Before Reading

The Red Guards
From the Memoir Red Scarf Girl by Ji-li Jiang

What happens when FREEDOM vanishes?

The United States is known as “the land of the free.” Its laws state that citizens can travel where they like, worship as they wish, and enjoy whatever music and books they choose. What if those laws suddenly changed? In “The Red Guards,” you’ll read about a girl struggling with the loss of freedoms she once took for granted.

DISCUSS With a group of classmates, talk about the freedoms that you cherish most. Do you read a newspaper every day? Do you watch the television programs you want to? Can you go into a bookstore and buy any book you choose? Talk about what it means to be able to do these things—and what it would mean to not be able to.

COMMON CORE

RI 1 Cite textual evidence to support inferences drawn from the text. RI 4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in text, including connotative meanings.

RI 6 Determine an author’s point of view in a text and explain how it is conveyed in text. L 3a Vary sentence patterns for meaning, reader/listener interest, and style.
Meet the Author

Ji-li Jiang
born 1954

Tough Times
Ji-li Jiang’s (jī-lǐ jiāng) happy childhood in Shanghai, China, became one of fear when Mao Zedong (máo dū’ěr dzǔ’ěr dzǒng) took over China. Because of their wealth, Jiang and her family were treated harshly by supporters of the Chinese government for years.

Bridging the Gap
Jiang moved to the United States in 1984. She wrote Red Scarf Girl to share her childhood memories of the Cultural Revolution. “By telling my story,” Jiang says, “I hope that people will learn about the Cultural Revolution and make sure that such a terrible event will never happen again.”

BACKGROUND TO THE MEMOIR

The Cultural Revolution
In 1966 Communist Chairman Mao Zedong began to transform China’s government. He enlisted the help of teenage students known as the Red Guards. Squads of Red Guards went from house to house seeking to get rid of all “four olds”—anything that represented old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. These searches went on for several years and destroyed millions of lives.

**TEXT ANALYSIS: AUTHOR’S PERSPECTIVE**

An author’s personal feelings about a subject affect the way he or she writes about it. The combination of ideas, values, feelings, and beliefs that shape the way an author looks at a topic is called the author’s perspective. In nonfiction, you can identify the author’s perspective by paying attention to

- direct statements by the author that tell what he or she thinks, feels, or cares about
- words he or she uses to describe people, events, and things

As you read “The Red Guards,” look for ways the author shows her perspective on events in her childhood.

**READING STRATEGY: IDENTIFY SYMBOL**

A symbol is a person, place, or thing that stands for something else. A sunrise, for example, might be a symbol of hope or a new beginning. To identify symbols, look for

- things that the author mentions over and over
- objects that seem to have great importance to the author

As you read “The Red Guards,” look for objects that serve as symbols. Think about the ideas each symbol represents. Record your thoughts in a chart like the one shown.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symbol</th>
<th>Stands For</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>butterfly</td>
<td>freedom, beauty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Review: Make Inferences**

** VOCABBULARY IN CONTEXT **

The words in Column A help tell about a frightening event. To see how many you know, match each word in Column A with the word in Column B that is closest in meaning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Column A</th>
<th>Column B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. zealous</td>
<td>a. sharp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. leniency</td>
<td>b. threateningly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. aggressively</td>
<td>c. take</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. acrid</td>
<td>d. mercy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. confiscate</td>
<td>e. enthusiastic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Complete the activities in your Reader/Writer Notebook.

Go to thinkcentral.com.
KEYWORD: HML6-275
In the following excerpt, Ji-li Jiang is 12 years old, and the Cultural Revolution is underway. At first a loyal follower of Chairman Mao, Ji-li’s perspective changes after her late grandfather’s status as a wealthy landlord becomes known. Mao’s government considers landlords and their families possible enemies of the people. Now classified by the Red Guards as having “suspicious status,” the Jiang family lives in fear.

Mom got home from work that evening looking nervous. She whispered to Dad and Grandma, and as soon as we finished dinner, she told us to go outside and play.

“We have something to take care of,” she said. I knew this had something to do with the Cultural Revolution. I wished she would just say so. We were too old to be fooled like little children. But I didn’t say anything and went outside with the others.

When it was nearly dark, Ji-yun and I went back home, leaving Ji-yong1 with his friends.

As we entered the apartment, I smelled smoke, \textit{acrid} and choking. I looked around in alarm. But Grandma was sitting alone in the main room, showing no sign of worry.

