



Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet

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Ana Shen has what her social studies teacher calls a "marvelously biracial, multicultural family" but what Ana simply calls a Chinese American father and an African American mother. And on eighth-grade graduation day, that's a recipe for disaster. Both sets of grandparents are in town to celebrate, and Ana's best friend has convinced her to invite Jamie Tabata -- the cutest boy in school -- or a home-cooked meal. Now Ana and her family have four hours to prepare their favorite dishes for dinner, and Grandma White and Nai Nai can't agree on anything. Ana is tired of feeling caught between her grandparents and wishes she knew whose side she was supposed to be on. But when they all sit down for their hot, sour, salty, and sweet meal, Ana comes to understand how each of these different flavors, like family, fit perfectly together.

Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet Details

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From Reader Review Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet for online ebook

Pappu says

I wasn't so excited to read this, I choose it from my 2019 Popsugar reading challenge, because everything with "sweet" was very steamy hot romance that is totally not my type.

And maybe is not really a 5 star book, it's a little fast and sloppy, but omg i had fun reading it!!

The chaos, the fights and the food, everything is hot, sour, salty and sweet. Loved it!

carrietracy says

Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet by Sherri Smith

Ana's middle school graduation day is going to be just perfect. She's Salutatorian and at night there's going to be a school dance and a chance to finally connect with her crush Jamie Tabata. But her dreams are shattered when a water pipe explodes, canceling her speech and dance. Her best friend Chelsea won't sit by and see Ana's day spoiled, so she invites Jamie to Ana's house to dinner. With just hours left before everyone's set to arrive, Ana must convince her family to prepare an unforgettable meal, hopefully without killing each other in the process.

You know I'm a sucker for cooking in a book, even more so when it shows a family coming together. Even if Ana's grandparents don't all get along with each other, it's clear they all love her very much. The meal preparation ends up being the backdrop for lots of important conversations, something that is true in so many families. I love that Ana ends up talking about her crush with pretty much her whole family, taking a topic that so many tweens and teens are embarrassed to share with their family and normalizing it. The men in the family not only provide moral support for Ana, but they are a big part of cooking the meal as well.

It was also great to have a book where diversity means more than a single sidekick-of-color. Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet features a biracial main character, whose family is Chinese and African American, while her crush is Japanese. So "Asian" isn't a thing here, people's specific cultural background is. And that adds levels of both interest and complexity.

Initially I found the book a little jarring because it is written in third person present tense, but as a teacher, I got a little thrill from seeing the unusual choice. Kids need to see lots of variety in writing and this is a great opportunity to get familiar with something a little different.

Despite being a very enjoyable book overall, there were a few bits that just didn't sit right with me. The first of these was how the oneness between families took a financial turn. I'm not saying that this is unusual, but the degree to which it was taken (first class plane tickets, fully paid college tuition, a house) is a level of privilege few enjoy and which might ring false with some readers. I also felt that Ana's choice to throw food at an adult was really out of character, even allowing for her having lost her temper. Finally, despite being a book with much positive diversity, Ana's brother Sam is sometimes called the Samoan after his favorite Girl Scout cookie...it's not just mentioned once, it's used multiple times. Samoa is a really place, with real people and with their own traditions and culture. It seems like an odd choice. And finally, Grandpa mentions killing people with "yellow skin" during the Korean War. He mentions this of course, while at dinner with his Chinese in-laws and Japanese guests.

Good for & Age Recommendation: I expect this book will find it's audience with readers in Grades 4-6. Much as high school books appeal to middle school students because they show what is coming in the years ahead. This book, showing the end of eighth grade will definitely strike those same notes for middle grades readers. It may seem juvenile to some actual eighth graders, but the reading level will make it accessible to older students who are reading below grade level, without forcing them to read books about younger kids.

