

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon

a Wheelock Family Theatre Study Guide

prepared by Jeri Hammond

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Lin is the author and illustrator of picture books, early readers, and middle grade novels. Grace's 2010 Newbery Honor book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* was chosen for Al Roker's *Today Show* Kid's Book Club and was a *NY Times* Bestseller. *Ling & Ting*, Grace's first early reader, was recognized with the Theodor Geisel Honor in 2011. Grace, herself, has been honored by the Boston Public Library with the Literary Lights for Children Award and was an Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award nominee for the United States.

Most of Grace's books are about the Asian-American experience because she believes, "Books erase bias, they make the uncommon everyday, and the mundane exotic. A book makes all cultures universal."

See more about Grace and her work at www.gracelin.com.

Grace Lin is the 2014 Recipient of the Wheelock Family Theatre's WHEEL Award, which recognizes individuals who share the Theatre's commitment to children and families and whose work embodies the Theatre's belief that the arts can transform lives. To learn more about the Wheelock Family Theatre's 2014 WHEEL Award go to www.wheelockfamilytheatre.org.

Author Bio: www.gracelin.com

Photo credit: Alexandre Ferron

ABOUT THE BOOK

Grace Lin, author of the beloved *Year of the Dog* and *Year of the Rat*, returns with a wondrous story of adventure, faith, and friendship. A fantasy crossed with Chinese folklore, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is a timeless story reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*. Grace's beautiful illustrations, printed in full-color, accompany the text throughout. Once again, she has created a charming, engaging book for young readers.

In the Valley of Fruitless Mountain, a young girl named Minli lives in a ramshackle hut with her parents. In the evenings, her father regales her with old folktales of the Jade Dragon and the Old Man of the Moon, who knows the answers to all of life's questions. Inspired by these stories, Minli sets off on an extraordinary journey to find the Old Man of the Moon to ask him how she can change her family's fortune. She encounters an assorted cast of characters and magical creatures along the way, including a dragon who accompanies her on her quest for the ultimate answer.

www.gracelin.com

Behind the Story/ Behind the Scenes

Watch a book trailer for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iM8NWGrAHtA>

Watch an interview with author Grace Lin as she discusses the inspiration for the book: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cJzahDI9hFI>

Grace Lin writes in her book notes for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*:

“All these stories and images are the threads that tie together to make *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. It is a fantasy inspired by the Chinese folktales that enchanted me in my youth and the land and culture that fascinates me in my adulthood. I hope there is magic in it for you as well.”

While a piece of writing is the creative effort of one, a theatrical production is the creative collaborative effort of many. We believe there is magic in the theatrical process of bringing a story from the page to the stage. As you watch the performance and use this study guide to “get in on the behind- the-scenes action,” we hope there is magic in *it* for you as well.

Bringing the STORY to the STAGE

The Setting

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon is a fantasy story set in China, drawing on Chinese land and culture, while also existing in a place that is both timeless and universal.

Be a Scenic Designer

Often designers will research the setting of a play before creating a design.

- Learn about China.
- Go on a virtual tour of China.
- Read or listen to the descriptions of the places in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*.
- What images come to mind? Draw or paint what you imagine.
- Create a three-dimensional set design for one of the places in the story.
- Compare and contrast Fruitless Mountain, from the beginning, with Fruitful Mountain at the end. How, as a scenic designer, could you show this transformation?

This is a journey story—Minli travels to many rich and varied places before returning home. How could you, as a set designer, create the feeling of changing time and place while only having one stage?

There's No Place Like Home

Where The Mountain Meets the Moon is often compared to another classic journey story—*The Wizard of Oz*.

- Using a Venn diagram or other graphic organizer, compare and contrast these two classic tales.

The classic hero's quest or "Home/Adventure/Home" structure is an enduring literary genre—consider such tales as *The Odyssey*, *The Hobbit*, and *Where the Wild Things Are*...

- Write your own "Home/Adventure/Home" story. Why are you going on this quest? What obstacles do you face on your journey? How do you return home? What lessons do you learn along the way?
- Create a map depicting Minli's travels throughout the book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. *The Once Upon a Time Map Book* by B.G. Hennessy and Peter Joyce is a wonderful example of how to create maps of fantasy literary lands.
- Using traditional Chinese art panels for inspiration, draw or paint scenes to retell Minli's adventure. View the work of author/illustrator Ed Young (*Lon-Po-Po*) for beautiful examples of this style.

Many Moons

The moon plays a prominent role in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, as it does in many folktales from around the world. Since the beginning of time, people have gazed up at the moon in wonder and told stories.

- Learn about the phases of the moon.
- Keep a Moon Journal.
- Read folktales about the moon.
- Research facts about the moon and write your own “All About the Moon” book.
- Learn about the Lunar New Year.
- *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is filled with beautifully descriptive similes and metaphors. Try your hand at using simile or metaphor to describe the moon.
- Create a piece of art inspired by these images
- What would you ask the Old Man of the Moon?
- Use these questions, wonderings, and similes to create your own moon poem.

Be a Lighting Designer

Explore light and shadow.

