

Author of THE SCIENCE OF BREAKABLE THINGS

TAE KELLER

When You Trap a Tiger



SOME STORIES REFUSE TO STAY BOTTLED UP.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

ABOUT THE BOOK

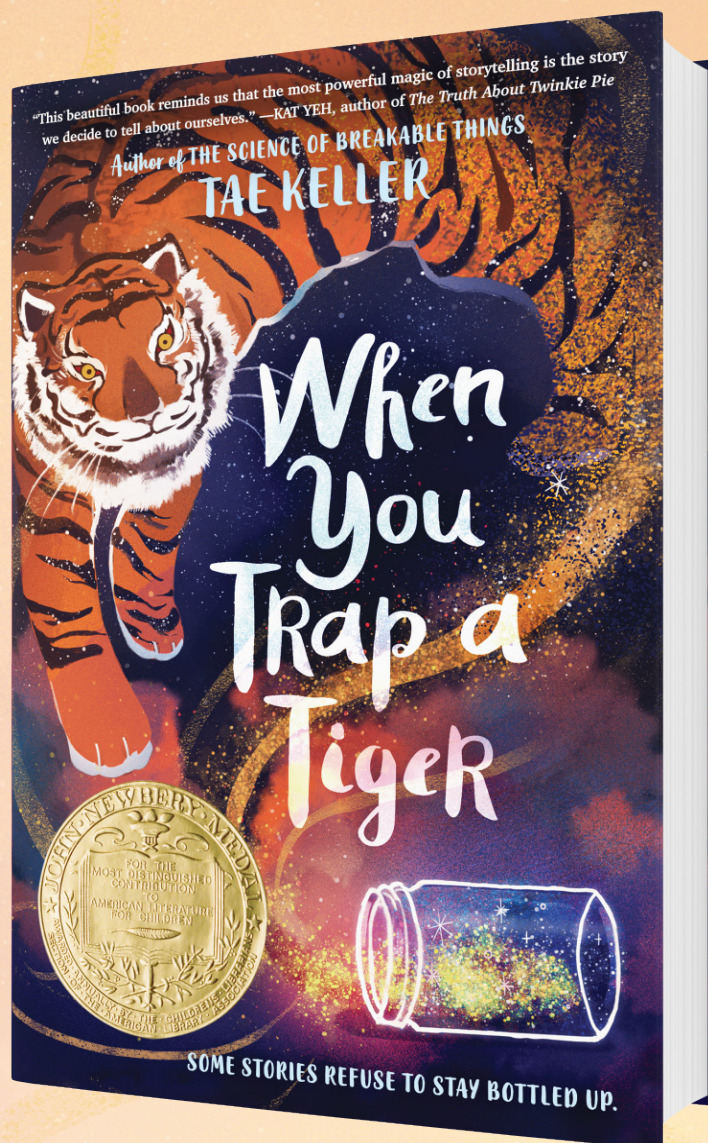
Winner of the Newbery Medal

A New York Times Bestseller

**Winner of the Asian/Pacific
American Award for Children's
Literature**

Would you make a deal with a magical tiger? This uplifting story brings Korean folklore to life as a girl goes on a quest to unlock the power of stories.

When Lily and her family move in with her sick grandmother, a magical tiger straight out of her halmoni's Korean folktales arrives, prompting Lily to unravel a secret family history. Long, long ago, Halmoni stole something from the tigers. Now they want it back. And when one of the tigers approaches Lily with a deal—return what her grandmother stole in exchange for Halmoni's health—Lily is tempted to agree. But deals with tigers are never what they seem! With the help of her sister and her new friend Ricky, Lily must find her voice . . . and the courage to face a tiger.



Tae Keller | HC: 978-1-5247-1570-0 | GLB: 978-1-5247-1571-7 | EL: 978-1-5247-1572-4 | DN: 978-0-593-15545-5 | Grades: 8-12



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tae Keller was born and raised in Honolulu, where she grew up on purple rice, Spam musubi, and her halmoni's tiger stories. She is the Newbery Medal-winning author of *When You Trap a Tiger* and *The Science of Breakable Things*. Visit her at TaeKeller.com, follow her monthly love letters at bit.ly/lovetae, and find her on Twitter at @taekeller and Instagram at @tae_keller.

