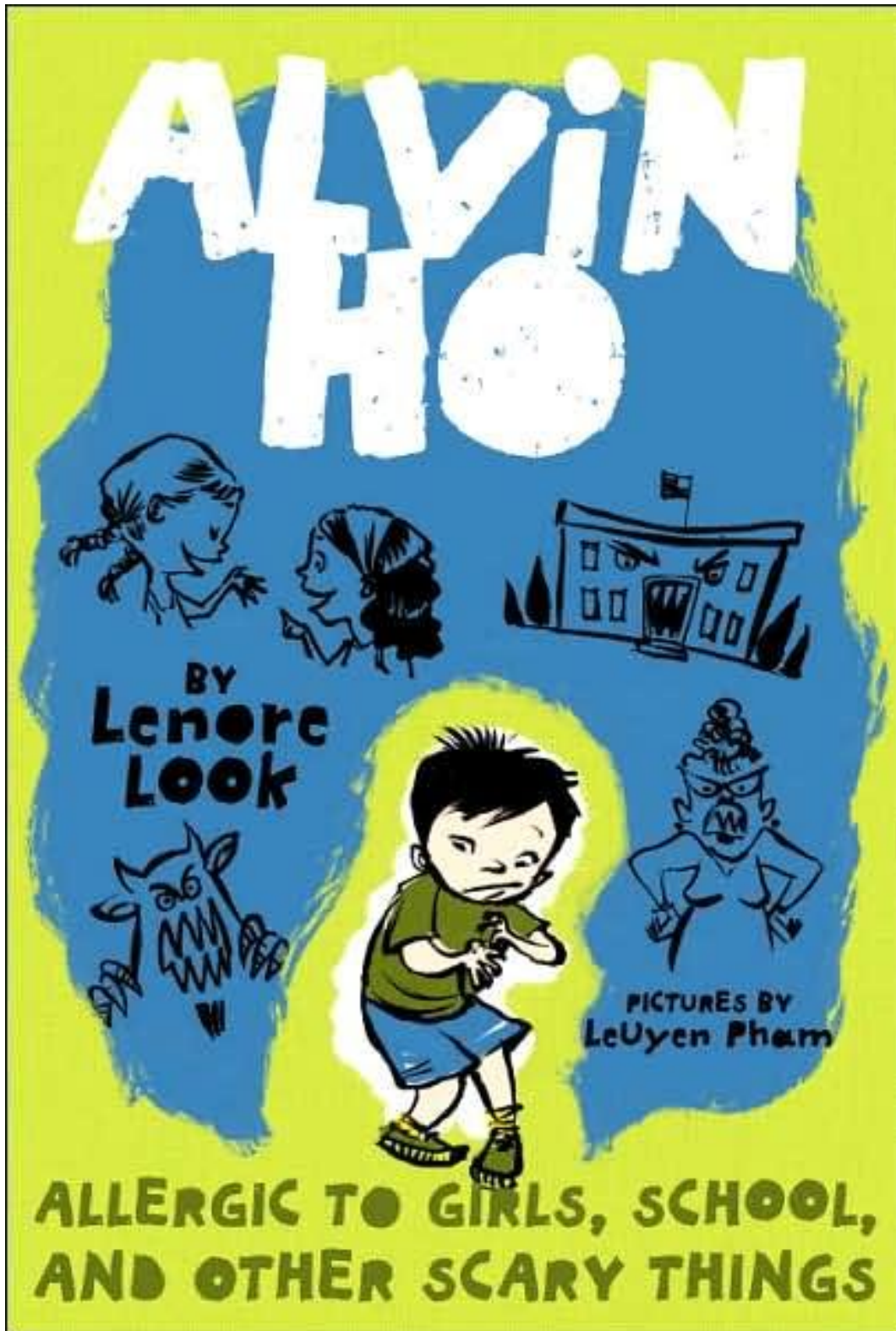


**About the book...**



*Alvin Ho is a Chinese-American who is in the second grade. His long list of fears includes everything from girls to tunnels to wasabi, but mostly he's terrified of school. So scared, in fact, that he's never uttered a single word while in class. All of this is preposterous because Alvin is living a secret double life as an exuberant superhero named Firecracker Man and is in training to become a true gentleman just like his dad. This hilarious and quirky story follows Alvin's quest to overcome his fears, find true friendship, and make his family proud.*

**-Books & Authors**

## About the Author...



I first began making picture books in kindergarten because my other career option at the time was stealing. But a life of crime requires practice and patience, neither of which I had, so I settled into industry, making what I coveted but what my parents could not afford to buy: beautiful books like the ones my teacher read to us in school.

