



HOW TO HAVE AN AMERICAN BABY

DELVE DEEPER READING LIST



This list of fiction and nonfiction books, compiled by Jeremy Davies, MMLIS, of San Diego Public Library, provides a range of perspectives on the issues raised by the POV documentary *How to Have an American Baby*.

How to Have an American Baby is a kaleidoscopic voyage into the shadow economy catering to Chinese tourists who travel to the US to give birth for citizenship. Told through a series of intimately observed vignettes, the story of a hidden global economy emerges—depicting the fortunes and tragedies that befall the ordinary people caught in its web.

Contributors



Jeremy Davies, MMLIS

Jeremy currently serves in the Art, Music, & Recreation service section at the City of San Diego Public Library's (SDPL) Central Library in beautiful downtown San Diego, where he provides excellent reference services, collection development, and library programming. Community collaborations are Jeremy's specialty. In his role with SDPL, he collaborates with organizations like the Old Globe Theatre, The Peace Train Transcending Barriers, The San Diego LGBT Center, local filmmakers, and more to provide high-quality library programming for San Diego residents and visitors.

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ADULT NON-FICTION

Chin, Ava. *Mott Street: A Chinese American Family's Story of Exclusion and Homecoming*. Penguin Press, an imprint of Penguin Random House LLC, 2023. Mott Street follows Chinese American writer Ava Chin, who grew up estranged from her father, as she seeks the truth about her family history—and uncovers a legacy of exclusion and resilience that speaks to the American experience past and present. Chin's ancestors became lovers, classmates, sworn enemies, and, eventually, through her birth, kin—all while converging at a single Chinatown address

Harpaz, Yossi. *Citizenship 2.0: Dual Nationality as a Global Asset*. Princeton University Press, 2019. In recent decades, global citizenship has seen substantial changes. Many nations have shifted towards allowing dual citizenship, departing from exclusive allegiance requirements. This shift has led to tens of millions worldwide holding citizenship in multiple countries. Yossi Harpaz's book broadens the discussion beyond Western Europe and North America. He argues that dual citizenship offers non-Western elites a way to turn local advantages into a global asset. They leverage ancestral or strategic ties to Western/EU nations, seeking second citizenship for added opportunities, insurance, high-status passports, and social standing. This book draws on real-life cases to demonstrate this shift.

Klass, Perri. *A Good Time to be Born: How Science and Public Health Gave Children a Future*. W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2020. The fight against child mortality that transformed parenting, doctoring, and the way we live. Only one hundred years ago, even in the world's wealthiest nations, children died in great numbers—of diarrhea, diphtheria, and measles, of scarlet fever and meningitis. Culture was shaped by these deaths; diaries and letters recorded them, poets and writers from Louisa May Alcott to Eugene O'Neill wrote about and lamented them. Not even the high and mighty could escape: presidents and titans of industry lost their children, the poor and powerless lost theirs even more frequently. The near-conquest of infant and child mortality is one of our greatest human achievements, and Perri Klass pulls the story together for the first time, paying tribute to scientists, public health advocates, and groundbreaking women doctors like Sara Josephine Baker and Mary Putnam Jacobi, who brought new scientific ideas about sanitation and vaccination to families. Thanks to their work, early death is now the exception, bringing about a massive transformation in society and freeing parents to worry a lot more about a lot less.

Nackenoff, Carol and Julie Novkov. *American by Birth: Wong Kim Ark and the Battle for Citizenship*. University of Kansas Press, 2022. This book explores the legacy of Wong Kim Ark and a landmark 1898 Supreme Court case, establishing citizenship for those born within U.S. boundaries. In a time of racial tensions, Chinese immigrants, facing hostility, found support in this case. Wong Kim Ark, born in San Francisco in the 1870s, became a symbol. He challenged his denial of entry, asserting his citizenship rights, ultimately winning at the Supreme Court. This victory had broad implications for immigrant communities and birthright citizenship. The book delves into the case's significance in the context of U.S. history and ongoing debates on birthright citizenship.

