



# Kimchi & Calamari

*Rose Kent*

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## **Kimchi & Calamari** Rose Kent

Kimchi and calamari. It sounds like a quirky food fusion of Korean and Italian cuisine, and it's exactly how Joseph Calderaro feels about himself. Why wouldn't an adopted Korean drummer-comic book junkie feel like a combo platter given:

- (1) his face in the mirror
- (2) his proud Italian family.

And now Joseph has to write an essay about his ancestors for social studies. All he knows is that his birth family shipped his diapered butt on a plane to the USA. End of story. But what he writes leads to a catastrophe messier than a table of shattered dishes—and self-discovery that Joseph never could have imagined.

## **Kimchi & Calamari Details**

Date : Published April 10th 2007 by HarperCollins (first published April 1st 2007)

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Author : Rose Kent

Format : Hardcover 220 pages

Genre : Parenting, Adoption, Young Adult, Childrens, Middle Grade, Fiction, Realistic Fiction, Cultural

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# From Reader Review Kimchi & Calamari for online ebook

## Amy says

A really wonderful book about a Korean boy and his adopted, Italian family. Joseph's search for identity is well-written and well-paced.

My favorite scene is near the end where Joseph's typically bratty sisters smuggle ice cream to cheer him up. That is what family is for!

I highly recommend this one, especially for middle school readers.

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## Ashley Robles says

Adopted! Have you ever questioned or thought you were adopted? What if you looked different from everyone in your family and not know anything about your birth parents or really know who you are and where you came from when you look in the mirror. The book Kimchi and Calamari by, Rose Kent is a wonderful book that I have read. This great book is realistic fiction and you will never want to put this book down.

In the novel Kimchi and Calamari you meet Duk-kee also known as Joseph, Joseph is a Korean boy in eighth grade. The reason why Joseph has two names is because he is adopted into an Italian family and has been renamed Joseph. All Joseph knows about him being adopted is that his birth mother abandoned him when he was born and an old woman took him to a nearby police station. Joseph loves his Italian family and knows more about the Italian heritage than his own, but he can't help but wonder what his life could have been like if he was never abandoned. All these questions enter his mind when Joseph receives his social studies assignment which requires him to write an essay about his ancestors leaving him trying to make a decision on what to write. Joseph waits until the last minute to write his essay and tries to ask his father about any information about his adoption and ancestors unfortunately his father is no help and begins to talk about Joseph's Italian ancestors. Joseph frustrated that his dad was no help began to argue with his father, and instead Joseph wrote his essay about a famous Olympian and wrote a lie saying that his ancestor was a very well known Olympian. He then confesses the truth and rewrites his essay and says he embraces being both Korean and Italian.

I think the theme of this story is self discovery because in this novel Joseph discovers who he truly is and he becomes proud of being Korean by blood and Italian by heart. Joseph never discovers much more than what he new about his birth parents but he doesn't mind because he describes himself as an ethnic sandwich. I believe that Joseph discovered his true self as he tried to learn more about his Korean heritage and where he came from. In the story Joseph's father gives him a "corno" which is a traditional Italian necklace that runs in his father's family. Joseph does not wear it in the beginning of the story because he didn't feel like he was a true Italian. In the end of the story when Joseph discovers his true self he wears the "corno" proudly. I think this shows that Joseph is embracing himself as an ethnic sandwich.

I truly enjoyed this book and never wanted to put it down and I give this book a five star rating! I give this book a five star rating because I enjoyed the the theme very much about self discovery and embracing your culture. I would recommend this book to my friend Julian Ramirez because he is Korean as well just like the main character Joseph, and enjoys eating Kimchi and he definitely embraces being Korean just like Joseph at the end of this novel when he discovers his true self. Joseph, adopted! Not so bad because Joseph has his family whom he loves even if they do not look like him or are his birth parents because he is a proud boy. An ethnic sandwich!

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### **Cindy Hudson says**

Joseph Calderaro is an “eighth-grade optimist” whose “bag of barbecue chips is always half full.” That is until he has a lousy 14th birthday and his teacher assigns a 1,500-word paper called Tracing Your Past: A Heritage Essay. The only trouble is, Joseph is adopted. Fourteen years ago he was left on the steps of a police station in Korea. His adopted parents are Italians living in New Jersey, and while he knows he’s a Calderaro, he feels he can’t claim the Italian heritage as his own.

