

Title: Dragonwings

Author: Laurence Yep

Genre: Historical Fiction

Level: 5.3

Themes: Family loyalty, determination, following one's dreams, prejudice, poverty/drugs connection; multicultural values; Chinese immigration.

Setting: San Francisco Bay Area

Main Characters: Moon Shadow (Chinese boy-the narrator), Windrider (his father).

Summary: In the first years of the twentieth century, 8-year-old Moon Shadow leaves China to join his father, Windrider, in San Francisco. Moon Shadow learns that his father, a master kitemaker, dreams of building and flying his own airplane. Father and son experience discrimination, but also make valued friends. The 1906 San Francisco earthquake and fire bring destruction but new opportunities for the boy and his father.

Pre-Reading Activities: 1. Have students share what they know about an aspect of Chinese culture (customs, language, art, or myths). Provide books on Chinese culture in the classroom for students to peruse before and during their reading of the novel. 2. Have students predict the plot of the novel.

Chapter 1:

Vocabulary- to lynch, stingy, clan, hardy, nuisance, dowry, perturbed
bilge

Questions:

1. Explain why Father is not living with his wife and child. Your answer should contain all of the information available to you in this chapter.
2. What attitudes toward the Demons of the Golden Mountain are expressed in this chapter? Be specific, quoting from the text where possible.
3. Explain the significance of Father's special talent. In what way does it help his family?
4. Moon Shadow does not describe in detail either the trip across the Pacific or the week spent in the immigration detention center. In the space below, write his thoughts about one of these two experiences. Write in the first person and in the present tense (as though you are actually having the experience).

Chapter 2:

Vocabulary- saloon, to lounge, inhabitant, vendor, flank, nimble, wafer, conventional, pious, dialect, drudgelike, insolent

Questions:

1. Write at least 5 adjectives to describe the Tang community.
2. Moon Shadow talks about "sensible safeguards against demons" which guarded the doors of the Tang homes. Imagine a guardian for the door stop of your home. Describe it in at least 6 sentences. Be sure to explain what demons you have to guard against.
3. Explain what Father means when he says, "I gave you something for your soul."

Chapter 3:

Vocabulary- to bolt, vast, phenomenal, to tinker, residue, skirmish, poultice, allotted, span (as of time), sternly, unalloyed, malleable, knickknack meticulous, rheumatic

Questions:

1. What is the "greater and purer magic" to which Father refers? Give an example of how this "magic" can be harmful.
2. For what action was Windrider punished by the Dragon King? Write at least 3 good sentences comparing this action to that of *Icarus*.
3. We will learn as we read *Dragonwings* what it means to be **dragonish**. At this point, you should be able to make some good guesses about the traits which Windrider must display if he is to be reborn as a dragon.

Chapter 4:

Vocabulary- mutual, to associate (as with people), deliberate hunkered down, embodiment, fateful, encounter, intuitive, begrudge proclamation, guild, eternally, antiseptic, moronic

Questions:

1. Explain Uncle's feelings about flying and bringing Mother over. You may want to quote his words to Father in your explanation.
2. Reread the silly song in Chapter Add a verse for an article of your own clothing (ideas: sneakers, socks, tie, blazer, poncho...)

Chapter 5:

Vocabulary- sneer, despise, spiteful, goaded, cleaver, gruffness prudent

Questions:

1. Write no more than 4 sentences which summarize the plot of this chapter.
2. In one sentence, tell what the author is telling the reader in this chapter about violence and human beings:

Chapter 6:

Vocabulary- poultry, tenement (house), turret, petite, gracious, sly
malicious

Questions:

1. Chapter 5 ended with a description of "parting gifts" from the Company. In the space below, explain which gift you feel Moon Shadow now values most, and why. Review Chapter 5 if necessary.
2. The Rules of Hospitality are as important to the Demons as they are to the Tang. In the space below, list as many of these rules as you can find in Chapters 1-6.