PRE-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. If you could have a superpower, what would it be and why? Are there characters in other stories that also have this superpower? What do they do with it?
2. What are some of your favorite folktales, and why do you like them? How have they shaped your understanding of the world?
3. Read about tigers in Korean folklore on this page: gogohanguk.com/en/blog/the-tigers-in-korean-folktales. Explain to a classmate, friend, or family member the meaning that tigers hold in Korean culture and folklore.
4. Is there a place—like a library, a park, or a place in your house—that is a refuge to you? Why?
5. Do you have a grandparent or someone like a grandparent in your life? How did you develop this relationship, and what are some special moments or interests you share?
6. Think about a time a friend helped you with a project. What were some of the challenges? How did you work together to overcome them?
3. A stereotype is a commonly held but incomplete and often untrue idea of a person or thing. Sam tells Lily that she's a "QAG"—a Quiet Asian Girl (p. 20). In what ways is this a stereotype? How do you think Lily does or does not fit this label throughout the book?
4. "When you believe, that is you being brave. Sometimes, believing is the bravest thing of all" (p. 51). What do these lines mean to you? Write about a time when you believed and were brave.
5. Jensen tells Lily that stories exist all over the world, but essentially they are the same (p. 68). Have you heard or read different versions of folktales from different parts of the world? What were some of the similarities and differences in those stories? What might you learn about specific cultures from those stories?
6. What is story magic? Can story magic become poison? (p. 98)
7. Ricky likes to read superhero comics. Do you have a favorite character or series? How can reading superhero comics help you overcome challenges in your life?
8. Sam and Lily disagree on the meaning of the sun and moon story (p. 143). Is it sad? Is it happy? Why do you think so?

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. The first line in the book is: "I can turn invisible" (p. 1). What do you think this line means? Have you been in situations where you wanted to be or thought you were invisible? How does Lily become more visible throughout the story?
2. Lily says Halmoni's house "looks like a memory" (p. 16). What does this mean? Are there places that "look like a memory" to you? Draw or write about them.
9. After a falling-out at the library, Ricky and Lily exchange apologies (chapter 34). What was Ricky apologizing for, and why is his apology important?
10. Lily tells us that a tiger is a "scary, tricky predator" in some stories (p. 9). Do you think this tiger is scary or tricky? How did meeting this tiger make you feel? How would you describe this tiger? How did your impression of the tiger evolve throughout the story?

11. How do the tiger's and Halmoni's stories intertwine?
12. So much of *When You Trap a Tiger* is about loss—Lily and Sam lose their father before the story begins, and then they learn they are losing their halmoni. How do the girls handle these losses? How do you handle loss?

POST-READING QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

1. **Sisters**—Lily is sad that she and her sister aren't as close as they used to be. How does their relationship evolve throughout the story? Choose to embody either Lily or Sam and write a letter to the other sister explaining why and how their relationship evolved and how they feel about it.
2. **Stories**—Ask students to think about a story the grown-ups around them tell over and over, and either retell it or reflect on why it's important.
3. **Korean Folktales**—Visit your public or school library and read some Korean folktales that include tigers (or maybe you have some books in your home!). What are some of the characteristics that Lily's tiger shares with the tigers you meet in these other stories?
4. **Korean History**—Halmoni and the tiger allude to the sad history of Korea. Learn about Korean history, starting in the late 1800s. What are some of the sad parts and what are some of the parts where Korean people showed strength and bravery?
5. **Korea and United States Relations**—Research the history of the relationship between the United States and Korea. Create a timeline of important events.
6. **Korean Immigrants**—Korean people came to the United States beginning in the late 1800s, but they began systematically immigrating to Hawai'i in 1903. Do some research about this first group of immigrants and write a report about what brought them to Hawai'i, what they did when they arrived, and how the community evolved as time went by.
7. **Korean Americans**—Look up some famous Korean Americans, such as Andy Kim, Marilyn Strickland, Paull Shin, Philip Jaisohn, Philip Ahn, Susan Ahn Cuddy, Sammy Lee, Margaret Cho, Steven Yeun, Linda Sue Park, Roy Choi, or Greg Pak. Write a biography of that person.
8. **Korean Current Events**—Research Korean current events as they relate to the Republic of Korea's relationship with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. How do different newspapers report on the same story? Pretend you're a journalist: distill the facts and write your own feature story for a newspaper.
9. **Art and Architecture**—Halmoni's house and the library are important places in this story. Reread the parts of the book where Keller describes these two buildings, and then draw a picture of the street views or the insides of both buildings.

Discussion questions prepared by Sarah Park Dahlen, PhD. Sarah is an associate professor in the masters of library and information science program at St. Catherine University. She co-founded and co-edits *Research on Diversity in Youth Literature* and researches Asian American children's literature.



A Q&A WITH TAE KELLER

1. **When did you start writing? Which parts of the process do you find easiest, and which are most challenging?**

I started in 2016, and it took about three years to write. To be honest, I'm not sure any part of this book was easy, but the challenges were incredibly rewarding. I learned so much while writing this book, both as a writer and as a person.

2. **What advice would you give middle schoolers who are aspiring writers?**

Write for yourself first. Write because it's a way to express yourself and tell your story and because it's *enjoyable*. Don't worry about what other people will think. Also, read a lot!

3. **Which idea came first, the characters or the plot of your story? What was the inspiration for your book?**

Definitely the characters. The plot was wobbly and took many tries to nail down, but I knew this family and their dynamic pretty early on—probably because much of it was inspired by own family and experiences.

