



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION

WELCOMING SCHOOLS Book of the Month



Last Night at the Telegraph Club

By: Malina Lo

Secondary Discussion Guide

Suggested Age Range: 14+

Content Advisory: This book contains some sexual content, references to alcohol, and potentially distressing language

About the Story

Lily Hu, a high-school senior who lives in 1950s San Francisco's Chinatown, seems to have it all: she's a dedicated student, her family loves her, and she has a long-time best friend. But the Telegraph Club, a local lesbian bar, calls to her. Her feelings for her classmate Kath develop with her fear: during the Red Scare, her father faces the threat of deportation, and Lily's sense of safety crumbles. Will she lose it all--her family, her friends--in order to be true to herself?

About the Author

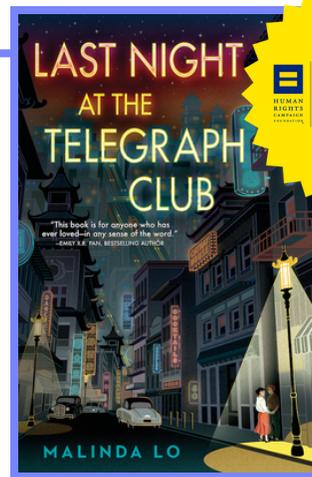
Malinda Lo is a lesbian, Chinese-American author who has won many awards including the National Book Award, the Stonewall Book Award, and the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. She was born in China and immigrated to America with her family when she was three years old. She has degrees in Economics, East Asian Studies, and Cultural Anthropology, and has worked her entire career to highlight queer identities in media.

Discussion Questions

- ✳ Early in the book, Lily is already balancing multiple identities: Chinese American, daughter of immigrants, high-achieving student, and a girl with interests that don't match expectations. Which identities does she feel safe showing, which does she hide, and why might that be? (Chapters 2-8)
- ✳ Lily describes her connection with Kath as something she hears "like silver against a glass: a faint, resonant ring." What might this "chain" symbolize about their relationship at this point in the story? Why do you think it's something she hears but can't fully see or name yet? (Chapter 8)
- ✳ Lily is often aware that people are watching her. How does that awareness change her behavior, thoughts, or decisions? Why does visibility sometimes make her shrink and other times make her feel stronger? (Ch. 17, Ch. 27, Ch. 31, Ch. 38)
- ✳ How do the sections told from Grace's and Judy's points of view reveal both similarities and differences between their lives and Lily's? In what ways do all three experience pressure to sacrifice parts of themselves because of expectations about being a woman? Where do you see Lily continuing those patterns, and where might she be breaking them?
- ✳ Why might Lily's parents, living under the threat of deportation, see her sexuality not just as personal, but as another risk to the family's survival? How does history shape their response?

Activities

- ✳ Make your own identity web. Consider including identities that feel empowering, identities that come with pressure, identities people misunderstand, and/or identities that are growing or changing.
- ✳ Create a split visual, chart, or short written comparison of two spaces in your life: one where you might feel pressure to act a certain way and one where you feel more like your authentic self. Show how your behavior, emotions, or thoughts shift between these spaces. Reflect on how your experience connects to how Lily feels in Chinatown versus the Telegraph Club.
- ✳ Think of something in your life that feels like a need, not just a want (such as a hobby, friendship, value, community, or creative outlet). Create a short paragraph, poem, or visual metaphor that represents this need, inspired by the line "like finding water after a drought" (Ch. 22). Reflect on why this need is so essential to you.
- ✳ Learn more about the Lavender Scare in this ["The History You Didn't Learn" video](#).
- ✳ Curate a playlist inspired by Last Night at the Telegraph Club.



Reading is one of the most powerful ways to model inclusion and nurture empathy. Welcoming Schools created the Book of the Month series to foster compassionate dialogue and elevate joyful stories of authentic LGBTQ+ lives, building monthly engagement and momentum leading up to our National Day of Reading each February.