“Grandma, is there a fire?” we shouted anxiously. “Don’t you smell the smoke?”

\textbf{Analyze Visuals} \\
What mood, or feeling, do the colors in this painting help create?

\textbf{AUTHOR’S PERSPECTIVE} \\
The author is an adult but she writes the events as a young girl. Why might a child narrator help the reader understand the author’s perspective better than an adult narrator would?

\textit{acrid} (ák’ríd) \textit{adj.}\nharsh and sharp in taste or odor

---

1. Ji-yun (jì-yūn) … Ji-yong (jì-yōng): the author’s younger sister and brother.

\textit{September} (2003), Hung Liu. Oil on canvas, 66” x 66”. © Hung Liu.
“Hush, hush!” Grandma pulled us to her quickly. “It’s nothing. They’re just burning some pictures.” We looked puzzled. “Your mother heard today that photos of people in old-fashioned long gowns and mandarin jackets are considered fourolds. So your parents are burning them in the bathroom.”

“Can we go watch?” I loved looking at pictures, especially pictures of all those uncles and aunts I had never met.

Grandma shook her head. I winked at Ji-yun, and we both threw ourselves into her arms, begging and pleading. As always, she gave in, and went to the bathroom door to ask Mom and Dad.

Mom opened the door a crack and let us in.

The bathroom was filled with thick smoke that burned our eyes and made us cough. Dad passed us a glass of water. “We can’t open the window any wider,” he said. “The neighbors might notice the smoke and report us.”

Mom and Dad were sitting on small wooden stools. On the floor was a tin washbowl full of ashes and a few pictures disappearing into flames. At Dad’s side was a stack of old photo albums, their black covers stained and faded with age. Dad was looking through the albums, page by page, tearing out any pictures that might be fourolds. He put them in a pile next to Mom, who put them into the fire.

I picked up one of the pictures. It was of Dad, sitting on a camel, when he was about six or seven years old. He was wearing a wool hat and pants with suspenders, and he was laughing. Grandma, looking very young and beautiful and wearing a fur coat, was standing beside him.

“Mom, this one doesn’t have long gowns or anything,” Ji-yun said. “Can’t we keep it?”

“The Red Guards might say that only a rich child could ride a camel. And besides, Grandma’s wearing a fur coat.” She threw it into the fire.

Mom was right, I thought. A picture like that was fourolds.

The flames licked around the edges of the picture. The corners curled up, then turned brown. The brown spread quickly toward the center, swallowing Grandma, then the camel, and finally Dad’s woolen hat.

Picture after picture was thrown into the fire. Each in turn curled, melted, and disappeared. The ashes in the washbowl grew deeper. Finally there were no more pictures left. Mom poured the ashes into the toilet and flushed them away.

That night I dreamed that the house was on fire.

---

2. Mandarin jackets ... fourolds: Mandarin jackets are fancy jackets with narrow, stand-up collars. They were one of the “fourolds”—old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits—that were forbidden during the Cultural Revolution.
Early in the morning Song Po-po rushed upstairs to tell us the news. All the neighbors were saying that a knife had been found in the communal garbage bin. The Neighborhood Dictatorship Group had declared this to be an illegal weapon, so the entire bin had been searched and some incompletely burned pictures found. In one of them they recognized my Fourth Aunt. Because my Fourth Uncle had fled to Hong Kong right before Liberation, her family was on the Neighborhood Party Committee’s list of black families. The weapon was automatically associated with the pictures, and that was enough for Six-Fingers to report to the powerful Neighborhood Party Committee.

All day we were terrified. Grandma and the three of us went to the park immediately after breakfast. This time none of us wanted to play. We just sat together on Grandma’s bench.

“Will the Red Guards come?” Ji-yun asked.

“Maybe they will, sweetie,” Grandma answered. “We just don’t know.”

She took out her knitting. I tried to do the same, but I kept finding myself staring into space with no idea of where I was in the pattern. Ji-yun and Ji-yong ran off to play but always came back to the bench after a few minutes. At four o’clock Grandma sent me to see if anything was happening at home.

I cautiously walked into the alley, alert for anything unusual, but there was no sound of drums or gongs or noise at all. The mop was still on the balcony. I looked into our lane. There were no trucks. Everything seemed calm, and I told Grandma it was safe to go home.