4. **How much research did you have to do while writing this book? Did you anticipate it at the outset?**

This book required a ton of research, though I didn't realize that when I started. At first, I drew on my personal experience and the knowledge I'd gleaned about Korean history over the years. But when I still couldn't find the "heart" of this story, I realized that I needed to dig much deeper into history. I read through Korean history, folklore, and my family stories, and in doing so, I was able to understand these characters much better. I saw the way generational triumphs and traumas are passed down, and the themes of how we tell stories—which ones we tell, which ones we *don't* tell, and why—really solidified for me.

5. **Why did you feel it was important to document this book's progress in an Insta Story, and how does it feel to reflect on that video now? The video can be found [here](#), on Tae Keller's Instagram page (@tae_keller).**

I documented the ups and downs because I love when other authors do the same! There's an idea that books come from a lightning strike of inspiration, and that writers *writewritewrite* in a flurry before turning in a perfect draft. That myth can be very discouraging for new writers who feel like they're doing something wrong if writing doesn't feel that way.

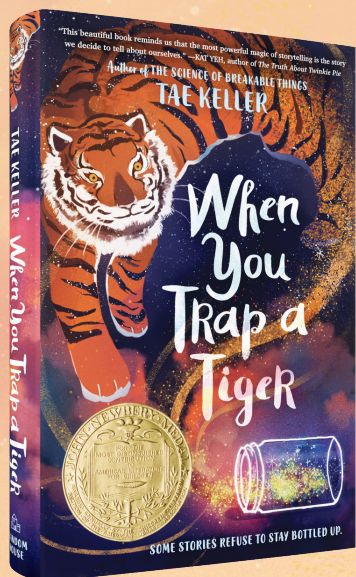
So, I wanted to honestly document my writing process, and now I'm so glad I did! It's surreal looking back at those videos and remembering how I felt at times—like I wouldn't be able to pull this book off, like I wouldn't do it justice, like nobody would read it. But I can also see how much of my heart I poured into this story, and I'm proud of that.

6. **How did you know Lily was the character who needed to tell this story? Was there something that you felt only Lily could teach or convey?**

This book is a love letter to the quiet kids, the ones who feel invisible, the ones who believe they can't make an impact and can't be a hero. With this book, I wanted to show that finding your voice doesn't have to mean becoming extroverted or loud or suddenly changing your personality. There can be strength in quiet.

7. **Many middle-grade books about mythology place a regular kid in a magical or mythological world. Why did you decide to bring the magical tiger into the real world?**

I loved portal fantasies as a kid, and still do! But I also love the idea that magic exists all around us. We just have to be willing to see it.



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for Children's Literature

★ “Keller weaves ancient folklore with Korean history through contemporary magical realism. She calls on the power of stories to bring families and communities together and the ability to heal by speaking to their pasts.”

—*School Library Journal*, starred review

★ “Explores both the end of life and coming-of-age, with a sensitive examination of immigration issues and the complexity of home.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*, starred review

★ “A tale about letting go and the immortality that story can allow.”

—*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★ “A complex, satisfying story, one that foregrounds family and healing alongside a love for Korean folklore.”

—*The Bulletin*, starred review

★ “Every chapter is filled with a richness and magic that demands every word be treasured, a heartfelt reminder of the wonder and beauty in our everyday lives.”

—*Booklist*, starred review

★ “A compassionate glimpse
of mental illness accessible
to a broad audience.”

—Kirkus Reviews, starred review

★ “Keller’s layered, accessible story offers
beautifully crafted metaphors, a theme of mending
old friendships and creating new ones, and an
empowering teacher to a variety of readers.

A moving story about fragility and rebirth.”

—Booklist, starred review

“An emotional story that explores parental
depression with realism and empathy.”

—School Library Journal

“An easy-going, middle-grade novel that may help readers process their
emotions about parental dissonance/depression. The characters are well
developed and relatable and the resolution leaves readers with hope.”

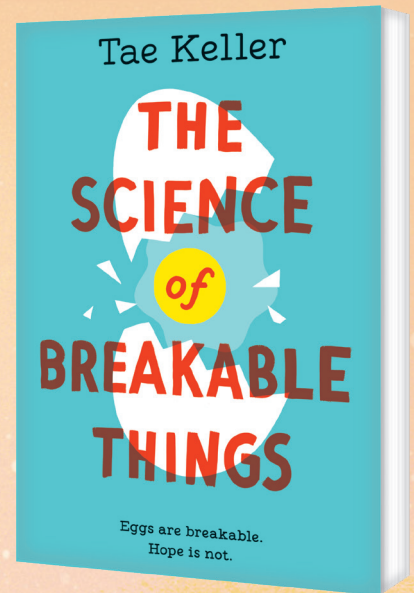
—VOYA

“Natalie’s Korean heritage is sensitively explored,
as is the central issue of depression.”

—Publishers Weekly

“The Science of Breakable Things is the perfect example of a book that
addresses a serious topic (depression in a parent) while still presenting an
engaging and even at times humorous story. These elements
will keep students reading and rooting for the main character.”

—Adrianna Cuevas, educator



[Click here for The Science of Breakable Things Educators' Guide](#)



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