



Book Title: *Fire Heart*

Written by: Joyce Ch'ng

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ISBN #: 9781958051788

Age Range: 13-18 years

Grade Range: Grades 7-12

Let's Get Ready to Read

About the Book

Wehia t'Doniyat dreams of forging a legendary longsword like the one crafted by her great-grandmother. As the eldest daughter of a knifsmith's holding, a tight-knit, skilled artisan household known for ornamental daggers, Wehia's ambition sets her on a bold path to the City of Swords, where she apprentices under her kinswoman, Hadana t'Tolani, a renowned swordmaker. Far from home and surrounded by strangers, Wehia must learn patience, discipline, and resilience to survive the demanding life of a swordmaker's apprentice. With a new friend by her side and the support of her mentor, Wehia's future begins to take shape—until her impulsive nature puts everything at risk, including her dream of forging Fire Heart, the sword that calls to her soul.

Why This Book Matters

Fire Heart by Joyce Ch'ng speaks directly to themes that resonate deeply in today's society—identity, perseverance, belonging, and the fight to define one's own path.

Set in a richly imagined world rooted in non-Western culture, the story follows Wehia, a young girl determined to break through barriers of class, gender, age, and sexual orientation. Her journey reflects real-world struggles faced by young people today—particularly girls, LGBTQ+ youth, and children of color—who seek to pursue dreams that society may try to limit or define for them.



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Fire Heart also explores the importance of mentorship, intergenerational knowledge, and the strength found in community—ideas that are especially meaningful as we navigate conversations around inclusion, equity, and representation. Wehia’s emotional growth, as she learns to manage impatience and channel her passion into craft and purpose, mirrors the very human experience of learning to overcome internal and external obstacles.

In a time when books that challenge stereotypes, expand cultural understanding, and empower marginalized voices are increasingly under attack, *Fire Heart* offers a bold affirmation: young people deserve stories that reflect their truths, inspire their courage, and honor their dreams.

Reflection and Discussion Questions

Reflection Questions for Adults:

1. Thinking back to yourself as an adolescent. How did you learn patience and how to manage strong emotions and/or impulsiveness? What are things you can do to support emotional self-awareness and regulation in the youth you know and work with?
2. Consider spending some time journaling about the different ways you’ve had to be resilient in your own life. What are some of the challenges you’ve had to overcome, and how did your family or community support you in overcoming those challenges?
3. What did you learn growing up about gender roles and stereotypes about women’s and men’s work? How does this book challenge those stereotypes in positive ways and/or in ways that might make you uncomfortable?

Discussion Questions:

1. How would you describe the three main female characters in the story: Wehia, Geri, and Hadana?
 - a. How are they similar to each other? To you?
 - b. How are they different from each other? From you?
2. A matriarchal society is one where women hold primary positions of power and authority, particularly in political, economic, and family structures. Inheritance and



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lineage are often traced through the female line, and women may be seen as the central figures in cultural and social life. How does matriarchy show up in *Fire Heart*?

3. In what ways does Geri offer her friendship to Wehia throughout the beginning of the book?
 - a. Why do you think Wehia struggles with accepting Geri's kindness and friendship at times?
 - b. What is special about their relationship?
4. How does Wehia's identity as the daughter of a knifsmith shape her dreams and struggles?
 - a. How do your family's traditions or background influence your goals or interests?
5. What tasks and tests does Wehia have to do to prove to Hadana that she is ready to make her own sword?
6. Hadana continually asks Wehia the same questions to gauge how ready she is to make her sword, *Fire Heart*. How do these questions apply to all important projects, goals, and dreams that require deep focus, time, energy, and potential sacrifice? How do these questions apply to what you want for yourself in your own life?
 - a. Why now? Why not wait?
 - b. Are you ready?
 - c. Is your resolve unshakeable?
 - d. Will you be easily discouraged or distracted?
 - e. Are you strong enough to last through all the troubles and doubts that will come your way?
7. How is Wehia's impulsiveness both a strength and a weakness? What are examples from the book to support your thinking?
8. What do you think of Wehia's decision to challenge Lord Vess to a duel to protect Geri and keep her from having to marry Lord Marik?



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9. In what ways does secret-keeping between the three females make the situation with Geri's betrothal to Lord Marik more complicated than it should have been?
10. What is the problem with the border people in the city where Wehia lives as an apprentice?
 - a. What is the tension between the border people in the fens where Wehia is from and the blood families who live and work there?
 - b. Who do you think is more to blame for the problem - the City/blood families or the border people? Why do you think that?
11. At the end of the book, Wehia finishes Fire Heart but finds a tiny flaw, which no one else sees. In your opinion, do you think that Wehia was ready to make her sword as she swore she was throughout the beginning of the story? (Was she too easily discouraged or distracted? Was she strong enough to last through all the troubles and doubts that came her way? Why or why not?)
12. What do you think of Wehia and Geri's decision to leave t'Tolani holding to return to the fens to help the border people? What do you think you would have done if you were Wehia?

See also the author's [Study Guide](#) for educators and librarians.