Mom and Dad both came home earlier than usual. Dinner was short and nearly silent. Soon after dinner we turned the lights off and got into bed, hoping that the day would end peacefully after all. I lay for a long while without sleeping but finally drifted into a restless doze. When I heard pounding on the door downstairs, I was not sure whether it was real or a dream.

It was real.

I heard my cousin You-mei ask bravely, “Who’s there?”

---

4. communal: used by everyone in the building.
6. Because my . . . black families: The author’s uncle had gone to Hong Kong (at that time independent from China) just before Chairman Mao established his government. Because of this, the Communist Party officers in charge of the neighborhood listed the family as opponents of Communism.
7. Six-Fingers: the nickname for Mr. Ni, chairman of the Neighborhood Dictatorship Group, who had six fingers on one of his hands.
9. The mop . . . balcony: a signal used by the Jiangs to indicate to family members returning home that the Red Guards were not in the house.
Six-Fingers’s voice replied, “The Red Guards. They’re here to search your house. Open up!”

They rushed into Fourth Aunt’s apartment downstairs.

At first we could not hear much. Then we heard more: doors slamming, a cry from Hua-hua,10 crash after crash of dishes breaking overhead, and the indistinct voices of the Red Guards.

By this time we were all awake, but no one turned on a light or said anything. We all lay and held our breaths and listened, trying to determine what was going on downstairs. No one even dared to turn over. My whole body was tense. Every sound from my Fourth Aunt’s room made me stiffen with dread.

Thirty minutes passed, then an hour. In spite of the fear I began to feel sleepy again.

I was jolted awake by shouts and thunderous knocks. Someone was shouting Dad’s name. “Jiang Xi-reng!11 Get up! Jiang Xi-reng!”

---

10. **Hua-hua** (hwâ-hwä): You-mei’s daughter; Fourth Aunt’s granddaughter.
11. **Jiang Xi-reng** (jîng shê-rêng): Ji-li’s father, like other people in China, is called by his surname first.
Dad went to the door. “What do you want?”

“Open up!” Six-Fingers shouted. “This is a search in passing! The Red Guards are going to search your home in passing.”

We often asked somebody to buy something in passing or get information in passing, but I had never heard of searching a house in passing.

Dad opened the door.

The first one in was Six-Fingers, wearing an undershirt and dirty blue shorts and flip-flops. Behind him were about a dozen teenaged Red Guards. Though the weather was still quite warm, they all wore tightly belted army uniforms. Their leader was a zealous, loud-voiced girl with short hair and large eyes.

“What’s your relationship with the Jiangs living downstairs?” the girl yelled, her hand aggressively on her hip.

“He is her brother-in-law,” Six-Fingers answered before Dad could open his mouth.

“Oh, so you’re a close relative,” she said, as if she only now realized that.

**Leniency for confession, severity for resistance!** Hand over your weapons now, or we will be forced to search the house.” She stood up straight and stared at Dad.

“What weapons?” Dad asked calmly. “We have no—”

“Search!” She cut Dad off with a shouted order and shoved him aside.

At the wave of her arm the Red Guards behind her stormed in. Without speaking to each other, they split into three groups and charged toward our drawers, cabinets, and chests. The floor was instantly strewn with their contents.

They demanded that Mom and Dad open anything that was locked, while we children sat on our beds, staring in paralyzed fascination. To my surprise, it was not as frightening as I had imagined through the weeks of waiting. Only Little White was panicked by the crowd and the noise. She scurried among the open chests until she was kicked by a Red Guard. Then she ran up into the attic and did not come down.

I watched one boy going through the wardrobe. He took each piece of clothing off its hanger and threw it onto the floor behind him. He went carefully through a drawer and unrolled the neatly paired socks, tossing them over his shoulder one by one.

I turned my head and saw another boy opening my desk drawer. He swept his hand through it and jumbled everything together before removing the drawer and turning it upside down on the floor. Before he could examine the contents, another one called him away to help move a chest.

---

12. **Little White**: the Jiang family’s cat.
All my treasures were scattered on the floor. The butterfly fell out of its glass box; one wing was crushed under a bottle of glass beads. My collection of candy wrappers had fallen out of their notebook and were crumpled under my stamp album.

