



If You Were Me and Lived in...Ancient China: The Han Dynasty

Carole P. Roman

Mateya Arkova, Illustrator

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This fair and comprehensive look at life in ancient China will prove to be an invaluable classroom aid.

Carole P. Roman's *If You Were Me and Lived In ... Ancient China* offers a compact and comprehensive look at life during the Han dynasty era.

Striking a pleasant balance between the series' familiar "day in the life" narrative and a history of major figures and events, *If You Were Me and Lived In ... Ancient China* tackles the formidable goal of introducing children to the traditions, customs, and accomplishments of ancient Chinese culture. Roman puts readers in the role of children living 1900 years ago, advising them of typical names for boys and girls of the era, but also pointing out that "mostly, you didn't call each other by name. Your sisters called you 'Older brother,' and you called them 'First sister' and 'Second sister.'"

There are some issues with consistency and tone. The beginning of the book says, for example, that you "might have lived in the capital city Chang'an," but later, the narrative takes on a more definitive tone, with declarations like "Your father was a doctor" and "Your home was rather large." Still, Roman succeeds in the difficult task of interweaving historical information, like the origins of silk and paper or the Chinese Lantern Festival, with the day-to-day experiences of those things. The book also includes a brief, illustrated guide to major figures of the time and a thorough glossary with pronunciation guide.

Roman portrays the culture fairly, without idealizing it, noting that girls were not thought worthy of education, and that male children were expected to follow in their fathers' footsteps in choosing a profession, even if it conflicted with their own interests: "You wanted to be a noodle maker ... but your father told you you were going to be a doctor, and that was the end of that."

The images alternate with text on every two-page spread, which helps to keep the sometimes dense text from feeling overwhelming, as does the decision to utilize blank space in the book's design, rather than filling every page to capacity. Arkova's illustrations favor pastel colors and rough, fuzzy edges, which results in pictures that are unique enough to be interesting but still clear enough to aid the storytelling.

If You Were Me and Lived In ... Ancient China is a natural fit for classrooms and school libraries and an excellent read for anyone curious about life during one of the world's most celebrated eras of civilization.

PETER DABBENE (August 15, 2016)

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