Publishing was no problem in those days, not like it is now. By first-grade, I was my own publisher, making multiple copies of my books by hand. As for fame and fortune, I took care of that, too—I taught my brothers and the neighborhood kids how to wait in line for autographed copies, and I charged them 25 cents a book (an enviable paperback royalty today!), but also accepted candy.

By third grade, I had abandoned the literary scene. My parents had bought an old piano and signed me up for lessons and, thus, I began dreaming of becoming a world-famous concert pianist.

Then I came across a book on Maria Tallchief, and

became a ballerina, just like that. I weighed only 40 pounds and could leap and pirouette all day without stopping. It was a lot easier than becoming a pianist. Then I read a book about a surgeon, and one about a veterinarian, and another about a great tennis player . . . and I found myself wanting to become whatever I'd last read.

Eventually I grew up and became a newspaper reporter. It was the perfect job for me. I got paid to do the two things I loved most: writing and being curious. Working as a reporter taught me how to talk to people, how to find the story behind the story, and how to tell a story in a way that keeps a reader reading. I learned to listen to the way people talk. I learned to be precise and concise in my own choice of words. Best of all, the more I wrote, the more I was filled with a sense of wonder. I loved writing not only about what happens to people, but also about what happens inside of them, which is what writing for children is all about, but I didn't yet know it.

It wasn't until I became a mother and began reading children's books again that I felt what the Chinese call *yun fuen*, a continuing of work begun in past lives. I had long forgotten my early foray into picture books, the thread I'd dropped in kindergarten, a thin rig, like the one a spider would

use in rising. I had journeyed nearly 30 years down through space by then, unaware of my silken strand. Then one afternoon, with my two young children clamoring for something to do, I showed them how to fold paper into a book . . . picked up some crayons and a pen, and then . . . felt myself rising . . . returning to that place where I began, that brief age in which I had so many talents, and leapt and pirouetted into the sun, and could not stop.

For more information visit:

<http://lenorelook.wordpress.com/>

## **Writings**

- [\*Alvin Ho: Allergic to Camping, Hiking, and Other Natural Disasters \(#2\)\*](#), 2009.
- [\*Alvin Ho: Allergic to Birthday Parties, Science Projects, and Other Man-Made Catastrophes \(#3\)\*](#), 2010.
- [\*Alvin Ho: Allergic to Dead Bodies, Funerals, and Other Fatal Circumstances \(#4\)\*](#) 2011.
- [\*Alvin Ho: Allergic to Babies, Burglars, and Other Bumps in the Night \(#5\)\*](#), 2013
- [\*Ruby Lu, Brave and True, \(#1\)\*](#), 2004.
- [\*Ruby Lu, Empress of Everything, \(#2\)\*](#), 2006.
- [\*Ruby Lu, Star of the Show, \(#3\)\*](#), 2011.

## **Awards**

- American Library Association Notable Children's Book for "Ruby Lu, Brave and True", and "Ruby Lu, Empress of Everything".

## Reviews

### *Kirkus Reviews*

Bright, energetic Alvin Ho is about to enter the second grade. The middle child in his close family, he idolizes his devoted, patient dad. He's a big superhero fan and he loves all things that explode. His enthusiasm, however, doesn't carry over to school--he's so petrified while there that he can't utter a single word: "But as soon as I get to school...I am as silent as a side of beef," he explains. In the vignettes that make up this exuberantly funny slice of Alvin's life, Look portrays the world as it would be viewed through the eyes of a wildly creative but undeniably neurotic kid. In his hometown of Concord, Mass., Alvin searches for friends, meets with a psychotherapist (who he supposes must be a "very smart crazy person" based on her job title) and gets himself into a variety of jams. A witty glossary and Pham's simple yet expressive line drawings perfectly complement this appealing story about the refreshingly original, endearing Alvin.

*The Horn Book Magazine*

Fearful second-grader Alvin Ho has never, not once, said a single word in school. His voice works at home, in the car, on the school bus. "But as soon as I get to school ... I am as silent as a side of beef." Like the author's Ruby Lu chapter books, this one acknowledges kids' troubles while lightening them in a funny yet respectful way. For instance, Alvin plays cards with the psychotherapist he sees for his anxiety. When he realizes she's letting him win, he says his first words to her--swear words he's learned from his dad. But they're Shakespearean swear words ("Sit thee on a spit, then eat my sneakers, thou droning beef-witted nut hook"), so she's impressed. There's no miracle cure for Alvin's missing voice, and the book nicely focuses more on his need for friends. At the end, he's still afraid of school, scary movies, etc., but he's made a friend--and it's (yikes!) a girl. Generously illustrated short chapters include laugh-out-loud descriptions of Alvin's attempt to grow taller (his siblings leave him hanging from a tree branch where he remains forgotten until his mother spots his empty seat at dinner), his fateful decision to bring his dad's beloved childhood Johnny Astro toy for show-and-

tell, and his brief membership in a not-so-tough neighborhood gang. Readers will hope Alvin has enough fears to fill yet another small but hugely amusing chapter book.

