# Address Book with solid fillShanghai Acrobat by JingJing Xue

## Synopsis

Jingjing Xue was born in China in 1947, during a period of civil war. Jingjing, left in an orphanage in Shanghai, was destined to a life of hardship before officials singled him out and enlisted him to train with the Shanghai Acrobatics School.

*Shanghai Acrobat* tells the moving story of Jingjing’s rise from poverty to become an admired performer in China and beyond. Through the turbulent period of the Cultural Revolution, he realised the value of freedom. This is a story of hope and perseverance, of overcoming adversity and of finding a place to belong.

## Discussion questions

1. In the prelude to the book, Jingjing talks about a Chinese legend that describes humanity being divided into three parts: people who are immovable, people who are movable, and those who move on their own. Discuss this idea. Which do you think you are, and which do you think you were taught to be?
2. At the start of the book, Jingjing likens the selection/ recruitment of children to the acrobatic school to cattle being selected at a market. How do you think a young person might understand complex ideas like communism?
3. On their tour of the Soviet Union the acrobatic troupe see an old woman begging at a train station. They are ordered not to speak of this incident again. Why? What does this tell us about the political landscape of the time?
4. What did joining the Youth League and the invitation to join the communist party mean for JingJing? How did it change the trajectory of his life?
5. Jingjing’s imprisonment and experience with the special investigation team brought him to the conclusion that there is no such thing as truth and anything could have any meaning. Do you agree?
6. Discuss the meaning of art in life. What benefit did Jingjing’s art provide him? How did it shape his life? When his American passport was denied and he was subsequently shunned from the performance troupe, how did this affect him?
7. Jingjing had set himself the goal of surpassing first Malgit, then Ocinsky’s achievements in acrobatics. Why do you think he did this?
8. Jingjing’s search for his family and questions about them have been a constant since he was left at the orphanage, indeed, the book is dedicated to his unknown parents. Discuss the power of family, history, and knowing your roots.
9. Jingjing eventually left China and migrated to Australia. It took years before he was able to continue his vocation of teaching gymnastics. Discuss the migrant experience both for Jingjing and others.

*Discussion questions from https://www.blackincbooks.com.au/books/shanghai-acrobat*