Kimchi and Calamari by Rose Kent follows Joseph as he questions his own identity and struggles to come up with answers about his heritage. Is he a real Korean? Is he Italian? Does it make a difference to him?

I found myself liking Joseph right off the bat. And I loved the assignment he got to write about his heritage. I’ve done a lot of work tracing my own family’s ancestors, so I know that feeling of wanting to identify with the people who came before you. Joseph’s desire to know more about where he came from is extra complicated because of his adoption. But I admired the way he treats this issue as just one of many things he’s thinking about in life. He is 14 after all, and so he’s trying to decide who to ask to the year-end dance. He’s also making new friends and trying to figure out how to bring up difficult subjects with his parents.

Through it all Joseph mostly maintains his optimism, even while he gets into and out of trouble. I found myself cheering for him and thinking how refreshing it is to get to know a character who is upbeat most of the time.

Kimchi and Calamari has many things for mother-daughter book clubs to like and talk about. Issues include communicating with your parents, what makes you part of a family, adoption, your family heritage, dating and more. And don’t be surprised if you get hungry while reading it. The Italian food and Asian dishes described should offer plenty of ideas for what you can serve at a book club meeting. I highly recommend it for mother-daughter book clubs with girls aged 9 to 12.

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### **JumbleofJargon says**

Rose Kent's Kimchi and Calamari features Joseph Calderero; a Korean 8th Grader raised by his adoptive Italian parents from infancy.

I picked this up hoping to learn more about Korean culture. I learned 2 new things; although small in quantity, they depict aspects of Korean culture well.

(1) I learned how poorly pregnant women without husbands may be treated in Korea. I don't know if these kinds of perceptions have changed since the 70s, 80s, 90s ish era.

(2) I learned that adoption is not discussed or understood by a lot of Koreans. As a result, some Koreans hold a negative view towards Koreans who have been adopted, even though it is no fault of their own.

If you hope to learn more about Korea's history, culture and traditions this is probably not the book for you.

I am not adopted and thus cannot speak for those who have been adopted. However, after reading this novel, I feel more acclimated with sense of identity distress/crisis some who have been adopted go through. I empathize with how difficult it can be if the location one is adopted from doesn't keep records and how crushing it may feel to learn that you come from a society with negative opinions about adoption. I think about all the innocent little lives deemed worthless because they were not boys.

Unfortunately, Rose Kent's narrative is filled with annoying catch phrases and literary cliches (*not so much character and plot cliches, more so cliché phrases and writing devices*). Kent exacerbates this malediction by throwing in innumerable dad jokes and annoying catch phrases as well.

I feel obligated to state that this novel is an elementary/middle grade book written in 2007. I also feel obligated to say that as someone who was in elementary school in 2007 I don't know anyone who talked like this.

Even though, I wasn't fond of the writing style - *at all* - the emotions Joseph felt past the halfway point of the book were depicted really well.

I highly recommend *Twinsters* and *Lion* on Netflix. *Twinsters* follows a girl who was adopted from South Korea as an infant. *Lion* follows the life of a boy adopted from India by an Australian couple. Both movies are true stories that easily ensnare your emotions. They're not long and I promise they're worth your time :)

If this conclusion seems abrupt, blame finals.

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### **Sandi Van says**

A lovely story that opened up the dialogue between me and my son, who was adopted from Korea (and has an Italian - American family on my side). Suggested for preteen and up adoptees as it deals with some deeper emotional issues.

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### **Eboni says**

Unique insight into adoption, completely comical...

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### **Josh says**

In all my years of reading books, I have never come across a book that dealt with being adopted, at least

from a teenager's point of view, until this wonderful, fantastic novel. I originally bought it for my classroom because I thought some of my students would find it an interesting read. Instead, it sat in the room untouched until about two weeks ago when I began giving away books to my students. I decided to keep this one and read it myself, and boy am I glad I made that decision. This book really spoke to me as I myself am adopted as are three of my siblings. This book with great honesty touched upon a number of issues I had had when I was a fourteen year old kid.

