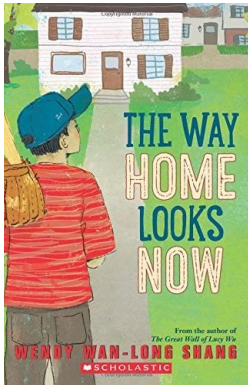


Finalist, Middle School Category



Essayist: Allie, age 11, George Washington Middle School

Advocating for: *The Way Home Looks Now* by Wendy Wan-Long Shang

Hope and Baseball

How to keep playing into the next inning

Can you imagine giving up your passion because it reminds you too much of a lost loved one? Peter Lee, a 12-year-old baseball fanatic, did just that. After his older brother, Nelson, died in a car accident, baseball was the one thing that Peter couldn't bear to play or watch without him. But when Peter's mother fell into deep depression, he could only think of one thing that had always brought his family together: baseball.

Peter decides to try out for a baseball team and is dismayed when his overbearing father, Ba, offers to coach. But soon, baseball starts to mend Peter's life, bringing him closer to his father, while keeping hope for his mother's recovery alive.

Wendy Wan-Long Shang's *The Way Home Looks Now* takes a beloved American pastime, baseball, and introduces readers to an overlooked part of its history. Peter remembers driving with his family to Howard J. Lamade Stadium in Williamsport, Pennsylvania to watch Taiwan play Indiana in the 1971 Little League World Series. Many Taiwanese-Americans watched that game—Ba said it was important that Taiwan be recognized separately from China. In another historic accomplishment, the boys on the team from Gary, Indiana were the first all-Black team to play in the Little League World Series. In another twist, one of the top pitchers on Peter's team turned out to be a girl, reminding readers of the stereotypes girls face in sports.

This story ignited in me a passion for baseball and how it brings people together. Sometimes when I'm playing catch with my family in the backyard, I think of Peter playing catch with Nelson. They talked about everything, from nearly impossible plays to girls and protesting the Vietnam War. The war was one thing Nelson and Ba fought about. Peter's teammates weren't big fans of Ba either, at



first. But when the team disagreed about letting a girl play, Ba was the magnet that pulled them back together. Peter's team reminds me of my band. When everybody plays together, the sound is as perfect as the crack of a home run hit.

I would love seeing *The Way Home Looks Now* come to life in Planet Word's magical library. This book deserves more recognition for capturing the simple and difficult moments in life through the lens of baseball. Nelson tells Peter why baseball is special: "[I]t has no time limit. You could go nine innings, but then you could go fifteen innings. Twenty innings. That's when you find out what the team is made of, which ones have the stamina and the guts to hang in there. The ones that keep having hope. Always." Life has many innings. Sometimes you get a walk to first, and sometimes you strike out. I may still be in the early innings of life, but this book has taught me that even when tragedy strikes, we shouldn't give up on what we love.