For full review including any possibly concerning content, see my blog: <http://bit.ly/1UMEW9O>

Travis says

When a pipe bursts during Ana Shen's middle school graduation, flooding the field and cutting the ceremony short, it doesn't seem like things could get any worse. Then comes the announcement that the gym is flooded, too, and the graduation dance is cancelled. The dance was going to be Ana's big chance to tell Jamie Tabata she likes him before they go their separate ways for high school, but when her best friend Chelsea ends up inviting Jamie and his family over to Ana's for a graduation dinner, it looks like there might be hope after all. Assuming Ana can keep her grandmothers' rivalry from ruining everything.[return][return]I'd seen several reviews for this on and wasn't really that interested, but after reading and loving Flygirl, I decided to give some of Smith's other books a try. This...is definitely no Flygirl. It's cute enough, and it's nice to see a biracial main character (or any character!) who isn't half white, but I wasn't wowed or anything.[return][return]I really think the book could have used a lot more editing. Most of it is fine, but it starts to fall apart at the ending, which seems really rushed, plus has a couple of chapters that don't really fit. At one point her grandfather starts telling a story and instead of just making it quick or summarising, we actually get a random flashback chapter in his POV about the event he's relating. We also get a few paragraphs in one of the grandmothers' POV towards the end, in a story that has otherwise been very tight third person with only one POV. It just seemed sloppy.[return][return]Also I was really excited about the story being set in LA at first, but it ended up being more frustrating than anything because the author gave all sorts of conflicting details. The kids have gone to school together since kindergarten, yet for some reason they all go to an elementary school in a totally different zone than where they live. (One person going to a far away public school might have some excuse, but not a whole class.) Then the high school mentioned is not the high school that middle school feeds into. Neither is it the high school she would actually be going to for where she's supposed to live. Which being less than a mile from the beach would be Santa Monica and she'd go to SaMoHi, not Uni (also everyone keeps saying University High and I'm sorry but I have never heard anyone call it that; it's Uni). Plus the author gives a freeway exit that they're supposed to live near, which is not less than a mile from the beach, either.[return][return]I really don't know what she was thinking. The jacket flap says she lives in LA, so it's not just that she didn't know what she was talking about. It's like she wanted to use real names of stuff, but didn't want to be specific, so she ended up taking bits from all over. If you don't want to be specific, then either be vague or make up names of school and stuff. But if you're going to be specific then you have to get your facts right![return][return]Of course most of the people reading aren't going to know or care, but it really took a lot of fun out of it for me.

The Library Lady says

In that I'm raising two daughters who are half-Filipino and half-Ashkenazi Jewish, there were some familiar echoes here for me. I shudder at the idea of MY mother and mother-in-law ever having to cook in the same kitchen!

Ana Mai Shen is half-black and half-Chinese. She's just graduated from middle school. And during the afternoon and evening of her graduation party her two sets of grandmothers battle in the kitchen over the food and her love. The boy she has a crush on comes over for dinner along with the snobbiest girl in the class, and his father obviously disdains Ana's bi-racial family. In the midst of the chaos, Ana arrives at a moment where realizes she must speak up and show her pride for her family.

The characters here are wonderful and believable and Ana's struggles to understand who she is will resonate with other girls, whatever their background.

Anna Lembke says

I ask myself one question about this book. What was the point?

There really was none.

It was horribly boring to the point of me almost not finishing, and I am upset I actually used my time to read it. The story focuses on some plain-Jane girl who likes a boy and ends up inviting him to dinner with her (incredibly annoying) family. This sounds like a Disney television episode, not material for a novel. The entire plot of the book is her family going through a really unnecessarily hectic afternoon to make a dinner. Why did this family need to get traditional Asian ingredients to make a graduation meal for an 8(?)th grader? Why couldn't they just order a meal?

Also, another issue I had was with the parents of this girl. They let their daughter totally walk all over them. Make me this now. Don't do that. Stop doing this. Do that differently. I just wanted to reach into the pages of this book and strangle the girl. How can one person be so obnoxious.

Well, the only thing I can say is that if you want a poorly written, glaringly boring, hideously unoriginal book about a girl who has to make the perfect meal for a boy she likes, then get ready for a treat.

Sue Black says

Ana is the salutatorian of her 8th grade class and as she is about to give her speech, the water main breaks and causes flooding. She is not as disappointed about not being able to give her speech as she is that the school dance has been canceled due to the flooding of the gym floor. She had hoped to attend the dance with the valedictorian, Jamie, the boy she likes. As an alternate plan, her friend, Chelsea, invites Jamie and his family along with her own family to Ana's house for dinner. Ana has a multicultural family and conflict between both sets of grandparents becomes apparent once again as they all begin cooking their favorites in the same kitchen. The grandparents try very hard to trump each other with gifts, etc. for Ana. Ana becomes frustrated with her family as the day progresses.