My stamp album! It had been a birthday gift from Grandma when I started school, and it was my dearest treasure. For six years I had been getting canceled stamps from my friends, carefully soaking them to get every bit of envelope paper off. I had collected them one by one until I had complete sets. I had even bought some inexpensive sets with my own allowance. I loved my collection, even though I knew I should not. With the start of the Cultural Revolution all the stamp shops were closed down, because stamp collecting was considered bourgeois. Now I just knew something terrible was going to happen to it.

I looked at the Red Guards. They were still busy moving the chest. I slipped off the bed and tiptoed across the room. If I could hide it before they saw me... I stooped down and reached for the book.

“Hey, what are you doing?” a voice demanded. I spun around in alarm. It was the Red Guard leader.

“I... I didn’t do anything,” I said guiltily, my eyes straying toward the stamp album.


“I... I’m not...” I blushed as I fumbled for words.

The girl looked at Ji-yong and Ji-yun, who were still sitting on their beds, watching, and she turned to another Red Guard. “Get the kids into the bathroom so they don’t get in the way of the revolution.” She threw the stamp album casually into the bag of things to be confiscated and went back downstairs. She didn’t even look at me.

Inside the bathroom we could still hear the banging of furniture and the shouting of the Red Guards. Ji-yun lay with her head in my lap, quietly sobbing, and Ji-yong sat in silence.

After a long time the noise died down. Dad opened the bathroom door, and we fearfully came out.

The apartment was a mess. The middle of the floor was strewn with the contents of the overturned chests and drawers. Half of the clothes had been taken away. The rest were scattered on the floor along with some old...
copper coins. The chests themselves had been thrown on top of each other when the Red Guards decided to check the walls for holes where weapons could be hidden. Grandma's German clock lay upside down on the floor with the little door on its back torn off.

I looked for my things. The wing of the butterfly had been completely knocked off the body. The bottle holding the glass beads had smashed, and beads were rolling all over the floor. The trampled candy wrappers looked like trash.

And the stamp album was gone forever. 

IDENTIFY SYMBOL
How does the stamp album act as a symbol here, not only for Jiang, but also for the reader? 

Analyze Visuals
What details in this piece of art are also mentioned in the memoir?

Wildflower (2003), Hung Liu. Five-color lithograph with gold leaf and collage, Ed. 20, 25" × 19". © Hung Liu.
**Reading for Information**

**INTERVIEW** In “The Red Guards,” you read about some of Ji-li Jiang’s experiences during the Cultural Revolution. In the following interview, she explains her reasons for sharing her story with young readers.

---

**AN INTERVIEW WITH JI-LI JIANG**

**Why did you write *Red Scarf Girl* for young people instead of adults?**

In 1984 I moved to the States. The first year, I lived with an American family. They were very interested in my life in China. Using my limited English, I shared some of my stories with them. One day they gave me a present, a book, *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Inside they wrote: “In the hope that one day we will read the diary of Ji-li Jiang.” Of course, I was very moved by the story, and also, I was inspired to write my own story through a little girl’s eyes, instead of as an adult looking back. Honestly speaking, I didn’t target my readers before I wrote it, but I am glad it turned out to be a children’s book. I used to be a teacher in China. If my book has an impact on the kids who read it, I will feel most rewarded.

**Why did you leave China?**

After the Cultural Revolution, things didn’t change much. Rigid policies and restrictions kept me from achieving my dream: to enter the Shanghai Drama Institute. I was not allowed to audition. When the universities re-opened, I passed the exam, but because of my family’s political situation, I was only accepted into a less prestigious university. After frustration upon frustration, when America opened the door to students from China, I decided to go to the United States. At that time, my only option was to go overseas and study in America.

Ji-li means “lucky and beautiful,” a name your parents carefully selected for you. Do you consider yourself lucky?

Yes, I consider myself quite lucky. Despite everything I experienced in China, I have never lacked for love from my family, my friends, and also God. After surviving the Cultural Revolution, I find myself more sensitive to the beauty of nature and the human spirit. I am grateful for having my mind in peace, grateful to have experienced other cultures and lifestyles, and especially grateful that I have been able to do something meaningful and enjoyable to me.
Comprehension

1. **Recall** Why do Ji-li Jiang’s mother and father burn the photographs?
2. **Recall** What are the author, her grandmother, and her brother and sister worrying about while they’re at the park?
3. **Clarify** Why do the Red Guards search Fourth Aunt’s apartment?

