

INTRODUCTION

Penguin Random House published *MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN* by award-winning author Kyla Zhao. This fast-paced STEM-inist novel tackles gender stereotypes and the pressure to succeed in one of the world's fastest-growing games: Chess.

MAY THE BEST PLAYER WIN taps into this excitement and brings young readers love for the game to the page. While fast-paced and humor-filled, the story also 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.

Kyla Zhao delivers a story with authenticity and charm, writing from her own experience as a former member of Singapore's National Junior Chess Squad. Perfect for fans of Kelly Yang and Celia C. Pérez. **No chess knowledge needed** to read and enjoy!



SUMMARY

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?

ACHIEVEMENTS

- Featured at **2024 World Chess Championship** and **International Chess Olympiad**
- Selected for **Hong Kong Battle of the Books 2025-26**
- Selected for **Singapore Battle of the Books 2025-26**
- Shortlisted for the **Switzerland Golden Cowbell Book Award 2025-26**
- Recommended Book by **International Chess Federation**
- Selected for **New York Public Library's Vibrant Voices** list
- **Mathical Award Honor Book**
- **U.S. National Spelling Bee** book club pick
- **The Week Junior's** Book of the Week
- Selected for **American Library Association's** Feminist Book Project 2025
- Shortlisted for **Chess.com Book of the Year**
- **The Straits Times** *bestseller*
- Exhibited at **World Chess Hall of Fame**

KYLA ZHAO

Award-winning author ✉ kyla@kylazhao.com

ABOUT KYLA

Kyla writes novels that center women and girls of color as they navigate ambition, identity, and belonging.

Her writing has also appeared in *Vogue*, *Harper's Bazaar*, and *Tatler*. A graduate of Stanford University, Kyla holds both a BA in Psychology and an MA in Communication, Class of 2021.

WORKS

- ***May the Best Player Win*** (2024)
- *Valley Verified* (2024)
- *The Fraud Squad* (2023)



 kylazhao.com

PREVIOUS COLLABORATIONS

- **Firms & NPOs:** Twitch, Pinterest, Instacart, Figma, American Bankers Association, Qualtrics, Tencent, Oracle, Girls Future Ready, Miss Asian Global, etc.
- **Schools:** Stratford Schools, International School of San Francisco, United World College, Dulwich College, Chatsworth International, Global Indian International School, etc.
- **Bookstores, libraries, book conferences:** Bay Area Book Festival, Greater Pittsburgh Festival of Books, Virginia Children's Book Festival, etc.
- **Chess organizations:** World Chess Championship, International Chess Olympiad, World Chess Hall of Fame, International Chess Federation, etc.

SPEAKING TOPICS

- The inspirations and themes behind the book
- Writing process and tips for young storytellers
- Behind the scenes: how books are created
- Balancing a creative career & corporate job
- Realities of being an author of color
- Storytelling as a superpower

FEATURED IN

- Forbes
- Good Morning America
- CBS
- ABC
- Vogue
- Cosmopolitan
- Elle
- BuzzFeed
- NBC

AWARDS

- *Forbes* 30 Under 30
- *Tatler* Leader of Tomorrow
- Certificate of Recognition by California State Assembly
- American Library Association's Feminist Book Project
- Mathical Award Honor Book
- US National Spelling Bee book club selection
- Hong Kong & Singapore Battle of the Books selection
- New York Public Library *Vibrant Voices* selection
- Switzerland Golden Cowbell Book Award shortlist

BOOK PRAISE

For May the Best Player Win

“GAME-CHANGER FOR READERS OF ALL AGES”

“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, **current US Women’s Chess Champion**

“EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT WORK”

“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... The supporting characters, both adults and peers, are well developed, and the chess games are thrilling. An emotionally intelligent work that explores socially relevant themes.” —**Kirkus Reviews**

“RIVETING STORY”

“[Zhao], who is a former competitive chess player, addresses gender bias, self-doubt, and anxiety in this riveting story.” —**The Week Junior**

“FIERCE YET TENDER”

“A fierce yet tender narrative [that is] rich in emotions and facts... A top recommendation for young readers.” —Tatiana Flores, **World Chess Champion for People with Disabilities**

“EMPOWERING, FULL OF HEART”

“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*

“QUICKLY DRAWS YOU IN”

“*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**

“AN INSTANT CLASSIC”

“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**

SPEAKER TESTIMONIALS

*More available
upon request*

OVERSEAS FAMILY SCHOOL

"Kyla's passion for writing and her **dynamic, interactive style** captivated our students from start to finish. Her approachable and friendly demeanor made her a **wonderful role model**, leaving a lasting impression on everyone. Her ability to **tailor her presentations to each age group** was remarkable. For younger students, she introduced complex topics like gender equality in **an age-appropriate and engaging way**, while her high school presentation delved deeper into these critical issues, **sparking thoughtful discussions**. She **inspired budding writers** by sharing her journey and providing practical insights into the writing process. We would **highly recommend Kyla Zhao to any school** looking to inspire their students to read, write, create and work towards their dream." —Vanessa McConville, Head of School

DULWICH COLLEGE SINGAPORE

"Kyla Zhao's visit was truly memorable. With an **engaging and interactive delivery** accompanied by a **beautifully designed slideshow**, she brought a special vibrancy to the event. The students were enthralled, eagerly lining up to have their copies of the book signed. Kyla answered questions with **eloquence and insight**, leaving a lasting impression on everyone. Her presence added a unique and inspiring element, and we couldn't have asked for a better guest!" —Clare Measures, Deputy Head of Junior School

HARVARD CREATIVE WRITING AND LITERATURE SOCIETY

"Kyla's **passion for writing and perseverance in advocating for the Asian community** through her stories capture the audience's attention. Listening to Kyla speak **reignited my belief in myself and encouraged me to pursue my dreams** regardless of the statistics. She is authentically herself, and her presentation showed me that no matter what, we should not give up because we all have stories inside us that, if we dare, can change the communities we're part of." —Nathalie Zender, President 2024-2025

UNITED WORLD COLLEGE SOUTH EAST ASIA

"It was wonderful to have Kyla visit our campus and share her experiences as a writer with our students. Her talks were inspirational and, what's more, **interactive and fun** for our Middle School learners who had a ball and followed up with endless questions. Kyla facilitated her sessions with ease and was a **fascinating speaker who connected brilliantly with her audience**." —Jenny Murray, Middle School Head of English

HAYWARD PUBLIC LIBRARY

"Kyla's book event was fantastic. She not only talked about her novel, but also gave **revealing insights about the writing process**, from original idea to publication. It was **entertaining and valuable for aspiring writers and readers alike**. I would highly recommend Kyla for your next literary program" —Ricardo Antoni, Librarian