Chapter 7:

Vocabulary- vehemently, smug, patronizing, schematics, skeptical
parlor

Questions:

1. List the "educations" which occur in this chapter, explaining for each who is educated, by what or whom, and what the outcome of the education is. You should do this as notes or you may create a chart.
2. Explain how the conflicts, both external and internal, of Father and Moon Shadow are parallel in this chapter.

Chapter 8:

Vocabulary- humbug, impulse, pert, scrappy

Questions:

1. What do you think Father was thinking about when he cut the kite string? Write his thoughts in the first person - as if you could read his mind.

Chapter 9:

Vocabulary- tea money (this word must be defined from the novel - paragraph 1), merchant, to monopolize, pagan, to boycott, to undulate, ominously, querulous, eerie, Sunday Christians (this word must be defined by reviewing its use in the chapter), to shanghai, tottering, tormentor, martial law

Questions:

1. What was the reason for Deerfoot's visit?
2. Why is Moon Shadow's first thought that a dragon is causing the earth to shake? Find one or more examples of descriptive language which support this thought?

Chapter 10:

Vocabulary- trinkets, to bustle, venerable, forlorn, sprightly, taut
perpetual, cherished, amber (color), ethereal, cistern, ineptitude, deity, adversity
incredulous, incessant, sardonically

Questions:

1. Explain Father's decision to build an airplane of his own. What are his **motives** (there are many)?

Chapter 11:

Vocabulary- helter-skelter, ramshackle, scavenger, writhe, feverish
ruddy, rafter, varicolored, petty, to warp (something), lofty, tact, consecrated
contraption

Questions:

1. Review and describe the settings where Moon Shadow and Father have lived. Do you notice a pattern or any similarities?

Chapter 12:

Vocabulary- abominable, penance, bristling, to relent, lavishly
jargon, dubiously, ingratiating, auspicious, exhilarated, to cannibalize
cantankerous

Questions:

1. List and explain in the space below how at least 3 "new" technologies have played a role in the ending of this book.
2. Identify the **climax** of the novel and briefly defend your decision.

Research Project:

Immigration- Have students research the experiences of another immigrant group in California around the turn of the century, such as the Irish, Germans, Japanese, or Mexicans. Have them write a comparison between the experiences of the group in California and the Chinese experience as they know it from *Dragonwings*.

Other Projects:

Book cover- Have the students make their own book cover for the novel. Include a summary (with at least two quotes), review (why people should read the book), an about the author section and front and back graphics.

Newspaper - c.a. 1903-1909. Have students recreate a newspaper. It could include stories and headlines from the novel, interviews with the characters, advice columns from the era, and/or earthquake reports.

A-Z book- Have students create a book, using the alphabet, capturing the book and its characters, themes, plot, lessons to be learned, etc. Include illustrations.

BIOGRAPHY

Born June 14, 1948 in San Francisco, California, Yep was the son of Thomas Gim Yep and Franche Lee Yep. Franche Lee, her family's youngest child, was born in Ohio and raised in West Virginia where her family owned a Chinese laundry. Yep's father, Thomas, was born in China and came to America at the age of ten where he lived, not in Chinatown, but with an Irish friend in a white neighborhood. After troubling times during the Depression, he was able to open a grocery store in an African-American neighborhood. Growing up in San Francisco, Yep felt alienated. He was in his own words his neighborhood's "all-purpose Asian" and did not feel he had a culture of his own. Joanne Ryder, a children's book author, and Yep met and became friends during college while she was his editor. They later married and now live in San Francisco.

Although not living in Chinatown, Yep commuted to a parochial bilingual school there. Other students at the school, according to Yep, labeled him a "dumbbell Chinese" because he spoke only English. During high school he faced the white American culture for the first time. However, it was while attending high school that he started writing for a science fiction magazine, being paid one cent a word for his efforts. After two years at Marquette University, Yep transferred to the University of California at Santa Cruz where he graduated in 1970 with a B.A. He continued on to earn a Ph.D. in English from the State University of New York at Buffalo in 1975. Today as well as writing, he has taught writing and Asian American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley and Santa Barbara.