

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Fairy Tales & Folklore
- ❖ First & Third Person Perspectives
- ❖ Figurative Language

Ages: 8 – 12

INTRODUCTION

Just when we thought Grace Lin couldn't get any better at penning fantasy adventures inspired by Chinese folktales, here comes *When the Sea Turned to Silver*. A companion novel to the Newbery Honor book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* and *Starry River of the Sky*, *When the Sea Turned to Silver* draws from the legends and world of the other novels to narrate a new tale about Pinmei's quest to save her grandmother. In this way, Lin is not just telling another extraordinary story; she is proving the whole world is filled with incredible stories. These stories interconnect and build on one another in ways that shape and inspire our lives.

The activities described in this guide explore this interconnectedness through a variety of content areas, thus offering multiple ways to incorporate this remarkable book into your curriculum and pedagogy.

STORIES WITHIN STORIES

One of Lin's amazing abilities as an author is to weave stories fluidly within and around other stories.

In *When the Sea Turned to Silver*, the main narrative describes Pinmei's quest to save Amah, her grandmother. The story is also told from Amah's perspective while she is the Tiger Emperor's prisoner. Both Pinmei and Amah encounter people who request stories of them; in addition, interspersed between Pinmei's and Amah's experiences is the story of the Black Tortoise of Winter, who is also trapped and trying to escape. And while the stories about Pinmei, Amah, and the Black Tortoise of Winter are told in chronological order, sometimes the stories each character tells are not.

First have students list the different stories told in this novel. Then, have them map out the chronological sequence of each tale (e.g., the stories of Nuwa, the Ginseng Boy, the Sea King, etc.) on a timeline. Don't forget the overarching narrative of Pinmei's adventures. Challenge them to

identify the connections among the stories, perhaps by adding more lines to their timeline or rearranging it into a different kind of graphic organizer.

For extension activities, you could also have students read *When the Mountain Meets the Moon* and *Starry River of the Sky*. Then, ask students to add the stories within those novels to the web of connections.

Finally, challenge your students to write their own story-within-a-story, using any of the titles mentioned as a mentor text.

THE ART OF ORAL STORYTELLING

When the novel begins, Pinmei is apprehensive about telling stories. After all, her grandmother, Amah, is a renowned storyteller. Gradually, Pinmei overcomes her anxiety and masters the art of storytelling.

Have students explore and practice the art of oral storytelling. You might begin by having them listen to podcasts and recordings of stories, guiding them to analyze how the story is told in terms of tone, structure, pace, and emphasis. Once students are familiar with the skills needed for storytelling, invite them to try their hand at it by telling a favorite fairy tale, family story, or a story they've written themselves.



For more information about storytelling, see the following online resources:

- NPR’s Story Corps (npr.org/series/4516989/storycorps)
- National Storytelling Network (storynet.org)

THE POWER OF STORIES

In her author’s note at the end of the novel, Lin contemplates the importance and power of stories in her life. Share the author’s notes from her other novels, especially *When the Mountain Meets the Moon* and *Starry River of the Sky*. What does Lin believe about the impact stories have had on her life? What does she believe stories are capable of doing for others?

Have students brainstorm stories that have influenced their lives in similar ways. Invite students to explore and analyze why those particular stories affected them. In a whole-class discussion, see if there are any common answers or patterns about the power of stories. Invite students then to share those stories with classmates—orally, in written form, as a series of illustrated slides, etc.—as part of a storytelling showcase.

WORLD CREATION MYTHS AND LEGENDS

This novel tells stories about how the natural world works or was created as in the legends about Nuwa and the Black Tortoise of Winter. Numerous cultures have myths and legends about the natural world. Have your students research and read a variety of these myths and legends. For example, ancient Greek myths describe how Gaia (Mother Earth) was born from Chaos, while ancient Egyptian tales speak of Ra, the sun god, who gave birth to Shu, the god of air, and Tefnut, the goddess of water. Using the examples they find and discuss as mentor texts, have students create their own myths and legends about the natural world around us. Invite them to write these stories and share them orally with the class.

FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

A hallmark of Lin’s writing is the profusion of figurative language she employs. Not only does she include plenty of figurative language, but she also varies it: similes, metaphors, symbolism, onomatopoeia, personification, hyperbole, and idioms are among the devices she uses. Challenge students to search for examples of each type of figurative language, perhaps by dividing students into small groups or examining one chapter at a time. Compile students’ examples into a class list that you post in the classroom. Referring to this list of examples, remind students to try using such language in their writing to develop their writing skills, particularly their ideas, voice, and word choice.

COMPANION NOVEL STUDY

In small group literature circles or as whole-class readalouds, have students read the other two novels. What is similar and different about the novels in terms of plot, character, and setting? What about the symbols, structure, language, and illustrations in the novels? Have students read the author’s notes that Grace Lin includes at the back of the novels. What information do the notes provide to support their answers? To extend this analysis, invite students to debate the merits of each novel, and challenge them to select the best of the three, making sure they support their opinions with evidence from the books.

MENTOR TEXT FOR CHINESE FOLKTALES

Like other literary genres, Chinese folktales are defined by their particular style and use of literary elements, such as character archetypes, story arcs, settings, and themes. Share a collection of Chinese folktales to help students compare and contrast patterns and characteristics of folktales. You might curate this collection to be multimodal; that is, utilizing podcasts, videos, art, guest storytellers, and other modes of storytelling in addition to traditional written tales. Once students are familiar enough with the genre, have them create folktales of their own to share with others.

For more information and examples of Chinese folktales, see the following books and online resources:

- Carpenter, F. (1973). *Tales of a Chinese Grandmother*. Ill. by M. Hasselriis. Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing.
- Fang, L. (1995). *The Ch'i-lin Purse: A Collection of Ancient Chinese Stories*. Ill. by J. M. Lee. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Fu, S. (2008). *Treasury of Chinese Folk Tales: Beloved Myths and Legends from the Middle Kingdom*. Ill. by P. Yee. New Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.
- Hume, L. C. (2004). *Favorite Children's Stories from China and Tibet*. Ill. by L. Koon-Chiu. Boston, MA: Tuttle Publishing.
- Lin, A. (1978). *The Milky Way and Other Chinese Folk Tales*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc.
- Nunes, S. S. (2013). *Chinese Gables: The Dragon Slayer and Other Timeless Tales of Wisdom*. Ill. by L. Tay-Audouard. New Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.
- Werner, E. T. C. (1994). *Myths and Legends of China*. Mineola, NY: Dover.
- Yip, M. (2004). *Chinese Children's Favorite Stories*. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle Publishing.
- Yuan, H. (2006). *The Magic Lotus and Other Tales from Han Chinese*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.



Chinese folktales websites

- Whispering Books: whisperingbooks.com/Show_Page/?book=Chinese_Folk_Tales
- Chinese Folktales: chinesefolktales.blogspot.com
- iLearn Culture: cultureofchinese.com/traditions/folklore/

Chinese folktales in the classroom websites

- Teacher Vision: www.teachervision.com/china/resource/2971.html

Chinese Historical Society of America

- www.chsa.org

ILLUSTRATIONS IN NOVELS

Another of Lin's talents is her skill as an illustrator. With students, closely examine the artwork she added to this novel, including the full-page and full-color illustrations, the images placed at the beginning of each chapter, and the small, colorful emblems within the text. What function does each type of illustration serve? How does each type of illustration aid a reader's understanding of the story?

Guide them to analyze the full-page illustrations in terms of artistic principles—such as line, placement, texture, light and shadow, depth and perspective, etc.—to determine how those illustrations enhance what the text says and how they experience the story.

Then, have students select a chapter from a novel they've read that does not have illustrations. Challenge them to add illustrations to that chapter, working individually or in small groups, using what they've learned about how illustrations work in novels.

FOLK ART AND FOLKTALES

Folk art is another form of cultural storytelling. Share a variety of examples of folk art with your students, guiding them to identify characteristics of what distinguishes something as folk art. Give special attention to ancient Chinese folk art. How do these pieces of art work to tell a story in a way that language (oral or written) does not?

Have students then revisit the illustrations in *When the Sea Turned to Silver*. What similarities and differences are there among the illustrations and the examples of folk art you shared with them? As an extension, have students create their own piece of folk art around a story they know well.

