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Review of *Somewhere Only We Know* Written by Maurene Goo

Adult/Educator Reviewer: Ji Hyun Hong
The University of Georgia, Athens, GA
Student Reviewer: Andrew Park, 10th grade



Goo, M. (2019). *Somewhere only we know*. New York, NY: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

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Adult Review: Ji Hyun Hong

Seventeen-year-old rising Korean American K-pop (Korean popular music) singer Catherine Nam, better known by her stage name Lucky, is visiting Hong Kong before her debut in the U.S. Famished and in search of a hamburger, Lucky tactically avoids her bodyguards to find herself alone in a city bus where she meets Jack, a fellow seventeen-year-old Korean American who is taking a gap year from college and working part-time as a tabloid photographer.

The two have an instant connection and decide on a weekend exploration of the city, sharing their deepest concerns along the way, eventually falling in love. However, both are keeping a secret from one another: Lucky is using an alias and posing as an average girl on a trip with her church choir while Jack is pretending to believe her and has been taking photos of Lucky he is considering selling to the tabloids to boost his photography career.

Somewhere Only We Know is more than a teen romantic comedy novel. Written from a dual point of view, Maurene Goo confronts young adults' sexuality, career dilemma, mental health, and complex cultural identity as Americans of Korean descent. Goo also subverts the "model minority" myth by creating independent and bold adolescent characters who are in search of happiness away from parental and societal expectations. The book may be of interest to young adults struggling with ethnic or racial identity or have a liking for K-pop.

Before recommending this book to young adult readers, educators and students are encouraged to look up Korean words referenced throughout the novel and pay attention to the rich dialogues about

cultural differences and cultural belonging between the characters. A quick scan of articles or watching videos related to K-pop can also help readers get an overview of the genre of K-pop and K-pop artists' lifestyles discussed in the novel. Keep in mind that teens' wandering in the city by themselves at night, visiting a karaoke bar, and talking of sexual tension may be concerning for some young adult readers and adults.

Student Review: Andrew Park

In *Somewhere Only We Know*, many examples refer back to common Asian stereotypes. There is significance in Lucky's story about her troubles and having to sustain the "perfect image" which is expected of her. The storyline of Lucky being constantly maintained by someone, which in her case is her managers, causes her to live a stressful and anxious life that can be common among Asians and Asian-Americans. This story helps relay an important message about Asian societies and their standards while also telling a love story battling a dilemma. Hence, this book can be relatable to readers who are struggling with social pressures to succeed, a common burden for young adults. It can also be directed towards people who either favor romantic novels or K-pop.

I liked the overall storyline but found the ending the most compelling. Jack was able to stand up for Lucky even when his job required him to expose her vulnerable moments while Lucky finally showed her true colors by unmasking her fake personality, wig, and thigh-high shoes forced upon her by her entertainment industry.