- Moonlight and sunlight show the passage of hours. How does the lighting designer create this? How does the use of color create mood?

The Characters

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon is filled with rich and varied characters: Minli, whose name means quick-thinking; Dragon, her companion on the journey; Minli's Ma and Ba; and the mysterious Old Man of the Moon.

Be a Costume Designer

- Draw a sketch of one or more of the characters from *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. Consider the traits of that particular character.
- Design a costume for the character. Explain your design ideas—what does the color stand for? How does each costume choice reveal something about the character: rich or poor, young or old, kind or cruel?

Be a Props Master

Where the Mountain Meets the Moon incorporates the use of puppets and props to help tell the story.

- Learn more about the history and tradition of Chinese puppetry.
- Create puppets to retell a story from *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* or a favorite folktale.
- Watch this shadow puppet clip:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NE9ktnuG8JI>
- Dragons play an important role in Chinese culture. Explore dragons across cultures. How would you bring the character of Dragon to life on the stage?
- Learn more about Chinese lion and dragon dances.

Intermission

At this time, we'll take a brief intermission from this study guide to bring you some other wonderful resources.

Would you like to:

- Paint a dragon to life,
- Make a compass to find your way to Never Ending Mountain,
- Learn Chinese characters, or
- Make food fit for a king?

Find these activities and more in *Finding Your Way to the Never-Ending Mountain (or Anywhere): Things to Ponder and Things to Do after Reading Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, an Activity Guide by Kirsten Cappy of Curious City found at www.gracelin.com.

Getting Inside the Characters: Be an Actor

- In groups, retell key moments from the book by making frozen pictures (tableaux).
- When you read a book, there are many ways the author lets you know what the characters are thinking and feeling. While reading *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, note in your reading journal what you believe each character is feeling and thinking. Use evidence from the text to support your claims.
- When watching the play, take note of the way the actors say their lines (expression), their facial reactions, and their body movements to let the audience know how their character is feeling.
- Return to the frozen pictures you created above. One at a time unfreeze and say what your character is thinking or feeling in that moment. (Thought monologue.)

- Acting is reacting. Act out a moment from the book—when Minli sees Dragon for the first time, when Ma and Ba realize Minli has gone...
- As someone reads moments from the book, silently act out the story.
- It is the actor’s job to think about how the character changes from the beginning of the play until the end. Think about what events cause the character to change his or her beliefs or perspective.

In the book, author Grace Lin goes back and forth between revealing what is happening on Minli’s physical journey to what is happening inside Ma and Ba as they wait behind. The characters are not the same at the end of the story as they were when the story began.

- Write an imaginary diary for one of the characters showing how the character changed and grew throughout the story.

Stories Within Stories

Director Jane Staab, when asked about her vision for this production, spoke of wishing to keep the stories front and center—the stories, their lessons, and how the stories and the characters are interconnected.

Visit www.gracelinbooks.com for an Educator’s guide filled with rich discussion questions about the stories within stories in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* such as these:

“Grace Lin refers to the Chinese legend describing how the red threads connect people. In *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* these red threads make a bridge leading Minli to the Old Man of the Moon. Discuss with students how connections to personal experiences, other books, and background knowledge can help them understand this book and other pieces of literature. Ask students to record their connections and observations as they read the book, or as they read a particular chapter. On a piece of paper, have students write the title of the book or the chapter. Then, have them write their connections around the book title. Use red yarn or string to visually link their experiences with the book title. After students complete this individually, have them share their connections with the class. Did they have more connections to their

personal experiences, other books they have read, or what they know about the world around them? How do these connections create a bridge of understanding? “

“Ma said stories were worthless, but stories play an important role throughout Minli’s adventure. Using examples from the book, how did stories help Minli and others reach their goals? How did stories help characters change and develop throughout the book? Do you think stories are important?”

Bringing the Story from the Page to the Stage

The play you will see is an adaptation of the book. Playwright Jeannine Coulombe adapted the story for the stage.

Be a Playwright

- Choose one of the stories from *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* or another favorite folktale and write a script.
- How is writing a script different from writing a story?
- Perform the play for your classmates.

Curtain Call

Be a Theatre Reviewer

Reflect on what you just experienced:

- What was your favorite part of the play?
- Who was your favorite character? Why?
- Write a review of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*.

Encore! Encore!

Grace Lin is a gifted author and illustrator. Her rich and varied body of work makes her a wonderful choice for an author study. If you enjoyed *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* consider reading the companion book, *Starry River of the Sky*. Visit Grace Lin's website for additional information.

www.gracelin.com

Books by Grace Lin

Novels

The Year of the Dog

The Year of the Rat

Dumpling Days

Starry River of the Sky, companion novel to *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Early Readers

Ling & Ting: Not Exactly the Same!

Ling & Ting Share a Birthday

Ling & Ting: Twice as Silly

Pictures and Words

The Ugly Vegetables

Dim Sum for Everyone!

Fortune Cookie Fortunes

Kite Flying

Olivia Flies

Our Seasons

Lissy's Friends

Olivia Swims

The Red Thread: An Adoption Fairy Tale

Bringing in the New Year

Thanking the Moon