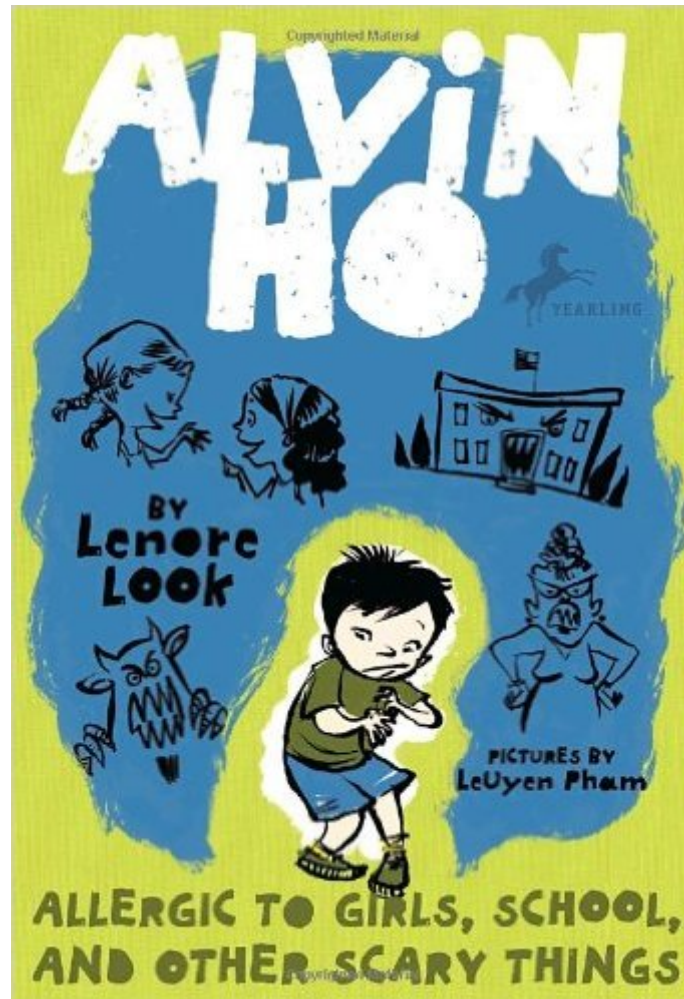


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# Alvin Ho: Allergic To Girls, School, And Other Scary Things



## Synopsis

Here's the first book in the beloved and hilarious Alvin Ho chapter book series, which has been compared to *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* and is perfect for both beginning and reluctant readers. Alvin, an Asian American second grader, is afraid of everything—elevators, tunnels, girls, and, most of all, school. He's so afraid of school that, while he's there, he never, ever, says a word. But at home he's a very loud superhero named Firecracker Man, a brother to Calvin and Anibelly, and a gentleman-in-training, so he can be just like his dad. From Lenore Look and New York Times bestselling illustrator LeUyen Pham comes a drop-dead-funny and touching series with a truly unforgettable character. Shares with *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* the humor that stems from trying to manipulate the world. "Newsday" Alvin's a winner. "New York Post" From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 600L (What's this?)

Series: Alvin Ho

Paperback: 172 pages

Publisher: Yearling; Reprint edition (May 12, 2009)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375849300

ISBN-13: 978-0375849305

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.4 x 7.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 4.8 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars See all reviews (65 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #12,535 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #6 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Asian & Asian American #74 in Books > Deals in Books #108 in Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life > Siblings

Age Range: 6 - 9 years

Grade Level: 1 - 4

## Customer Reviews

I purchased this book for a local elementary school library because it showed up on a list of top 20 read aloud books. I am now reading it to a class of second graders who find it, "hilarious." It is a chapter book so an advanced read but it has captured their attention and imagination. The author, Lenore Look, has managed to weave the roots of our country's history as well as art, music,

