Minli, an adventurous girl from a poor village, buys a magical goldfish and then joins a dragon on a quest to find the Old Man of the Moon in hopes of discovering how to change her family’s fortune.

Award: ALA Notable/Best Books; E.B. White Award; NCTE Notable Children’s Books in the Language Arts; Newbery Honor

Topics: Adventure, Quest; Common Core State Stds Appendix B Titles, CCSS Grade Band 4-5; Fantasy/Imagination, Magic; Popular Groupings, Middle Grades Popular Authors/Starred Reviews; Recommended Reading, Book Links Lasting Connections

Main Characters

A-Fu and Da-Fu  a sister and brother who are twins, also called Da-A-Fu because they are always together
A-Gong    the grandfather of Da-Fu and A-Fu, who helps heal Dragon
Amah    the grandmother of Da-Fu and A-Fu, who cares for Minli in the Village of Moon Rain
Aunt Jin    the goldfish Minli sets free, who becomes the orange dragon
Ba    Minli’s father, who keeps Minli’s excitement and wonder alive with his stories
Dragon    a dragon Minli saves and befriends, who accompanies her on her journey so he can find out how to fly
Green Tiger    a beast that injures Dragon but is outwitted by A-Fu and Da-Fu
Guardian lions    a family of lions guarding the city gate who give Dragon a red thread
Jade Dragon    a dragon from one of Ba’s stories, whose heart, broken from losing her children, becomes Fruitless Mountain

Vocabulary

barren    not able to bear young; unable to yield or produce crops or fruit; not fertile
brocade    made of a thick, heavy, expensive material with a raised pattern; made of fabric woven with gold and silver threads or ornamented with raised flowers or foliage
disbelief    a feeling that something is not or cannot be true; shock or amazement; doubt
emissary    a representative sent on a mission; someone sent on a mission to represent the interests of another, especially to carry messages or to discuss issues
fragrant    having a pleasing smell; sweet-smelling
frustration    helpless anger; annoyance or irritation at being thwarted, hindered, or criticized; anger resulting from failure or from being slowed down or prevented from doing something
magistrate    a person given authority by a government or monarch to oversee and carry out the law; a powerful public official
meager    lacking in quality, quantity, or extent; scanty; having little; thin or lean; small; neither offering nor providing much
pavilion    a temporary movable habitation; a large tent; a simple building with simple walls and a single roof; a shelter, covering, or canopy
wry intended to express bitter or biting humor; expressing sarcasm or irony; cynical; mocking; scornful; twisted

Synopsis
Minli and her family, Ma and Ba, live a hard life in a poor village near Fruitless Mountain. Through Ba's stories, Minli learns that the Old Man of the Moon has the answers to important questions, so she decides to find him to learn how to improve her family's fortune. On the way, she rescues Dragon, who wants to learn how to fly, and together they seek the Old Man of the Moon. On their journey, they are helped by the buffalo boy, the King of the City of Bright Moonlight, the guardian lions of the city, and the people of the Village of the Moon Rain, all of whom relate stories of their past.

When Minli finally reaches the Old Man of the Moon, she learns that she can ask only one question of him, and she struggles with which one to ask. When she sees the word "thankfulness" in a book on his lap, she realizes she has the answer to her question and decides to ask Dragon's question about flying instead. As she solves Dragon's problem, she comes into possession of a Dragon Pearl, which her family gives to the king, who rewards the village with seeds and farm equipment. The village prospers and becomes known as the Village of Fruitful Mountain.

Open-Ended Questions
Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Literary Analysis
How does the author use the character of the goldfish man to tell the story?

The goldfish man appears at three times and helps move the story along. In the beginning, he sells a goldfish to Minli, and the fish tells Minli how to find the Old Man of the Moon. Later, he appears as Ma and Ba search for Minli, and he gives them guidance and comfort. Finally, he appears at the end of the story in the revived village, and the reader learns through his questions how and why the village has changed.

Inferential Comprehension
The concept of greed appears several times in the story. Which characters are greedy, and why are they greedy? How, if at all, do they change in the course of the story?

Magistrate Tiger is particularly greedy as he seeks power and wealth for himself and his family. Ultimately, he is doomed as his spirit, in the form of the Green Tiger, leaps into a well. Ma is somewhat greedy as the story begins. She is bitter, and her sighs about the state of the family drive Minli to look for a better fortune for all of them. The monkeys in the forest are greedy and become victims of their greed as Minli tricks them so she and Dragon can travel through the forest.

Teachable Skills
Describing Actions or Events  Describing Events

Understanding Hist./Cultural Factors  Understanding Historical & Cultural Factors

Comparing and Contrasting  Compare & Contrast

Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning  Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning

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