



Classroom Guide for
GOLDFISH AND CHRYSANTHEMUMS
written by Andrea Cheng
illustrated by Michelle Chang

Reading Level

* Reading Level: Grade 2

Interest Level: Grades 1-3

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.2/.5

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Themes

Intergenerational Relationships, Children Making a Difference, Grandparents, Family Bonds/Traditions, Sharing and Giving, Gardening, Asian/Asian American Interest

Synopsis

Nancy is helping Ni Ni (Grandma) in the kitchen when a letter arrives from Ni Ni's brother in China. Ni Ni grows sad when she reads that her childhood home is being torn down, along with her father's (Ba Ba's) chrysanthemum-filled garden and fishpond, which she has always loved.

After Nancy wins two goldfish at the summer fair, she comes up with an idea to keep Ni Ni's memories alive. Nancy will recreate the garden and fishpond in the backyard. With her parents permission, Nancy gets to work the very next morning, but challenges lay ahead. First Nancy encounters a big tree root where she is digging the pond. Mrs. Zalinsky, Nancy's neighbor, helps her remove the root, but then the pond won't hold water. Mrs. Zalinsky offers Nancy a big glazed flowerpot to line the pond, and that does the trick. After adding chrysanthemums (another gift from Mrs. Zalinsky), a bench, and a stone path, Nancy is ready to show Ni Ni the surprise. A grateful Ni Ni is thrilled to have the familiar beauty of a garden and a pond again, and dubs the project Ba Ba's Garden in America.

Goldfish and Chrysanthemums shows how one young girl can make a difference in the lives of the people she loves. This tender story is a testament to the special bonds that tie us together within families and across generations.

Background

Immigration to the United States has been on the rise since the mid-1960s, when strict quotas based on nationality were eliminated. Since the 1990s, more than one million immigrants have arrived each year, and they have settled in all parts of the country. Today immigrants arrive from all parts of the world.

A common theme in author Andrea Cheng's stories is intergenerational relationships, and her child characters often share the experience of having grandparents who grew up outside the United States. This emphasis on intergenerational relationships is rooted in Cheng's own life. Like the grandparent characters in some her books, Cheng's parents were immigrants to the United States. They came from Hungary in 1954. Growing up, Cheng spent a lot of time at home with her family. Says Cheng, "Mostly we spoke Hungarian in the house because my grandmother lived with us, and she didn't speak English. We ate dinner together every night, and I often lingered after the meal to listen to my parents tell stories of their pasts. I used to lie down underneath the table, and the adults would forget that I was there."

Cheng's husband, Jim, is also a child of immigrants; his parents moved to the United States from China. Cheng was inspired to write *Goldfish and Chrysanthemums* after hearing her husband's mother talk about her family's garden in China.

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. Do you have a grandparent or an older adult you feel very close to? What is special about your relationship?
2. Have you ever moved to a place that was very different from where you lived before? How did you feel before you left? After you arrived? What eventually made you feel at home in the new place?
3. Is there a place in your home or community that is special to you? Why is that place special?

Exploring the Book

Read and talk about the title of the book. Ask students what they think the title means. What do you think the story is about?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, Chinese words, dedications, and illustrations.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

Have students read to find out why goldfish and chrysanthemums are a special part of the relationship between the little girl and her grandmother.

Vocabulary

The story contains several descriptive and regionally specific words and phrases with which students may or may not be familiar. Have students work with these words and phrases. Talk about the vocabulary below. Then have each student choose ten words and write three different sentences using each word, preferably to illustrate different meanings or context.

swirl
fishpond

counter
pinch the buds

courtyard
cracked

| | | |
|-----------|--------------------|----------------|
| slosh | Chinese characters | chrysanthemums |
| project | honeysuckle | stubborn |
| glazed | clumps | stunned |
| squeezing | scanned | booth |
| pooled | seeping | blinked |

AFTER READING**Discussion Questions**

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and illustrations in the book to support their responses.