Wang, Connie. *Oh My Mother!* Penguin Random House, 2023. “In each essay of this hilarious, heartfelt, and pitch-perfectly honest memoir, journalist Connie Wang explores her complicated relationship to her stubborn and charismatic mother, Qing Li, through the “oh my god” moments in their travels together. From attending a Magic Mike strip show in Vegas to experimenting with edibles in Amsterdam to flip-flopping through Versailles, this iconic mother-daughter duo venture into the world to find their place in it, and sometimes rail against it—as well as against each other. There are hijinks, capers, and adventures. There is also tenderness, growth, and discovery. In telling these stories about the places they’ve gone and the things they’ve done, Wang reveals another story: the true story of two women who finally learned that once we are comfortable with the feeling of not belonging—once we can reject the need to belong to any place, community, census, designation, or nation—we can experience something almost like freedom.” - Provided by publisher.

ADULT FICTION

Cai, Delia. *Central Places*. Penguin Random House, 2023. “A young woman’s past and present collide when she brings her white fiancé home to meet her Chinese immigrant parents in this vibrant debut from an exciting new voice in fiction.” - Provided by publisher.

Eng, Kara. *Not Just a Simple Chinese Girl*. 2022. Vanessa Jade Lee resides on the outskirts of Chicago's vibrant Chinatown, content with her family's apparent happiness. However, her tranquil life shatters when she stumbles upon a mysterious photograph. This enigmatic image unravels her family's hidden past, forcing Vanessa to confront layers of deception and lies. To unearth the truth, she must break free from her sheltered world, willing to make sacrifices and question everything she once believed. The journey into her family's secrets takes her down an unexpected path, where the past and present collide, challenging her understanding of self and family.

Kingston, Maxine Hong. *Woman Warrior*. Penguin Random House, Vintage International, 1989.

“As a girl, Kingston lives in two confounding worlds: the California to which her parents have immigrated and the China of her mother’s “talk stories.” The fierce and wily women warriors of her mother’s tales clash jarringly with the harsh reality of female oppression out of which they come. Kingston’s sense of self emerges in the mystifying gaps in these stories, which she learns to fill with stories of her own. A warrior of words, she forges fractured myths and memories into an incandescent whole, achieving a new understanding of her family’s past and her own present.” - Provided by publisher.

Li, Yiyun. *Where Reasons End*. Penguin Random House, 2021. “The narrator of *Where Reasons End* writes, “*I had but one delusion, which I held on to with all my willpower: We once gave Nikolai a life of flesh and blood; and I’m doing it over again, this time by words.*” Yiyun Li meets life’s deepest sorrows as she imagines a conversation between a mother and child in a timeless world. Composed in the months after she lost a child to suicide, *Where Reasons End* trespasses into the space between life and death as mother and child talk, free from old images and narratives. Deeply moving, these conversations portray the love and complexity of a relationship. Written with originality, precision, and poise, *Where Reasons End* is suffused with intimacy, inescapable pain, and fierce love.” - Provided by publisher.

Wang, Weike. *Joan is Okay: A Novel*. Penguin Random House, 2022. In the heart of New York City, Joan, a devoted ICU physician in her thirties, balances her life as the daughter of Chinese immigrants chasing the American dream. She excels in her work, cherishing her solitary existence, yet a lingering question haunts her. Does her true identity lie in her doctor's coat or the family's cultural expectations? Her father's sudden death brings her mother back from China, thrusting Joan into uncharted territory. "Joan Is Okay" dives deep into being Chinese American, medicine in tumultuous times, workplace gender dynamics, and the push-pull of independence within a close-knit family. Meet a remarkable woman you won't soon forget.