literature and famous historical figures into her very funny story line. Each week that I read, I use the first five or ten minutes to introduce what is new to the children. We have read some Shakespeare (Alvin is allowed to curse in Shakespearean dialogue as long as he doesn't hurt anyone as he is a "gentleman in training.") I have played short snippets of Brahms, Beethoven, and even a song from the Music Man as well as shown works by Frieda Kahlo, Gauguin, and Van Gough. The children had never heard of the Minutemen and the Redcoats and now play the same game on their California playground as Alvin does on his playground in Concord, Massachusetts. Henry David Thoreau is Alvin's personal hero and we have discussed Thoreau at first because of his strong pro environmental stance in the 1800's. During the week of the Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday, I read from King's autobiography where he credits Thoreau's essay on "Civil Disobedience," for inspiring his method of passive resistance during the Civil Rights Movement. The students are so taken with the book that they have been to the school library to find out when it was published, one child has already read the sequel--imagine a 7 year old reading a 166 page chapter book! They want to know when the next Alvin Ho book is coming out and have suggested the author create a Christmas special for TV and call it, "Alvin--Ho, ho, ho."

Some people follow sports teams. Others follow the rise and fall of various celebrities. Children's librarians, in contrast, are fans of children's book authors and illustrators. If trading cards were acceptable amongst grown adults I'm sure we'd be swapping Louis Sachars and Linda Sue Parks for a rare Beatrix Potter or A.A. Milne. Part of this particular branch of fandom concerns itself with the pairing of various authors with illustrators. This is where editors come in useful. It takes a smart publishing house to create just the right magic found in a Scieszka/Lane team, for example. Credit where credit is due then to Schwartz & Wade. When I heard that Lenore Look, author extraordinaire who introduced the world to Ruby Lu, had been paired with LeUyen Pham my little heart danced a tarantella. I've been fighting for more Pham appreciation for years. To see her complementing Look's particular brand of smart humor in, best of all, an early chapter book is like Christmas coming early. Together I am certain that these two women are going to create books that remain memorable long after their contemporaries have faded from the popular memory. What do you do with a kid who doesn't talk in school? Well, if you are that kid and your name is Alvin Ho then there are a number of things you can do. You can prepare for the second grade a PDK (or Personal Disaster Kit) in the event of an emergency. You can ask your older brother how to make friends, only not with that weird girl with the cool eye patch. You can visit a therapist to try to talk out your fears (but only if you talk). But Alvin's got more on his mind than whether or not he's able to say

something in class. Between "borrowing" his father's favorite toy, joining a relatively benign gang, and finding a new friend there's a lot to that kid Alvin Ho. He's an original, no doubt about it. This is going to sound a little odd, I know, but early chapter books starring boys are not quite as common as they might be. Sure, you've got your *Marvin Redpost*, *Martin Bridge*, *Horrible Harry*, and *Julian* but for every one of those blokes there are two *Clementines*, three *Junie B. Jones*, and a couple *Ivy and Beans* for good measure. And boys of any ethnicity other than white? There's the aforementioned *Julian* and maybe the kid from *The Toothpaste Millionaire*, and that's about it. Of course, if Lenore Look were dancing about singing, "Look! A boy of Asian descent!" that wouldn't be her style at all. Just as she did with "Ruby Lu", Look just writes great kids. Case closed. Look's style is wrapped up entirely in her ability to keep the sentences coming. For "Alvin Ho" she's opted to go all first person on us. So not only has she written about a boy but she has also inserted herself into the kid's very brain. It works, though. In some unfathomable way Look gets the subtlety of being a second grade boy. The seemingly incongruent combination of loving explosions and cooking shows is what makes Alvin so real to the reader. Somehow Look has tapped into the boy brain and gone deeper into their insecurities, hopes, and fears than most other authors for this age range. Mind you, there is the "Ruby Lu drives a car" moment in this book that will set some parental teeth on edge. At one point Alvin is left hanging from a tree while his family bakes some cookies. He's only missed when his mother notices his empty plate at dinner. It's vaguely traumatic, but not all that unbelievable within the context of the tale. I can also see some people getting a little squirrely when it comes to Alvin's dialogue, though. You could make the argument that no boy in the history of the world would say, "My dad is not superhero material," or "The fourth thing you should know about me is that I love Plastic Man, Wonder Woman, the Green Lantern, Concrete Man, Aquaman, King Henry V and all the superheroes in the world." You could SAY that but can I point out that Alvin never actually speaks these sentences? They're just explaining his state of mind. And if a sentence says, "The scary thing about girls is that they are not boys" then can't you argue that the author is clarifying what Alvin is feeling even if he wouldn't use those exact words at that exact time? In a sense, Look is translating Alvin's thoughts and emotions into coherent, remarkable little sentences that every second grader feels but is incapable of putting into words. There's the acknowledgment that "crying is really great" alongside the almost poignant "I am not good at anything ever since I started school." Alvin isn't precocious. He just happens to have an author capable of bringing him into crisp, clear relief. And for that matter the book itself is just a well-done little number. I liked that when Alvin's older brother gave advice it still sounded like it was advice coming from a kid. I liked that Alvin's seatmate Flea is taking a kind of kickboxing and karate

