

The River

by Libby Hathorn
illustrated by Stanley Wong



Overview

This interesting picture novel is set in China and relates the story of Xian, who undertakes a long and hazardous journey to reach the village of her grandparents after her mother has died. Modern-day Hong, the girl reading the story given to her by Ming (a woman who has worked as a cleaner in Hong's parents' shop), is transported back in time by the adventures of Xian. Hong is enthralled by the story and sees it as an important telling of where you belong. She lives in comfortable circumstances but from the reading of the precious story given to her, she decides to create a story of her own family - a treasure of her own. The story is multi-layered and intergenerational with interesting adventures and concepts. It is complex enough to be enjoyed by upper primary students.



Activities

- Tell the story in your own words.
- Make a map of the story.
- Draw your own map of Xian's journey.
- What is the purpose of Xian's journey?
- Do a character study of Xian saying what she looks like and what she is like as a person.
- Tell of two adventures that Xian has on her journey.
- Where is the story set? Is there more than one setting? Describe the different settings.
- Describe Xian's journey, telling where she went and describing the weather and terrain through which she passed.
- Write about whom she met on the way and what people were like and how they treated her.
- Why is the story called *The River*? Explain the significance of the river for Xian.
- When Ming gives the story to Hong she says, 'The story is about a treasure'. Explain.
- What does the story do for Hong?
- Make a list of the characters in *The River* and their place in the overall story.
- Why is Xian so upset when she finally reaches her grandparents' home?
- What does Xian's grandfather mean when he says, 'She has surely brought us a treasure'?

- What gift does Xian's grandfather say he will give to his granddaughter? Why is this so special? What will Xian write about?
- What is important for Hong's parents? What is important for Hong?
- What happens in the end? Does the story have a happy ending? Give reasons for your answer.
- Like Hong, use the Internet to find out more about China.
- Write a family treasure of your own - your own family history.
- Look up more information on Libby Hathorn and Stanley Wong.
- Write about the power of story and the imagination.