Yanyi. *Dream of the Divided Field: poems*. Penguin Random House, 2022. "The poems in Yanyi's latest book suggest that we enter and exit our old selves like homes. We look through the windows and recognize some former aspect of our lives that is both ours and not ours. We long for what we had even as we recognize that we can no longer live there. Yanyi conjures the beloved both within and without us: the beloved we believe we know, the beloved who is never the person we imagine, and the beloved who threatens to erase us even as we stand before them. How can we carry our homes with us? Informed by Yanyi's experiences of immigration, violent heartbreak, and a bodily transition, *Dream of the Divided Field* explores the contradictions that accompany shifts from one state of being to another. In tender, serene, and ethereal poems, *Dream of the Divided Field* examines a body breaking down and a body that rebuilds in limitless and boundary-shifting ways. These are homes in memory—homes of love and isolation, lust and alienation, tenderness and violence, suffering and wonder." - Provided by publisher.

YOUNG ADULT NON-FICTION

Fonda, Jane. *Being a Teen: Everything Teen Girls and Boys Should Know About Relationships, Sex, Love, Health, Identity, & More*. Random House, 2014. This thorough guide offers frank advice for teenagers on a range of topics including pregnancy, eating disorders, bullying, sexual abuse, and more.

Gao, Laura. *Messy Roots: A Graphic Memoir of a Wuhanese American*. Illustrated by Weiwei Xu. Balzer + Bray, 2022. After spending her early years in Wuhan, China, riding water buffalos and devouring stinky tofu, Laura immigrates to Texas, where her hometown is as foreign as Mars—at least until 2020, when COVID-19 makes Wuhan a household name. In *Messy Roots*, Laura illustrates her coming-of-age as the girl who simply wants to make the basketball team, escape Chinese school, and figure out why girls make her heart flutter. Insightful, original, and hilarious, toggling seamlessly between past and present, China and America, Gao's debut is a tour de force of graphic storytelling.

Ortiz, Lars. *Walls and Welcome Mats: Immigration and the American Dream*. Twenty-First Century Books, 2023. From hope for a better future to the backlash of xenophobia and nationalism, this book examines the history and current issues surrounding immigration in America.

YOUNG ADULT FICTION

Tan, Amy. *The Joy Luck Club*. Penguin Books, 2006. In 1949, four Chinese women, recent immigrants to San Francisco, begin meeting over dim sum, playing mahjong, and talking. United in shared unspeakable loss and hope, they call themselves the Joy Luck Club. With wit and sensitivity, Amy Tan's debut novel—now widely regarded as a modern classic—examines the sometimes painful, often tender, and always deep connection between these four women and their American-born daughters.

Yang, Gene Luen. *American Born Chinese*. First Second, 2021. *American Born Chinese* tells the story of three apparently unrelated characters: Jin Wang, who moves to a new neighborhood with his family only to discover that he's the only Chinese-American student at his new school; the powerful Monkey King, subject of one of the oldest and greatest Chinese fables; and Chin-Kee, a personification of the ultimate negative Chinese stereotype, who is ruining his cousin Danny's life with his yearly visits. Their lives and stories come together with an unexpected twist in this action-packed modern fable.

BOOKS FOR YOUNGER LEARNERS AND CHILDREN

Brockenbrough, Martha and Grace Lin. *I Am an American: The Wong Kim Ark Story*. Illustrated by Julia Kuo. Little Brown and Company, 2021. When American-born Wong Kim Ark returns home to San Francisco after a visit to China, he's stopped and told he cannot enter: he isn't American. What happens next would forever change the national conversation on who is and isn't American. After being imprisoned on a ship for months, Wong Kim Ark takes his case to the Supreme Court and argues any person born in America is an American citizen.

Simon, Rachel E. *The Every Body Book: The LGBTQ+ Inclusive Guide for Kids About Sex, Gender, Bodies, and Families*. Illustrated by Noah Grigni. Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020. This vibrant and beautifully illustrated book educates children about sex, gender, and relationships in a way that is inclusive of all sexual orientations and gender identities. Covering puberty, hormones, pregnancy, consent, sex, babies, relationships, and families, it uses gender-neutral language throughout and celebrates diversity in all its forms, including race, ethnicity, faith, bodies, gender, and sexuality. For use with children ages 8-12.