Inspire, Educate, and Connect

Learn More

- Author Joyce Ch'ng (they/them) lives in Singapore and wrote this book between 2018 and 2019. To get it published in Southeast Asia in 2022, they had to remove the "LGBTQIA elements" from the book, including rather tame references to female characters holding hands and sharing a kiss on the lips. The book was published again worldwide in 2024 with all the original story elements included. Read this blog post by the author, Joyce Ch'ng, [Fire Heart and the Things that Speak to Me](#), about the writing of the book.
- In some parts of Asia, books with LGBTQ+ characters and themes are facing bans and censorship, often under the guise of protecting public morals or traditional values. These actions are part of broader crackdowns on LGBTQ+ expression and content in various countries, including China, Singapore, Myanmar, and Malaysia. Spend some



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time researching how book bans on LGBTQ+ identities and themes have impacted different communities in Asian countries.

Talk About It

- Though Wehia lives in a matriarchal society where women are revered as powerful swordsmiths, chieftains, and council members, she still faces challenges as a girl potentially limited by class, age, experience, gender, and sexual orientation. What are real-world examples where people broke class, age, gender, and sexual orientation barriers? How did they do it?

Take Action

- **A Letter to a Mentor:** Think about what Wehia learns from Hadana and Geri and how those relationships helped her grow. Write a letter to a mentor or someone who's helped you learn something new.
- **Forge Your Path Timeline:** Reflect on Wehia's journey by mapping out key events in her apprenticeship. Then, create a timeline of your own learning journey—what goals you've worked toward, who helped you, and what's still to come.
- **Forge the Future:**
 - **Be a Mentor:** In *Fire Heart*, Wehia's journey is shaped not only by her talent and determination, but by the guidance of those who recognize her spark — especially her mentor, Hadana. Her story reminds us that mentorship is about more than passing down knowledge; it's about seeing someone's potential, holding them accountable, and walking beside them as they grow. Whether you're a teacher, artist, parent, coach, or community member, you have the power to be someone's Hadana. Offer your time, wisdom, and encouragement to a young person finding their way.
 - **Find a Mentor:** Likewise, if you're a young learner like Wehia—bold, unsure, and burning with dreams—don't be afraid to seek out mentors who can help you sharpen your craft, your confidence, and your voice.
 - Here are a few organizations that offer opportunities to mentor young people or get connected to a mentor:
 - **Big Brothers Big Sisters of America:** One of the most well-known mentoring organizations focused on long-term, one-on-one relationships between adults and youth ages 5–18. <https://www.bbbs.org>
 - **MENTOR: The National Mentoring Partnership:** Connects volunteers with youth-serving programs across the U.S., including school-based, community-based, and identity-specific mentorships.



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<https://www.mentoring.org>

- **Girls Write Now:** A writing and mentoring program for teen girls and gender-expansive youth, connecting them with women and gender-expansive professional writers. <https://www.girlswritenow.org>
- **YoungArts Mentorship:** Offers mentorship opportunities for young artists in visual, literary, and performing arts, with support from professional creatives. <https://youngarts.org>
- **iMentor:** Matches high school students with mentors who help them navigate college and career planning. <https://www.imentor.org>

About This Book and Book Banning

About This Book – From Lisa Basalto at Snowy Wings Publishing:

“Fire Heart is a moving fantasy novel for teens that focuses on a strong-willed apprentice swordsmith finding her place in the world. When it was first published in Southeast Asia, the book’s LGBT content was censored. We are so pleased to have the opportunity to publish this new edition of *Fire Heart* which restores the book’s original themes and brings the story to a worldwide audience. Snowy Wings Publishing is proud to stand against censorship and is committed to bringing inclusive books to all readers.”

About the *We Are Stronger Than Censorship* Project (IBPA) :

“[We Are Stronger Than Censorship](#) aims to combat the rising tide of book banning and censorship by empowering readers, supporting independent publishers, and ensuring that diverse voices are heard. The [Independent Book Publishers Association \(IBPA\)](#) and [EveryLibrary Institute](#) have teamed up to spread light and inclusive books to readers in communities across the US impacted by efforts to restrict the availability of books featuring Black, Queer, and other under-represented characters and themes.”

Resources to Learn More About Book Bans and Censorship:

- [PEN America](#)
 - [Book Bans FAQ](#)
 - [Banned in the USA report:](#)
 - PEN America recorded 10,046 instances of book bans in the 2023–2024 school year.
 - Student access was removed to more than 4,000 unique book titles.
 - Authors whose books are targeted are most frequently female, people of color, and/or LGBTQ+ individuals.



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- [Unite Against Book Bans](#)
- [Soft and Quiet: Self-Censorship In An Era of Book Challenges](#), Book Riot
- [National Coalition Against Censorship: Kids' Right to Read Project](#)
- [Books Unbanned](#)
 - [#TruthBeTold Campaign](#)

Taking Action Against Book Bans and Censorship:

- [BE STRONG! Things to do about Book Banning](#)
- [Unite Against Book Bans Action Toolkit](#)
- [PEN America: Tip Sheets for fighting book bans](#)
- [The Free Expression Educators Handbook](#)

About AmazeWorks

The mission of [AmazeWorks](#) is to champion equity and belonging for all. We believe that every child should see their families, identities, and lived experiences reflected in positive mirrors and windows into the lives of others who are different from them. AmazeWorks is happy to partner on the We Are Stronger Than Censorship program and offers this discussion guide because we all believe in the power of stories to inspire, educate, and connect us all.



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