Another girl who also has a crush on Jamie arrives at Ana's for dinner since Jamie's father took the liberty to invite her and her mother, too. Jamie's father makes rude comments throughout the meal, and it becomes evident that he would prefer Jamie to 'like' the other girl instead of Ana. When Ana has had enough of his rudeness, she stands up for her family and realizes that she is grateful for her family.

This book focuses on the challenges of multicultural families.

Megan says

Ana's 8th grade graduation day is full of drama. The pipes at school burst during her speech, cutting graduation short and canceling the graduation dance. So instead of figuring out how to get Jaime Tabata to dance with her, Ana has to figure out how to get her two sets of grandparents to get along. Ana's mother is African American and her father is Chinese American, so there is a bit of a culture clash when both sides of the family come together. When Jaime and a couple other classmates show up for dinner, things get even more complicated.

Readers may find it interesting to compare the different cooking styles and gift-giving traditions mentioned in the book. However, I found the writing style to be awkward, and I was puzzled by a sudden switch from 3rd person limited point of view to 3rd person omniscient point of view at the end. Trimmed up, this could have been an excellent short story, but it felt like page after page of the same stuff rehashed to fill up the novel.

The FountainPenDiva, Old school geek chick and lover of teddy bears says

If, by the end of Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet, you're not hoofing it as fast as you can your local chinese or soul food restaurant, you're either dead or anorexic. This book, with all the delicious food being prepared en masse, is a culinary delight...and that's not what it's really about.

It starts off with a bang and keeps going as fourteen year-old Ana Shen--the quirky product of a Black mother and a Chinese-American father--is about to give her speech at her junior high graduation when a water main bursts and literally rains on everyone's parade. Since there's to be no more ceremony, the after-graduation dance has also been cancelled. That's a bummer, because Ana wants to invite the smartest and cutest guy in school, Jason Tabata.

What to do? Have a well-meaning best friend named Chelsea invite Jason and his family over to Ana's house for a big family dinner.

Bad idea?

Considering that there are two very strong-willed grandmothers who cannot occupy the same space for any given amount of time, and both of whom have set ideas as to what comprises the perfect meal, Ana sees it as a recipe for disaster. Between her own dumplings that tend to look anything but *dumpling-like* to the Mixed Rice Disaster (yes, I said "rice") to an uninvited guest named Amanda who wants to make a play for the popular Jason, Ana wonders if she'll survive the get-together with her sanity intact. Add to that mix Jason's disapproving father and stir well.

Then run for cover!

I loved both sets of grandparents, especially the grandmothers--Olivia and Nai Nai. Both women are loving, stern and feisty--like all grandmothers should be. It's obvious that they adore their children and spoil their grandchildren. And it's obvious that they still don't quite get the whole mixed-marriage thing, but accept it anyway.

Ana reads like a savvy fourteen year-old, with all her attendant pre-teen hangups, but she's bright and funny and really loves her mixed-up family. It's nice that Smith doesn't try to dumb down the narrative the way a lot of adult authors these days seem to think makes their books "more accessible".

The added bonus of this book is it depicts an L.A. that most people don't ever see or sadly, do not want to. The rich diversity of neighborhood markets in Monterey Park with their wonderful smells of spices, and mentions of University High School is a nice reminder that there's more to Los Angeles than Beverly Hills or the beach.

Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet was a quick and enjoyable read.

Margaret says

Ana Chen is graduating from eighth grade, which should be a happy day for her. But her Chinese American father and her African American mother have invited both sets of grandparents over to dinner, and her grandparents just don't get along. To make things even worse, her best friend got Ana to invite cute Jamie Tabata and his parents, and Ana is worried that things will blow up with Jamie there. I felt this was a lot slighter than *Flygirl*. It was fine and reasonably entertaining as far as it went, and I appreciated the biracial heroine and her rich family cultural heritages, but there was a wealth of character background barely touched on in the final chapters, and Smith could have done a lot more with that.

Linden says

Ana Shen has what one of her teachers calls a multiracial family, though for Ana, it's simply her African-American mother and Asian-American father.

The whole story takes place on the day of her graduation from eighth grade--from the ceremony and its unplanned events to the family dinner at her house and its own unplanned events. She is pleased to offer a dinner invitation to Jamie Tabata, a Japanese-American boy on whom she has a crush. But the different cultural rules about everything from food to gifts create embarrassing conflicts among them all.

