**Sam:** Lily’s older sister is the silent, misunderstood as angry adolescent that keeps things bottled up inside. She pushes cultural norms, but secretly believes in Halmoni’s stories.

**Ricky:** Lily’s friend she met at the library. He helps set a Tiger Trap. His family hunts tigers.

**Mother:** Halmoni’s daughter that raised two girls as a widow and moved to help her sick mother.

**Jensen:** Library Assistant.

## New Literacy Studies

### Main NLS Terms

#### 1. Identity

Identity is a way of describing a sense of self in practice. Lily explores her identities through adolescence as she encounters the tiger she becomes brave, as she becomes friends with Ricky she learns about friendship. She faces her fears, learns to communicate across cultural barriers and learn about who she is for herself, not as stagnant like through her mother’s eyes.

### Key Passages:

#### Passages on Identity:

Pg. 219, 220, 268, 278, 236, 241, 247

#### Culture:

Pg. 99, 83, 187

## 2. Sedimented Identities in Text

Sedimented identities in text: Is the layering of Lily's identity throughout the story building over time. We explore Lily's layered identities through her Korean heritage, family folklore, experiencing grief, cross-cultural friendships, and feeling "invisible."

## 4. Culture

Culture is a way of describing a characteristic of human life where people share values, behaviors, ways of speaking and living.

- Korean Folklore is a major literacy the characters use to make meaning. Kosa (166).
- Multilingualism/language and pronunciation of "Halmoni" shows cultural respect and connection. "Sticky people" (pg. 83).
- Family roles are culturally shaped. The dutiful daughter, sacrifice, wise elder and leader. Hierarchy of roles.
- Immigrant experience that influences how characters communicate and understand their identities. ex. Quiet Asian Girl (QAG, pg. 99).

## 3. Artifact

Artifacts are an object that is tied to a context and an identity that carries a story and has a past.

### Artifacts include:

- 3 star filled-jars contain stories. they represent memories, hidden stories and trauma.
- The Pendant and gold cat statue
- The Tiger is a spiritual and cultural symbol and metaphor.
- House/Basement → holds history the family must confront.
- Food: cultural literacy. Rice, Kimchi, Mochi, rice cakes.

### Secondary NLS Terms

**Identity -in-Practice:** Identities expressed in artifacts, texts, and discourse.

**Critical Literacy:** An embodied understanding within the text: stories have power.

**Multilingualism:** Korean-American, blended families, bi-racial, living with grandma. "eggi" "Uni."

## Inside the Classroom Opportunities and Applications

### Why this text works inside a classroom

Students will have the opportunity to explore their identities as fluid, not stagnant while exploring their heritage and sedimented identities within familial and social constructs. Teachers can elaborate on stereotypes, multicultural themes, and assimilation of cultures by sharing artifacts. You can discuss themes of identity, culture, grief, and explore internal versus external communication with Lily's rich inner dialogue.

## In-Class Activities

1. Character identity mapping
2. Multimodal storytelling activity
3. Family Literacy Discussion
4. Nonverbal communication activity
5. Funds of knowledge writing prompt

6. Cultural symbolism exploration
7. Sedimented identities in texts to be explored
8. Cultural symbolism and artifact meaning
9. Stories we inherit mini-lesson
10. Make a list exploring artifacts: writing prompt
11. Host a student-led Potluck/ multi-ethnic bake sale or Kosa.

## In-Class Activity Example

Have students read "Begetting a Nation," by Seungsook Moonis from Korean folklore history. Have students write about the symbolism of the bear in connection to the Tiger in "When You Trap a Tiger."

## References:

Keller, Tae. When You Trap a Tiger (Newbery Medal Winner). Random House Children's Books, 2020.  
Pahl, Kate, and Jennifer Rowsell. Literacy and Education. SAGE Publications Ltd, 2012.