

# The Tryout

AUTHOR

**CHRISTINA SOONTORNVAT**

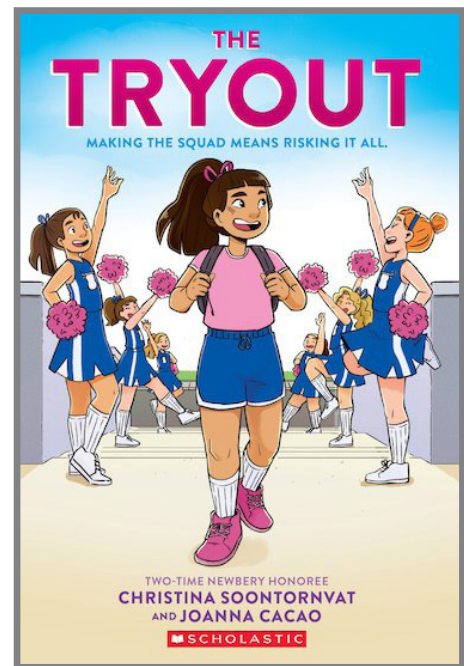
ILLUSTRATOR

**JOANNA CACAO**

SCIS: 5416106

ISBN: 9781338741261

RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Primary



## SYNOPSIS

When cheerleading tryouts are announced, Christina and her best friend, Megan, literally jump at the chance to join the squad. As two of the only kids of colour in the school, they have always yearned to fit in—and the middle school cheerleaders are popular and accepted by everyone. But will the girls survive the terrifying tryouts with their whole grade watching? And will their friendship withstand the pressures of competition?

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christina Soontornvat is the author of several books for young readers, including the Newbery Honor books *The Last Mapmaker*, *A Wish in the Dark*, and *All Thirteen*. Christina holds a B.S. in Mechanical Engineering and a master's degree in Science Education. She spent a decade working in the science museum field, where she designed programs and exhibits to get kids excited about science and STEM. Christina lives in Austin, Texas, with her husband, two young children, and one old cat. You can learn more about her work at [soontornvat.com](http://soontornvat.com).

## ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Joanna Cacao is a Canadian-Filipino artist and illustrator who lives in Winnipeg with her Pomeranian, Danny. She loves working on magical and fantastical stories. Growing up in front of a TV, Joanna immediately became obsessed with any show or film that had a great story and set of characters. Her favourite shows consist of *Avatar: The Last Airbender*, *Downton Abbey* and *Gravity Falls*. Her biggest influences come from various manga, as well as Ghibli and Disney films. She has a background in 3D Animation, and has self-published a queer webcomic: *Toxic For You*.

## STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class, discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
  - What can you see happening on the cover of the book?
  - What do you think the main character might be trying out for? Why do you think this?
  - What do you think the results of the tryout might be?
  - Where do you think this book might be set?
  - What do you predict might happen in this story?
- On Tina's first day of middle school, the class has to make acrostics using their first names. Make an acrostic of your own, using either your first, middle or last name, any combination of them all, or a nickname you are commonly known by.

- Tina's surname is too long and unfamiliar for her teachers to easily pronounce. Why might someone find an unfamiliar word or name difficult to say, when they can easily say other more familiar words that are just as long or even longer?
- Do you think that Tina's teacher was right to decide her name was too hard to say and to just call her Tina S? Why/why not? How do you think having her name singled out as 'too difficult' made Tina feel about school and about herself?
- The fortune cookie Tina opens says 'Success is failure turned inside out'. What do you think this means? Write a message(s) of your own that you think would make an excellent fortune cookie aphorism. As a class research how to make fortune cookies, and bake enough for your entire year group, placing your fortunes inside them. Take note of any possible allergens and be sure to have an ingredient list on display! In small groups discuss your fortunes, and the different ways you might be able to interpret their meaning.
- At Tina's new school, membership in sporting groups is far more important than it was at her elementary (primary) school. Is this the case at your school? Why do you think it is the case at Tina's school? As a class or in small groups discuss the importance of feeling that you belong to a group of your peers, and how and why this changes as you get older and transition from childhood into being a young adult.
- When Tina hears some other kids picking on Deanna in the lunchroom, she joins in with the nastiness. Why do you think she does this? How do you think being mean to Deanna makes her feel about herself and her life? What are some things she could have said or done differently that would have resulted in everyone being happier?
- Tina finds the pressure of having to wear the 'right' clothes upsetting and ridiculous, and wishes that everyone at her school could just all wear the same things all the time. She is amazed when her father's friend tells her that when he was at school in Thailand and they all wore a school uniform, the very first thing they'd do after school is change into their own clothes. As a class, discuss why some schools have uniforms, and some schools don't, and all the different reasons in favour of having a school uniform, and the reasons not to have one. Individually write a half to one page persuasive text arguing for or against school uniforms. Consider in your text the different types of school uniforms that are possible, as well as the fact that schools without a uniform might still have a fairly restrictive dress code in place.
- When the cheerleading tryouts were announced, no boys signed up, even though the tryouts were open to them as well. Why do you think that none of the boys signed up? If a boy had signed up, do you think that would have been a brave thing for him to do, or a foolish and silly thing? Why and in what way? Watch a video of a cheerleading competition where there are mixed-gender teams competing against each other. After watching the video, as a class, discuss what having boys also compete can bring to that sort of competition.
- When is this book set? How can you tell? Do you think that small-town Texas has changed much since the events in this story took place? Why do you think this/on what are you basing your answer?
- What religion does Tina's family practice? Why does she go to both the Thai Buddhist temple in Dallas, and the local Presbyterian church? In small groups, research the different religions practiced in Texas, and how many people practice each one. How do you think it must have felt for Tina, growing up as part of a minority religion, culture and ethnicity in a very homogenous society? (Do you know what homogenous means? If not, look it up!) As a class discuss how you think Tina felt about her Thai heritage and identity throughout her childhood in Texas.
- Do you think that the way Venable Middle School chooses cheerleaders is fair? Why/why not? What are some of the problems with tryouts for a sporting team being purely based on a popular vote? What do you think would be the fairest way for the cheerleading team to be chosen?
- One of the items of clothing that Tina really wants is an awesome vest. What is one item of clothing that you would absolutely love to own? Draw a detailed picture of an item of clothing that you would be overjoyed to own, and would wear (almost) every day.
- Hold an impromptu class speaking competition of your own, with the same rules as the one Christina enters into. After your competition, in small groups or as a class, discuss what the experience was like for everyone. Were you surprised by how good someone's performance was? What did you find most difficult about the whole experience, and what was the best bit? Who do you think gave the best speech, and what made it good?

- After finishing the book, read the Author's Note. How does knowing just how autobiographical this novel is affect your understanding of the events within it, and your empathy for the different characters? What do you find the most interesting fact in the Author's Note? Does the author look like the illustrations in the book—do they look like you imagined them to?
- Write a short (50 to 100 word) summary of the book, sharing what you feel are the most important aspects of the story.