



Penguin
Young
Readers

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**An upbeat, fast-paced story on overcoming gender stereotypes
& performance anxiety in the competitive world of chess**

**A family-friendly take on *The Queen's Gambit* –
relatable & relevant for chess and non-chess players of all ages**

MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN

By Kyla Zhao



On September 17, 2024, G.P. Putnam's Sons Books for Young Readers will publish **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** by award-winning author Kyla Zhao (Hardcover; 9780593615867; Ages 8-12; \$17.99). This fast-paced STEM-inist novel tackles gender stereotypes and the pressure to succeed in one of the world's the fastest-growing games: Chess.

Chess is more popular now than ever according to outlets ranging from *The Washington Post* to *PBS*. Demand for chess clubs continues to rise in schools across the country, and, in 2023, Chess.com saw the biggest growth among players in the youngest age bracket. **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** taps into this excitement and brings young readers love for the game to the page.

The clock is ticking for May Li, whose middle-school chess team just earned a victory at the state championship—and with it, a ticket to nationals. What's even more exciting is that May got an award for being the top female player and a splashy feature in the biggest chess magazine in the country. May should be thrilled. But some of her teammates, including her supposed-to-be-friend Ralph, aren't too pleased with the attention she's getting—and they're even questioning her skills. Backed into a corner, but not one to back down, May makes a move as bold as any of her chess tactics: She bets Ralph she can win the school's internal tournament and be chosen as team captain for nationals. The crown is May's for the taking... except she's starting to crumble under the weight of everyone's expectations. Anxious feelings begin to affect her performance and, what's worse, eat away at her love for the game. Now May is left to wonder: Can you still play for fun when you're playing to win?

Historically, chess has been a male-dominated sport. The number of registered players in the United States that are girls/women is only 15%; globally, it is 11%. Using a kid-friendly touch this STEM-inist story examines the gender bias that surrounds the sport and celebrates the female players who, like May, are changing the game.

While fast-paced and humor-filled, **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** addresses the reality of the high expectations often placed on children to perform well in and out of school. With rates of anxiety in children on the rise, young readers can relate to May's struggles to cope with her performance anxiety.

Author Kyla Zhao delivers a story with authenticity and charm, writing from her own experience as a former member of Singapore's Junior Chess Squad. **MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN** is Kyla's middle grade debut and is perfect for fans of Kelly Yang and Celia C. Pérez

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Penguin Random House, the world's largest trade book publisher, is dedicated to its mission of nourishing a universal passion for reading by connecting authors and their writing with readers everywhere. The company, which employs more than 10,000 people globally, was formed on July 1, 2013, by Bertelsmann and Pearson. As of April 1, 2020, Bertelsmann is full owner of the company. With more than 300 imprints and brands on six continents, Penguin Random House comprises adult and children's fiction and nonfiction print and digital English-German-and Spanish-language trade book publishing businesses in more than 20 countries worldwide. With over 15,000 new titles, and more than 600 million print, audio and eBooks sold annually, Penguin Random House's publishing lists include more than 80 Nobel Prize laureates and hundreds of the world's most widely read authors

About Kyla Zhao

After graduating from Stanford University in 2021, Kyla's now a Silicon Valley techie by day and an author by night. Her books have been featured by CBS, NBC, Good Morning America, Vogue, Elle, Buzzfeed, South China Morning Post, and more. Kyla was also selected as a *Forbes* 30 Under 30 honoree, a Tatler Leader of Tomorrow, and awarded a Certificate of Recognition by the California State Assembly for her contributions to Asian media representation.

Praise for MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN

- A 2025 Feminist Book Project selection by the **American Library Association** – this project has been promoting quality feminist literature for young readers since 2002 as a part of the Feminist Task Force and the Social Responsibilities Round Table
- “This book is a game-changer for readers of all ages, regardless of whether you play chess! *May the Best Player Win* captures the thrill of competition, the weight of expectations, and the sting of naysayers. From start to finish, this book will have you cheering for May from the edge of your seat and inspired to conquer your next match in life.” —Carissa Yip, **2023 and 2021 US Women’s Chess Champion**
- “Compassionate, empowering, and full of heart, *May the Best Player Win* reminds young readers that sometimes, the only limits on our potential are the ones we place on ourselves.”
—Rebecca Mix, **New York Times**-bestselling author of *The Mossheart’s Promise*
- “Zhao explores gender bias as well as performance stress, and the book’s valuable life lessons will speak to anyone who’s lost their love for a pursuit... An emotionally intelligent work that explores socially relevant themes.” —*Kirkus*
- “A great read for almost any age group! It offers the opportunity to discuss critical issues such as gender and culture, and also explores emotional challenges that are relevant and relatable for all ages. I like the way the story ended and look forward to more books like this by the author!” —Jerry Nash, **Chairman of International Chess Federation’s (FIDE) Chess in Education Commission**
- “A fierce yet tender narrative [that is] rich in emotions and facts. It will enlighten the young audiences’ minds with the usage of a smart and educative language. A top recommendation for young readers.” —Tatiana Flores, **2021 Women’s World Chess Champion for People with Disabilities**
- “A middle grade *Queen’s Gambit*, *May The Best Player Win* is a realistic story of one girl’s love of chess and her journey to rediscovering the love of the game. Utterly believable and inspirational, May’s story will have you on the edge of your seat and itching to play a game of chess!” —Graci Kim, **New York Times**-bestselling author of the *Gifted Clans* trilogy
- “An instant classic. I wish I read this book when I was growing up, and now that I’m a chess mom and mentor to many other kids, I am so thrilled it exists. Kyla is a wonderful writer and she paints richly detailed and emotional scenes, as she deftly handles themes that can apply to any competitive field. Gripping and fun, this is a gem of a book!” —Jennifer Shahade, **2004 and 2002 U.S. Women’s Chess Champion**
- “Kyla Zhao’s novel convincingly portrays chess players and their emotions and makes the reader care about these characters. *May the Best Player Win* is a winner.” —Dr. Alexey Root, **1989 U.S. Women’s Chess Champion**
- “Girls deserve to just have fun! Full of puns and emotions that had me on the edge of my seat, *May the Best Player Win* is an all-too relatable tale about how girls have to prove themselves over and over in boy-dominated hobbies.” —Xiran Jay Zhao, **New York Times**-bestselling author of *Zachary Ying and the Dragon Emperor*
- “[Zhao], who is a former competitive chess player, addresses gender bias, self-doubt, and anxiety in this riveting story.” —*The Week Junior*
- “*May the Best Player Win* brings the world of competitive chess to life, creating a story that feels both authentic

and inspiring. May is a likable character you can relate to - her determination and struggles with performance anxiety resonate deeply. A great read for chess enthusiasts and anyone who's struggling with the pressures of winning." —Lilli Hahn, **Councilor of European Chess Union**, Commission of Women's Chess

Praise for MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN

- "The author has crafted this book so beautifully! Although the book is specially aimed at the younger readers, it speaks to the inner child in everyone. I am genuinely thrilled that such an exceptional chess novel exists! This book possesses timeless qualities that will resonate with readers for years to come." —*Chessbase India*
- "Digestible chess strategy breakdowns and terminology scattered throughout serve as an approachable introduction to the sport." —*Publishers Weekly*
- "*May the Best Player Win* quickly draws you in because it deals with a subject that interests and affects many people: the pressure to perform. Author Kyla Zhao handles these serious topics with humour and refreshing ease, writing pointedly, wittily and entertainingly." —*Chessbase*