class called "Aggression for Girls". I like that every time Alvin mentions Massachusetts he says it's hard to spell (though that might just be the author showing her hand too). I like that there's a character named Jules and that Alvin is unclear on Jules's gender. I know kids like that. I like that Alvin's father's car only turns to the right now, that Alvin's baseball has a Daisuke Matsuzaka autograph, that the glossary credits Tenzing Norgay as the first to climb to the top of Mount Everest, and that by the end of the book there are still issues and problems to be resolved. Look could have wrapped Alvin's life up in a neat little bow, but of all his problems the only one she solves here is his need for a friend. And frankly, kids are probably going to understand that need better than Alvin's ability to speak in school. All right. Enough praise of Ms. Look. Let's take a gander at Ms. LeUyen Pham's pictures now. Ms. Pham has a range of different styles she employs at strategic moments, but her most recognizable is cute kids. Big heads, teeny tiny hands and feet, that kind of thing. I say "cute" but I don't mean Bambi cute or "Love Is" cute. I mean that she has an ability to capture the joy and dread of humanity in miniature. Alvin, for example, is rendered perfectly here. Whether he's cowering in dread or bursting onto the scene as a superhero, this protagonist is impossible to imagine as anything but as Ms. Pham's version. I particularly enjoyed the picture of the boys in Alvin's class discovering that they've all gotten chicken pox as he smiles out at the reader, his happiness undulating off of him invisibly. As I read this book do you know what title it kept reminding me of? I can't really explain why but I kept thinking about *The Best Christmas Pageant Ever*. Maybe that's not as odd as it sounds, though. Both books have that early chapter book style. Both mix in a brand of humor particular to their respective authors. And both, I am convinced, will remain firmly implanted in the brains of their readers for years and years to come. I'd love to wave a magic wand, bonk "Alvin Ho" over the head, and declare this book a contemporary classic. If I'm any judge, however, I figure this is just the first in many "Alvin Ho" books to come. Though it stands entirely on its own, Look has left plenty of room for future installments in the series. Alvin Ho turns out to be a guy definitely worth knowing. Help a kid to meet him.

My 8-year-old son is a selective mute, like Alvin Ho, and it has been terrific for him to be able to identify with and see himself in this character, even if he doesn't quite share all of Alvin's fears and "allergies". We're now on the third book in the series for bedtime reading together, and we both look forward to getting back to Alvin every evening. My middle schooler has taken to eavesdropping on our read-alouds and also finds these books thoroughly funny and charming. This is one of those books that I can feel really making a difference in how my kid sees himself and the world around him. Props on the illustrations, too, which support the text perfectly!

Alvin Ho, his family, and friends provide a sympathetic and humorous look at real kids. No one is perfect in this book, and the characters have depth. Even though Alvin is a second grader, I've read this book to middle-school students. They love it. As an adult, I have read the entire series on my own -- it's that good.

My 6 year old son loves this book so far. I saw as a recommendation on another website and found it here for less. It is funny, he is a 1st grader, advanced reader but we can read this together at night.

My son and I chose this book for his book report. He's in the second grade and enjoyed reading the book. There were parts where he plain laughed out loud and literally rolled on the floor. We will be purchasing the others in the series.

This book is great! There is tons of action and it is really funny! If you read it, I bet you will love it! It's a feel good book because Alvin conquers his fears and makes new friends! This book is great for 3rd and 4th graders.

I read it first to see suitability for a children's book club (I think it would be a great junior book club book) and then my 9 year old son read it and it was great to hear him laugh out loud at some of the funny bits.

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