



A Campaign of the
Oakland Literacy Coalition

Read Aloud Guide

Title: *Ruby's Wish* by Shirin Yim Bridges, illustrated by Sophie Blackall

Best for: K-5th grade

Summary: This book is about a young girl named Ruby who lives in China during a time in history when few girls were taught to read or write. Ruby loves to learn, however, and studies with tutors her grandfather hires for all the grandchildren in his house. Ruby excels at school, and her grandfather takes great pride in her success. Ruby's dream is to attend university - an option available to her boy cousins and siblings, but not to her - and she becomes sad and writes a poem lamenting that she's a girl in a house "where only boys are cared for." Ruby's grandfather is saddened to realize how upset Ruby is, and by the time Ruby is old enough to go to college, he helps her attend.

Why we chose this book: Shirin Yim Bridges based this story on the life of her grandmother, who, like the fictional Ruby, was accepted as one of the first female students and at a university in China. Bridges currently lives in the Bay Area. We like that this book shows the determination, individuality, and bravery of a girl rejecting the societal norms of the time - as well as her family who supports her.

Notes: This can be a long book for younger children - you may have to make the discussion shorter or cut it out all together at the end of the story if students are restless.

Central themes: Girls' education, China, gender equality, family relationships, self-esteem

Introducing the book: You can begin by showing the cover, reading the title and author, and then saying something like this:

"This book takes place a long time ago in China, when girls weren't allowed to go to college. It's about a little girl named Ruby, who has a wish - she wants to go to college, just like her brothers and cousins. What's a wish you have?" (call on 1-2 students)

After Reading: Debrief with students

"Only boys were allowed to go to college in China. What did most girls do?" (they got married, took care of the house)

"How did Ruby feel about that?" (she was upset; she wanted to go to college.)

"How did Grandfather find out that Ruby wanted to go to college?" (He read a poem she wrote, and asked her why she thought boys were treated better than girls; she told him.)

"How did Grandfather surprise Ruby at the end?" (He gave her a letter that says she can go to college.)