Text Analysis

4. **Make Inferences** The lives of Ji-li Jiang and her family have changed because of the Cultural Revolution. What personal rights and freedoms have they lost?
5. **Examine Author’s Purpose** Reread the interview with Ji-li Jiang on page 284. Was Ji-li Jiang’s reason for writing her memoir to inform, to persuade, to entertain, or a combination of these? Support your answer with information from the selection.
6. **Identify Author’s Perspective** On a chart like the one shown, describe the author’s perspective on each topic. How does identifying author’s perspective help you understand the experiences Ji-Li Jiang shares in her memoir?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Perspective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Her Family’s Experience</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Cultural Revolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. **Analyze Symbol** Look at the diagram you completed while reading “The Red Guards.” Explain how the symbols and their meanings help you understand the events that Jiang is writing about.

Extension and Challenge

8. **Inquiry and Research** In her memoir, Ji-li Jiang calls her stamp collection her “dearest treasure.” Stamp collecting is a common pastime, but people collect all sorts of items. Do research to find out some of the other items that people collect. Present your findings to the class.
9. **SOCIAL STUDIES CONNECTION** The Cultural Revolution began in China in 1966. Conduct research to find out more about how the Revolution began, who the Red Guards were, and how it affected the Chinese population. Present your report to your classmates.

What happens when FREEDOM vanishes?

How do you think Ji-li Jiang would answer this question? Think about what she says in the last sentence of the interview on page 284.
Vocabulary in Context

**VOCABULARY PRACTICE**

Choose the word in each item that is not related in meaning to the other words.

1. (a) sharp, (b) bitter, (c) acrid, (d) bland
2. (a) leniency, (b) displeasure, (c) patience, (d) forgiveness
3. (a) calmly, (b) aggressively, (c) coolly, (d) peacefully
4. (a) excited, (b) eager, (c) zealous, (d) prejudiced
5. (a) correct, (b) confiscate, (c) seize, (d) claim

**ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING**

- convey  • create  • influence  • interact  • qualities

Why is Ji-li Jiang’s family afraid to interact with the Red Guards? What are the Red Guards’ frightening qualities? Use at least one of the Academic Vocabulary words in your response.

**VOCABULARY STRATEGY: PREFIXES THAT MEAN “NOT”**

The English language uses a great many words from Latin, the language of Ancient Rome. The Latin words in the English language have come from many sources. In the box at the right are some prefixes from the Latin language. A **prefix** is a word part that appears at the beginning of a base word to form a new word. One example is the vocabulary word *indistinct* (*in* + distinct). The prefix *in-* is one of several prefixes that can mean “not.” Look at the chart to see other prefixes that can mean “not,” and to see what other meanings these prefixes may have. To figure out the meaning of a word that contains a prefix and a base word, think of the meaning of each word part separately. Then use this information, as well as any context clues that might be available, to define the word.

**PRACTICE** Use these strategies to determine the meaning of each numbered word. Then use each word in a sentence that shows its meaning.

1. disagree
2. nonfiction
3. unlikely
4. incurable
5. misunderstand
Language

◆ Grammar in Context: Compare Correctly

Adjectives and adverbs have special forms that are used to make comparisons. Use the comparative form to compare two people or things. Use the superlative form to compare three or more people or things. For most one-syllable adjectives and adverbs, add er to form the comparative and est to form the superlative. For most two-syllable adjectives and adverbs, use more instead of er and most instead of est.

Original: Ji-yun was the youngest of the two girls.
Revised: Ji-yun was the younger of the two girls.

Practice Complete the following sentences with the correct form of the adjective or adverb.
1. Of all her cousins, You-mei was the (braver, bravest).
2. Ji-yun and Ji-yong were both sleeping, but Ji-li was (more, most) restless.
3. One girl yelled (more loudly, loudlier) than the other.
4. Out of all her possessions, the stamp album was what Ji-li was (sadder, saddest) about losing.

For more help with comparative and superlative forms, see page R58 in the Grammar Handbook.

Reading-Writing Connection

Deepen your understanding of “The Red Guards” by responding to the prompt. Then use the revising tip to improve your writing.

Writing Prompt

Extended Constructed Response: News Article
The author’s description of events in her childhood is full of emotion. The description would be different if a journalist from the United States, for example, were writing about it years later. Write a two- or three-paragraph news article about the Red Guards searching the Jiang family home.

Revising Tip

Review your writing. Have you correctly used comparative and superlative forms? If not, revise your writing.

Interactive Revision
Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML6-287

287