For further information about folk art, see the following online resources:

- American Folklore Society – Folklore and Education websites (americanfolkloresociety.org)
- Education World – Folktale Resources (educationworld.com/a_tech/sites/sites062.shtml)

SHARING OUR OWN CULTURAL FOLKTALES

Your students might already know some folktales from their own cultural backgrounds. Engage students in an inquiry about some of the folktales from the cultural traditions represented among them similar to the one described above. What cultural folktales do your students know? What plots, symbols, themes, characters, settings, archetypes, and other elements do the folktales have in common? Invite students to share those folktales using the presentation modes and media that best showcase their strengths as storytellers. For example, some students might opt to write out their folktale as a narrative, while others might decide to employ a traditional oral storytelling approach. Still other students might tell their folktales via comic book, and others might try video storytelling. Invite other classes and students' families to attend the presentations and be

authentic audiences for your students' work.

For further information about folktales and storytelling, see the following online resources, as well as the ones listed for the previous activity:

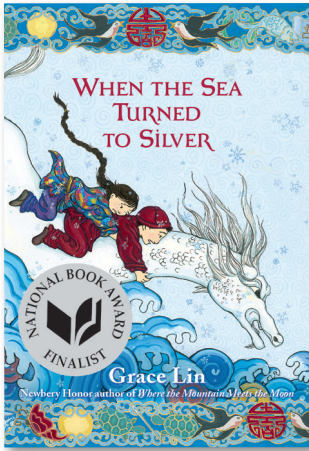
- PBS Learning Media – “Folktales of the World” (pbslearningmedia.org)
- Encyclopedia Mythica (pantheon.org)

AUTHOR/ILLUSTRATOR STUDY

Lin is a seasoned children's author, having published a number of picture books, beginning reader books, and novels. She is also the recipient of several awards, including a Newbery Honor and an Honorable Mention for the Asian/Pacific American Award for Literature. Gather multiple copies of her books to conduct an author/illustrator study with your students. Have students identify patterns in setting, theme, character, and plot across Lin's works. Have them analyze Lin's writing style, range of topics, storytelling techniques, and artistic style. Gather information about Lin from her website, your school or local librarian, the Internet, and as other biographical sources. Once students have a good sense of Lin's style, invite them to emulate her craft as an author and/or an illustrator in their own work.



about the book



978-0-316-12594-9 TP
978-0-316-12592-5 HC

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 find her grandmother, 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.

National Book Award Finalist

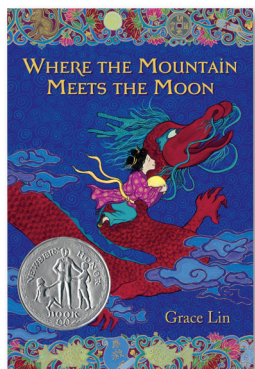
★ SLJ ★ Booklist ★ Kirkus ★ Horn Book ★ PW

about the author



Grace Lin is the award-winning and bestselling author and illustrator of *Chinese Menu*, *When the Sea Turned to Silver*, *Starry River of the Sky*, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, *The Year of the Dog*, *The Year of the Rat*, *Dumpling Days*, and *Ling & Ting*, as well as picture books such as *The Ugly Vegetables*, *A Big Bed for Little Snow*, and *A Big Mooncake for Little Star*. Grace is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Massachusetts.

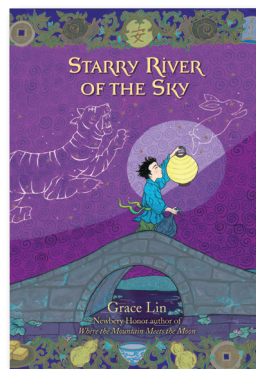
other books by Grace Lin



978-0-316-03863-8 TP
978-0-316-11427-1 HC

**Newbery
Honor Book**

★ Booklist
★ Kirkus
★ SLJ



978-0-316-12597-0 TP
978-0-316-12595-6 HC

★ Horn Book
★ Booklist
★ Kirkus
★ SLJ
★ PW



978-0-316-48600-2 HC

★ Kirkus
★ Booklist
★ SLJ
★ PW
★ Horn Book
★ SLC



978-0-316-59468-4 HC

★ PW

littlebrownlibrary.com

This educator's guide was written by Grace Enriquez, an Associate Professor of Language & Literacy, Lesley University in Cambridge, MA.