

TRADING PIZZA FOR RAMEN
an early middle-grade novel

BRENDA COHEN
SYNOPSIS & BIOGRAPHY



An introduction: *Trading Pizza for Ramen*

Sometimes after school, you have baseball practice. Sometimes, you go for pizza. Sometimes, your parents drop a bomb so significant your entire life explodes - like “We’re moving to Tokyo in four weeks.”

This is how it all began for my protagonist, Jacob, a smart, snarky, thirteen-year-old struggling with the most significant change in his life - a sudden relocation from the familiar Seattle suburbs to wild and bustling Tokyo.

In *Trading Pizza for Ramen*, Jacob and his twin siblings Dylan and Lily, have one summer vacation, three months, to figure out how to survive in Tokyo before school starts. From shrines to forests, arcades to onsens, ramen shops to baseball games, Jacob makes sure the fun never stops, typically at the detriment of a younger sibling or parent.

In sixteen chapters, 158 pages and 28,000 words, Jacob goes from hating everything about Tokyo to finding friends, food, and purpose in his new home.

MEMORABLE CHARACTERS

Jacob: the narrator

13 years old. Loves baseball, pizza and joking around. Finds joy in playing pranks on his siblings and parents. Jacob easily makes friends as he is witty and funny. He can be a snarky young teen, but wouldn't you be if your parents ripped you from home and moved you across the world to some strange country?

Dylan: little brother

10 years old and Lily's twin. Kind, gentle and a little nerdy. Loves video games and watching Jacob's pranks unfold.

Haru: friend

13 year old Tokyo local. Loves the Yomiuri Giants and his grandma. Serious, kind and cautious. Extremely loyal friend.

Obasan

Haru's grandma. A karate master, and ramen shop owner who teaches Jacob the art of ramen making.

Lily: little sister

10 year old future entomologist. The talkative twin who is full of ideas. Will stand up to her brothers but cries when an animal is hurt.

Yuki: friend

14 year old Tokyo local who spent time in Texas. Fun, outspoken, and loves to shock people with her carefree attitude.

Mom and Dad

If they keep the kids out of trouble for one summer in Tokyo, they think the move to Japan will work out.

ENDLESS ADVENTURES

Chapters Include:

The News
Packing and Letters
Departures
Arrivals
The Park
Ramen
The Baseball Diamond
The Shrine
Tsuku Tsuku Boshi
Akihabara
The Cooking Lesson
The Baseball Game
The Karuizawa Trip
Teamwork
Karaoke
The Festival

Ramen

It's hot, delicious and a defining part of Japanese culture for Jacob.

When he learns to make ramen, he discovers his true calling.

Akihabara

It's loud, bright and inappropriate.

This tech haven is what Jacob was hoping Tokyo would be even if he gets bullied by Sailor Moon fans.

Karuizawa

Dad is trying too hard. No one wants a vacation this authentic: naked family hot spring baths and fish with pickles for breakfast.

Baseball

It's the Yomiuri Giants, not the SF Giants now. Jacob discovers the secrets of teamwork and gyoballs while watching Japanese baseball.

Departures

The painful loss of Lily's beloved pet cockroach at airport security is a shock but it's a small step to becoming an All-Star Expat.

Karaoke

Jacob learns a vital part of Japanese culture when, much to his dismay, he is forced to sing Karaoke. In Japan, the group comes first.

NEW LANGUAGE NEW WORDS



Sumimasen

Meaning: Excuse me or pardon me.

Day one, pushing through crowds in Tokyo, Jacob learns his first word and echolocation maneuvering.

Naruto

Meaning: Cured fish

One spoonful of ramen and Jacob has a new favourite food, but wait - is that an eraser in the bowl?

Tsuku tsuku boshi

Meaning: The sound a cicada makes

A brother's love or the ultimate prank? Jacob helps sneak a new pet into the house. How long will it last?

Sugoi

Meaning: Awesome!

On first meeting Haru, Jacob learns "Sugoi" but isn't sure if Haru is going to be a friend or foe.

Onsen

Meaning: Hot springs

Will Jacob ever be the same after bathing in a hot tub with his naked mother, sister and a snake.

Irasshaimase

Meaning: Welcome

Is Jacob welcome in the ramen shop after his cultural faux pas? Will karate grandma or Haru be waiting for him?

About me, Brenda Lynne Cohen

As a Third Culture Kid, I know firsthand the struggles Jacob and his family experience. My family relocated to Tokyo when I was seven, and I spent the next 13 years making Japan my home.

I am now a mother, a professional copywriter and an advocate of multiculturalism. *Trading Pizza for Ramen* is as much a reflection of my struggles with living in a foreign country as it is an appreciation of Japanese culture itself. It is my first middle-grade novel.

You can find me in Oakville, Ontario, working on my next book, rolling sushi with my kids, or planning multicultural events for my community. I live with my husband, three kids, a rotund dog, a bearded dragon and a turtle.



MULTI-CHANNEL OPPORTUNITIES

A story for kids

Trading Pizza for Ramen exists to entertain kids while helping them with the struggles of relocation. I wrote this as an early middle-grade novel so that kids can immerse themselves in the Japanese culture, funny stories and experiences of an international move on their own time.

Since the story is for youth, I have considered that today's tweens demand every possible media channel for their information.

In print

Trading Pizza for Ramen is for youth who read a little every day. It is written in an episodic style similar to M & L Wade's "...and then it happened" series. The book is easy to put down after each chapter and a good laugh and ready to be picked up another day.

Web community

Children of expats need a safe place to talk about relocation struggles. There are lots of websites for adults to research relocation strategies and none for youth. A child-friendly, secure web community for expat kids would be an ideal spin-off from the book.

On screen

The witty, quick, episodic style of the book also lends itself to the potential of an excellent mini-series or children's film. Readers who loved the book will be able to enjoy a more in-depth view of Tokyo and Japanese culture in cinema.

Graphic novel

A manga-style graphic novel is a natural fit. Similar to the graphic novel versions of T. Sutherland's "Wings of Fire" series, readers can learn about the art of Japanese comics while still enjoying Jacob and his family's adventures.



Contact me for more information:

BRENDA LYNNE COHEN