The story is about a South Korean 14 year old who as a baby had been adopted by an Italian family. His family life is thrown into turmoil when he is assigned a paper to write about his ancestors. This sends him on a quest to locate his birth mother. What's wonderful about this book is the way the author describes his home life with a wonderfully loving family, his inner turmoil at not knowing where he fits into the world and his family, and how his search allows him to reconnect with his Korean heritage. The book doesn't shy away from some tough issues all adoptees and their families face, but it mixes in humor and joy to help temper some of the sadness and anxiety.

Rose Kent, who has adopted children of her own, does a great job of delving into the mind of this young protagonist while at the same time not making the parents seem like silly cliches or jokes. She captures the middle school scenes perfectly including the ever-evolving relationships between boys and girls at that age and the goofiness that is that time in these young people's lives.

I was really impressed with this book and Kent's tackling a subject many authors have never even touched upon. Please make a place in your classroom library for this book!

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### **Keira Sporing says**

When I first saw the cover of *Kimchi and Calamari*, I was instantly pleased. The bright colors and soothing description made me interested in reading it. When I started to read this novel, I was very compelled. The details Rose Kent used (such as when Joseph's Aunt Foxy comes into the story.) really blew me away. If you have never read it, *Kimchi and Calamari* is about a boy named Joseph who is in middle school. He had a big project about his family tree, but being adopted from Korea as a baby makes it difficult for him. Joseph had no idea who his birth family was. Joseph had many questions buzzing through his head, like how he will find his birth family and how he will do this project without any knowledge about his Korean relatives. But despite the problems and fears he has, Joseph strives to answer all his questions. I love the style of this book. It will never disappoint you. The way Rose Kent made the story so that others can connect with Joseph is just astounding. The description of Joseph and the problems he encounters is just the perfect amount of frosting on a cake. I think that young adults and older would enjoy this book as a family or class read aloud, or just as a single reader novel. This book is great for both!

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### **Elainna K says**

Do any of us really know who we are? Well if you ever questioned who you are then this is a good book for you. The book *Kimchi and Calamari* by Rose Kent is a great story about a boy questioning many things. I liked the book and give it a four and a half stars out of five, but you be the judge of the book.

Kimchi and Calamari wow, that sounds like a quirky food. This dish consists of Korean and Italian cuisines, this is how Joseph Calderaro feels about himself.

Joseph has to write an essay on his ancestors for social studies. All Joseph knows is that he was shipped to the USA. But will his writing lead to a life lesson?

I can see this story being interesting to many different types of readers. This story would reach kids who are adopted and confused about who they are, where they came from, and how do they fit into their adopted family. This story could also be a good read to anyone in the teen years who struggle with who they are. This book is also good for any family that is multicultural. The story is about acceptance. This book would be good for parents that have adopted a child. It would give them the perspective of a kid. In the book it also recommends anyone from fourth to seventh grade to read this, so if you're in that age group check out this book!

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### **Heidi-Marie says**

This book took me forever to read, but only because it seems like I don't ever have time to read print. And when I do start to read print, I fall asleep! So this one came in slow chunks, and then I finally had a doctor's appointment that allowed me to get the last 1/4 done during the waiting time. The book was OK. I didn't think it was marvelous, and sometimes the character seemed more like he was 11 than 14. But then, maybe I just don't know what it was like to be a 14-year old boy. (There's a shocker.) I liked that it didn't end with a wow-happy-though-slightly-unbelievable ending. And I would have discredited quite a few things, had I not read acknowledgements and the author bio at the end.

I think this book is a good choice for the younger YA audience that is trying to find their place at home and at school. A good choice for adoptees who have that aspect in their lives, and perhaps a good one for those who have relocated from a foreign country. It has its audiences and its messages for those audiences, and it doesn't come off preachy. It did seem a mite young and silly at times, but, I got over that.

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### **Ally B. says**

Book: Kimchi and Calamari By Rose Kent 4 star rating

Happy Birthday! Correction, unhappy birthday. That is how Joseph feels in the story, Kimchi and Calamari by Rose Kent. This book was funny with a certain curiosity that left you hungry for more. The family ties in this story are really the definition of love, though every story has it's quirks.