### *Publishers Weekly*

Alvin Ho, a Chinese-American second-grader with "so-so performance anxiety disorder," is afraid of just about everything: elevators, tunnels, kimchi, wasabi. But one thing is especially frightening: "I have never spoken a word in school," Alvin says, and he's mystified, "since I come from a long line of farmer-warriors who haven't had a scaredy bone in their bodies since 714 AD." By the end of the story, his fears are pretty much intact--but he's found a friend, made progress on his "How to Be a Gentleman" list and learned that joining a "gang" is for the birds. Look's (the Ruby Lu series) intuitive grasp of children's emotions is rivaled only by her flair for comic exaggeration, as in Alvin's description of his elderly piano teacher: "She bent like a question mark.., and looked exactly like her pictures in *The Complete Brothers Grimm Fairy Tales, Deluxe Edition*." It's perfection that Alvin's friend turns out to be his once-despised desk buddy, Flea, a one-eyed girl with one leg longer than the other, "like a peg leg"; she prides herself on her understanding of him, and he



enthusiastically thinks her eyepatch and legs make her look like a pirate. Ahoy! Ages 6-10.

## **Discussion Questions**

([http://www.multcolib.org/talk/ORCA/2011/guides-Alvin\\_Ho\\_Allergic.html](http://www.multcolib.org/talk/ORCA/2011/guides-Alvin_Ho_Allergic.html))

1. Alvin likes to pretend he is the superhero Firecracker Man. If you could make up a superhero character, who would you be? What would your costume look like?
2. Are you afraid of some things? What would you put in your PDK - Personal Disaster Kit - to help you survive the things that scare you?
3. Alvin takes his father's Johnny Astro toy to school without asking, because he hopes it will make him more popular. Does his plan work?
4. At first Alvin is excited when it seems like Pinky wants him to join his gang. But then he discovers there are some problems with joining a gang. What are they? Would you join the gang?
5. Flea made a book called *The Book of Alvin*. Why did she make it, and what did she put in her book?

## Activities

Collect some clothes from your parents or other family members, and come up with your own superhero costume, like Alvin did.

Have a bad food picnic! Get together with friends to try some foods you've always been afraid to eat, but never really tried. Brussel sprouts, lima beans, liver . . . are they really all that bad? For dessert, try a plate of gummi worms or spiders. Sometimes things aren't so scary if they're made of candy!

## Read-Alikes

Rachel Vail, [\*Justin Case: School, Drool, and Other Daily Disasters\*](#) (2010)

Third grader Justin Krzeszewski--also known as Justin Case--is a quiet, perceptive boy with a long list of hopes and fears. In *Justin Case: School, Drool, and Other Daily Disasters*, author Rachel Vail chronicles a year in the hero's life, presented in diary form and offering readers an intimate peek into Justin's innermost thoughts. As he navigates the terrain of childhood, Justin encounters a series of adventures and discovers his own unique place

in the world. *Justin Case* includes illustrations by Matthew Cordell.

Patricia Reilly Giff, [\*Number One Kid\*](#) (2010)

In *Number One Kid*, author Patricia Reilly Giff presents the first novel in the Zigzag Kids series. Chronicling the adventures of the students at the Zelda A. Zigzag School, this volume focuses on new-in-town Mitchell and his sister, Angel. Mitchell is desperate to win an award--*any* award--at the school's annual Prize Day. He sets out to be the best at everything he attempts, but Mitchell soon learns he excels at something very unique indeed. This volume is accompanied by Alasdair Bright's illustrations.

Peggy Elizabeth Gifford, [\*Moxy Maxwell Does Not Love Stuart Little\*](#) (2007)

It may look like Moxy is doing nothing, but actually she is very busy with a zillion highly crucial things—like cleaning up her room (sort of) and training her dog and taking a much-needed rest in the hammock. Just look at the pictures her twin brother Mark takes to document it all—they're scattered throughout—and you'll see why it's so difficult to make time for a book about a mouse.

Johanna Hurwitz, [\*Mostly Monty\*](#) (2009)

Six-year-old Monty doesn't have a brother, a sister, or a pet. What he does have is asthma, which sometimes makes it hard to breathe and often makes him feel like he'd rather be somebody else. And now that he's starting first grade, he's very nervous about being with all those kids he won't know. Luckily, he loves to read — even really hard books — and has a talent for finding things, from a cocooning caterpillar to classmates who want to be in his very own club. With familiar situations and gentle humor, Johanna Hurwitz follows an endearing character as he discovers that being himself can be pretty great after all.



Ann Arbor District Library