

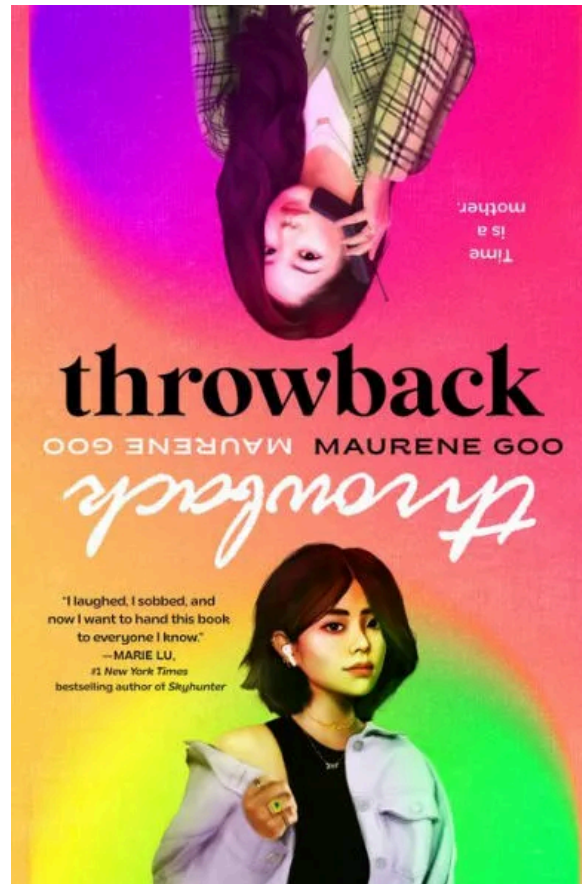
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## Review of *Throwback* Written by Maurene Goo

**Adult/ Educator Reviewer:** Mikaela LaFave, Avid Bookstore

**Child/ Student Reviewer:** Emily Tran, 11th Grade Student



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### **Adult's Review:**

Time traveling 30 years into the past, from 2025 to 1995 would already be hard enough. Things are even harder when getting back to your own timeline relies upon you solving the generational trauma of your own family. That is exactly the position high school senior Samantha, or Sam, is placed in when she is transported back to 1995 to mend the relationship between her mother, Priscilla, and her grandmother in *Throwback* by Maurene Goo.

Sam is thrown back in time after a major argument with her mother about their different relationships with Halmoni, Sam's grandmother and Priscilla's mom. Wrapped up in the same argument is Sam's love of Korean culture, from K-Pop and K-Dramas to traditional Korean food, and Priscilla's lack of engagement with this part of herself. Back in 1995, Sam must navigate her high school, befriend her teenage mother, and get to know her family 30 years in the past. Sam quickly realizes that Priscilla's attitude comes from the dual pressures of supporting her family and the dry-cleaning business Halmoni runs as a Korean immigrant in LA in the 90s and fitting into the all-American stereotype at school.

Goo's writing speaks directly to readers between 14 and 18, as Sam's relationships and responses to mid-90s culture feel real for a contemporary teenager. Teen readers will find Sam's use of her contemporary knowledge to solve problems like writing an apology or crafting a homecoming campaign to be familiar and fun. At the same time, older readers will also find this engaging, particularly as the cultural references of the 90s are woven throughout the novel. Furthermore, this book immerses young readers in an immigrant experience that may or may not be part of their own personal story, but is a part of the fabric of American history. Young readers will find Goo's novel to be a nuanced and interesting introduction to Korean communities and history in Los Angeles.

### **Student's Review:**

*Throwback* is an important book as it encompasses the themes of generational differences, Asian culture, coming-of-age, and love. These themes speak to me as the experiences within this book seem to reflect the experiences that I and probably many other Asian teenagers have had. For example, this novel captures the pattern of parents trying to live vicariously through their children. Whether this aspect stems from culture or is universal or not, it is arguably the most important of the novel because it highlights the care and love parents have towards their children. Parents want their children to be happy and to succeed like how they would have wanted or wanted to. This is best seen when Priscilla heavily encourages her daughter to go to parties or join the Oakwood Country Club since she was not able or allowed to do that in her adolescent years. Although this encouragement did not work and created more emotional division between the two, it still shows how parents want to satisfy their children and look out for them in order to compensate for what they had missed out on. I experienced something similar where my parents encouraged me to study hard in order to succeed and essentially attain the American dream like

they would have wanted and still want for themselves. Although it might be selfish of our parents to do so, a sense of sympathy, pity, and tending surges through me every time I am reminded of these true intentions as emulated in the book and my experiences.

The quality I liked best about the book was its ability to be situated into famous works like time travel movies. For example, the two movies that I was reminded of in the middle of reading *Throwback* were *17 Again* and *13 Going on 30*. I loved these movies especially since they portrayed how the past or the future taught the main protagonists lessons that they were able to apply to themselves in their actual time realm. In *17 Again*, Mike prioritized his basketball career over his pregnant then-girlfriend who became his future wife. Then, in his stagnant adult life, he shifted to his teen self and learned how to appreciate his family and partner more along with basketball. In *13 Going on 30*, 13-year-old Jenna wants to be popular, but ditches her best friend and hangs around the wrong crowd to do so. By using magic dust, she shifts into her 30-year-old body in which she has no recollection of how mean and stuck-up she has become. However, she wisely learns what to do and what not to do and that is to use the magic powder to become a better person when she is 13 to be better when she is 30 again. Similarly, Sam does not realize the adversity her mother Priscilla has gone through to make her the mother she is in 2025. However, once Sam travels back to 1995, she understands and appreciates her mom more. I believe that the aspect of being able to move back in time is my favorite because everyone wants to go back in time to try to fix something. In Sam's case though, the process of moving back in time is crucial because she puts all of her might into fulfilling a selfless act: mending the relationship between her mom and grandmother. Here, going back in time demonstrates the devotion and desperate yelp to alleviate tensions and form better bonds among a family structure.

The audiences that this book would be enjoyed by are children and parents from first and second immigrant generations. *Throwback* displays a proper representation of the relationships between first-or-second-generation children and their first-generation parents as seen through the contrasting personalities of Priscilla, the mother of the protagonist, and her mother Ms. Jo in 1995. Their clashing personalities can easily be understood as a result of not understanding one another. This cycle of apathy and disinterest in each other's views continues as seen through the relationship between Priscilla and Sam, the main protagonist, 30 years later. This representation is significant because it proves that the book is relatable, contributing to why people would enjoy reading it. Although Goo's story is fictional, the incorporation of the frequent arguments and the opposing personalities of the characters makes the story come to life and leads readers, specifically the ones mentioned, to feel acknowledged. Personally coming from a perspective within an Asian household, personalities tend to differ more and more after experiencing their parents' personalities and mindsets forced onto them. The book is masterful at capturing this pattern and made me feel grateful to be heard. Thus, as a second-generation daughter, I believe that others from the first or second generation would heavily enjoy reading *Throwback* as it involves the cultural, social, and personal aspects one would see within an ethnic family.