BOOK CLUB GUIDE
WHEN THE SEA TURNED TO SILVER by Grace Lin

ABOUT THE BOOK
A New York Times bestseller and National Book Award finalist, this breathtaking, full-color illustrated fantasy inspired by Chinese folklore is a companion to the Newbery Honor winner Where the Mountain Meets the Moon.

Pinmei’s gentle, loving grandmother always has the most exciting tales for her granddaughter and the other villagers. However, the peace is shattered one night when soldiers of the Emperor arrive and kidnap the storyteller.

Everyone knows that the Emperor wants something called the Luminous Stone That Lights the Night. Determined to have her grandmother returned, Pinmei embarks on a journey to find the Luminous Stone alongside her friend Yishan, a mysterious boy who seems to have his own secrets to hide. Together, the two must face obstacles usually found only in legends to find the Luminous Stone and save Pinmei’s grandmother—before it’s too late.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Amah tells Pinmei, “I know that when it is time for you to do something, you will do it” (page 9). Does Pinmei believe her?

2. After Amah tells the stonecutter, “Stories cannot tell all,” he says, “I disagree. I think stories tell everything” (page 116). Why does the stonecutter believe this and not the Storyteller?

3. Lady Meng says, “If one of the greatest joys is encountering a friend far from home, making a friend must be as well” (page 237). How do friendships cause positive results throughout the book?

4. The stonecutter tells Amah, “Almost all men respect the Storyteller. You can make time disappear. You can bring us to places we have never dreamed of. You can make us feel sorrow and joy and peace. You have great magic” (page 151). Amah says the stonecutter is flattering her. Why does she not see her own importance, and how is that similar to Pinmei’s own struggle?

5. The Paper of Answers told the king and emperor that the secret to mortality is stories. What does this mean?

6. The Paper of Answers not only provides answers to questions, but can physically change people too. Why does it work differently with different people?

7. Joy to the Heart says, “Mortals are the only ones who can give immortality... I guess it’s because it’s the mortals who create the memories that last. Without those, immortals forget. They can even forget who they are, right?” (page 257). Why do you think Yishan had forgotten who he was? What does this show about the importance of stories?

8. In “The Story of Our Mountain,” the new ruler is mocked by the Mountain Spirit who asks, “Do you know who you are? Will you ever know?” (page 340). Why do these questions make the new ruler angry?

9. Yishan tells Pinmei on page 360 that she is a friend he will never forget, and that is the only immortality that matters. On page 368, Pinmei says she finally understands. What does she understand?

10. The book ends with Pinmei beginning to tell a story. The story begins with “When the sea turned to silver,” which is the same way the book begins, and is the title of the book. How is everything tied together? What story is now being told? Why is it fitting that this last scene takes place in the Long Walkway?