I found the psychological tone realistic--for example, the "So that's what you are" look from Mr. Tabata on seeing Ana's parents. The one thing I didn't like were the quiet asides and sniping by Ana and her friend Chelsea at the dinner table. While such behavior may be generally true for the age group, there was way too much of it. None of Ana's family noticed or gave Ana a cue to stop, which surprised me, especially since they were so tuned to the nuances of intention. Had Ana been keeping some of those thoughts to herself, I'd have understood her reaction to a comment by Mr. Tabata as the final straw.

Cynthia says

It was okay for the most part. I did like that the main character is a mixed black and Chinese, strong, smart, pretty girl. And that she is able to talk herself out of changing herself to appeal to her peers (including the boy she likes). Also, the commentary on how people consider and talk about biraciality. And how her family

has learned to be complacent and not point out someone's racism (however unsightly it was handled, but I concede that it is a children's book). And the complex dynamics of prejudices/racism between non-white people of different ethnicities.

However, that the author chose a Japanese man to be the racist abusive jerk against which the MC finally takes a stand fills a little like a cop-out (where it's not about racism as much as an awful individual; not to mention the more complex relation of Japanese people and racism). The grandmothers rivalry to gain their granddaughter's love with more and more extravagant gifts and growing pressure on her is too unbelievable for my enjoyment but children's book. On a more cultural aspect, I have a problem with the very stereotypical characterization of the Chinese grandmother as naggy, and obsessed with reputation and grades; as well as the romanticization of her seducing her older husband when he was her teacher. (On a side note, I have never met a non-white person who did not rinse rice before cooking it.) (On an additional side note, what teenager says she "has the hots" for a boy?) I am also so very tired of those narratives with another teenage girl as the cheap and fake rival of the main character for a nice clueless boy's attention.

Vickie says

An enjoyable story of a strong, smart biracial young woman who shows us how crazy and wonderful and exasperating it is to live in the center of so many cultures that don't always respect each other.

Jackie says

An odd, preachy story which highlights a multi-cultural family and their struggles and issues. Ana Shen, newly graduated salutatorian is just about to give her speech when a pipe bursts quickly ending the graduation ceremonies. Her crush, Jamie, will be out of her life forever (maybe) now that they are going to different high schools.

Through a series of curious conversations, the Shen family hosts an impromptu dinner party for the graduates, including Jamie and his family, her best friend, Chelsea's family, and Ana's rival, Amanda and her family. Her grandparents compete to make the tastiest food, present the most elaborate graduation gift, and to make Ana embarrassed beyond belief. When things get out of hand, arguments ensue and Ana and Jamie are mortified.

The essence of *Hot, Sour, Salty, Sweet* has an underlying theme of making the best of cultural diversity and why we should respect and rejoice in the differences. Yet, the story is preachy and the characters are not well developed. A story which could have been delightful left me disappointed in the end.

Tony says

I laughed so hard I almost cried while reading this book. When I made my purchase I didn't know it was about a fourteen year old but nevertheless I enjoyed Ana's big day. Ms. Smith who I'm a rescent fan of does a wonderful job of showing the similarites between people of different cultures, in this case Ana's grandparents, her mother is African American and her father is Chinese American. The friction arises over cooking Ana's graduation meal, since food and the sharing of a meal is important to every culture this was a great way to

show case the family dynamic. The one thing everyone agrees on is there love for Ana and reading the grandmother's try to out do one another is hilarious. This book isn't really about cultural difference that isn't the friction in the family, this is simply about family and everyone can relate to that.

Reader says

A 2009-2010 Sunshine State Book for Grades 6-8.

For me, this story was excruciatingly boring. What started out as a promising story of a young girl's infatuation with a guy really panned out to be a long, drawn out story of how to cook and clean amidst family members driving you crazy. However, as I try to do with every book I read, I tried to think about what was positive about the story. For one, I felt it was a realistic portrayal of one dysfunctional family's attempt to prepare for a big graduation/date dinner. Another positive is that as boring as it was for me to get through the heart of the story, I thought the climax of the story was gripping and sent a powerful message to readers about making sure not to judge others based on background or color. Realistically, a lot of biracial couples deal with issues very real and in line with that message. I sympathize with them because it really is ridiculous how so many people completely shut out others simply based on how they look or what backgrounds their families come from. Amazing how many really good potential friends people miss out on because they are too ignorant to see past their natural-born differences.