Joseph is Korean, but was adopted into a big, boisterous Italian family. Joseph feels a little stuck in the middle of each nationality because you can tell he loves his family, but it is obvious he wants to learn more about his background. When Joseph is given a class project about his family tree, I knew this was going to be a problem. I think Joseph is scared and confused about what to do. You can tell he wants to support his family, but he really wants to see his true self. With his mysterious abandonment, Joseph is extra curious especially when his friend Nash puts an ad online. Joseph pulls a bit of stunt on his birthday when he is given something that more so represents his Italian side.

I think that the author really needed to add this in to show that every normal family isn't perfect. The book

does have a few times when not much is happening, but it means something in the end. This is when the author is developing family relationships. I also thought there were some parts of the story that weren't needed. It is important that Joseph has a crush on Kelly, but it does not need four solid chapters devoted to it! Overall the book was funny yet heartwarming with a few flaws, but an overall solid read!

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### **Rebecca says**

3 stars. Grades 3-6. Disappointing story about a Korean adoptee raised in a loving, very Italian family. Joseph Calderaro is as happy as a kid has a right to be until a homework assignment, an essay about family heritage, turns him inside out. Frustration is added to his confusion when his parents are less than forthcoming about his adoption details. A Korean family moves in nearby and Joseph begins to feel he's not a "real" Korean but he's obviously not Italian either. And what about his birth parents? Who are they? Why did they give him up? Many of Joseph's decisions and behavior at this confusing time makes his relationship with his father tense and unhappy. On top of all this, Joseph's trying to spark up a relationship with the very pretty and popular Kelly. The back of the book has advance praise from three known children's authors who claim Kent has done a superb job capturing the voice of a 14-year-old boy. I disagree. Especially after just reading *Two Parties*, *One Tux*, this book pales by comparison. Sure, *Two Parties* is a teen selection and this book is geared toward younger kids, but both books are about high schoolers who are really good kids, have good familial relationships, and are honor students. They both have situations with the prettiest and most popular girl in school. Mitchell Wells, to me, was believable and likeable. Joseph Calderaro--not so much. Lines like "That stinks worse than skunk juice!" and phrases like "between their dumb bunny eyes" are not used by any middle schooler since the '50s (and maybe not even then). Even though the book is skewed toward elementary readers, I feel Kent has written a book where the characters talk, think, and behave in a way which she wishes was so. 2010 Caudill nominee.

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### **Alan ? ? ? says**

This book shows the pros and cons of being adopted. Joseph feels as if he is smooshed between his original ancestry, Korean, and his adopted race, Italian. This book also shows us how it feels to be adopted and it helps us understand more about adoption.

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### **Adriana says**

At first, I wasn't really into the MC's personality. Once I got to know him and his story I began to really care. This is about adoption so there were moments where Joseph felt unwanted or like he wasn't really his parents kids. I got pretty teary eyed towards the end because of reasons... I've always felt that adoption was something I might like to do in the future, but I wouldn't want my child questioning whether they were my kid or not which I could that the parents felt the same. There was a moment at the end where Joseph was told that he never had to prove he was Korean which brought me back to something said about me and how I've never felt really Hispanic but I know that I never have to prove who I am to someone else who matters. Joseph and I know who we are.

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## Sara ♥ says

This book was really lovely.

The thing that initially attracted me to the book is the fact that Joseph is Korean. I lived in Korea during my senior year of high school, and LOVED it... and I enjoy any and all positive references to Korean culture, language, food, etc. I *loved* that he was from Pusan, which is pretty close to where I lived when I was there.

So the premise of the story is essentially: Joseph, a Korean boy, is adopted as a baby by an Italian-American family. He's raised pretty Italian... eating pasta three times a week (in his words)... with the big extended family, and dot, dot, dot. And then his 8th grade English teacher gives his class an assignment to write a 1500-word paper about their ancestry. So he's like, "Uhhh... I'm adopted! I don't know ANYTHING about my Korean heritage!" So he goes on a sort of cultural and familial exploration, aided by his best friend (an internet guru) and a new Korean family who just moved into the area.

I don't know what it's like to be adopted or to be... sandwiched between two very strong cultures (I've just got the one strong culture, myself), but I think the author did a really great job of writing Joseph's story in a way that allowed me to step into his shoes for a little while. It was a very interesting and thought-provoking experience that I'm glad I was able to have!

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