Literal Comprehension

1. What does Ni Ni receive in the mail? How does it make her feel? How do you know?
2. What did Ni Ni used to do with her father at their house in Suzhou?
3. Where do Nancy and Greg go?
4. What does Nancy spend her money on? Why?
5. What are some special things Nancy and Ni Ni do together?
6. What is Ni Ni doing when Nancy comes home from the fair? What does Ni Ni think of the goldfish? How do you know?
7. What does Nancy decide to do for Ni Ni? Why? Where did she get the idea?
8. Who helps Nancy build the fishpond?
9. What challenges does Nancy overcome in building the fishpond? How do you know?
10. What does Ni Ni think of the fishpond? How does it make her feel?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

1. What are some clues the author gives that let you know that Ni Ni is very special to Nancy?
2. Reread some of the things Ni Ni says in the story. Why do you think she speaks the way she does?
3. How do Nancy's mom and dad feel about her plan? How do you know?
4. What kind of person is Nancy? What makes you think that? Find passages in the story that led you to your conclusion.

5. What kind of person is Mrs. Zalinsky? What makes you think that? Find passages in the story that led you to your conclusion.
6. The author and illustrator are very good at showing us how the characters feel, instead of just telling us how they feel. Find examples in the story. For example:
 - How do the author and illustrator show how Ni Ni feels after she gets the letter from her brother? What does she do? What does she say?
 - How do the author and illustrator show us how Ni Ni feels about the pond? What does she do? What does she say?

Literature Circles

If you use literature circles during reading time, students might find the following suggestions helpful in focusing on the different roles of the group members.

- The **Questioner** might use questions similar to the ones in the Discussion Question section of this guide.
- The **Passage Locator** might look for lines in the story that suggest how each character is feeling.
- The **Illustrator** might create scenes on a timeline that illustrate the plot of the story.
- The **Connector** might find other books that feature stories about the special relationships between children and their grandparents.
- The **Summarizer** might provide a brief summary of the group's reading and discussion points for each meeting.
- The **Investigator** might look for information about Chinese gardens and fishponds and their importance to Chinese society.

*There are many resource books available with more information about organizing and implementing literature circles. Three such books you may wish to refer to are: *GETTING STARTED WITH LITERATURE CIRCLES* by Katherine L. Schlick Noe and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 1999), *LITERATURE CIRCLES: VOICE AND CHOICE IN BOOK CLUBS AND READING GROUPS* by Harvey Daniels (Stenhouse, 2002), and *LITERATURE CIRCLES RESOURCE GUIDE* by Bonnie Campbell Hill, Katherine L. Schlick Noe, and Nancy J. Johnson (Christopher-Gordon, 2000).

Reader's Response

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. Suggest that students respond in reader's journals, essays, or oral discussion. You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work, if they wish to.

1. Which parts of the story did you connect to the most? Make a list of at least three things in the story that were meaningful to you and note why you chose them.
2. Ni Ni has fond memories of her father's house in China. Is there a place you have lived or visited that is special to you? Where was it? Why is it special?

3. What did Nancy learn from Ni Ni? What other kinds of things can young people learn from older adults with whom they are close?
4. Have you started a project and then run into problems that had to be solved before you could complete the project? What was the project? What were the problems? How did you solve them?
5. Have students write a draft of the letter Ni Ni will write to her brother about “Ba Ba’s Garden in America.”
6. Ask students to write a book recommendation for this story explaining why they would or would not recommend the book to other students.

ELL Teaching Strategies

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English language learners.

1. Assign ELL students to read the story aloud with strong English readers/speakers.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the book or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about what they admire about a character or central figure in the story.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas.

Social Studies

1. Have students use a world map or globe to locate Suzhou, China. Then ask students to find out some basic information about this Chinese city: population, climate, school system, popular means of transport, language, and so on. Then find comparable information about your community or the nearest large city. Compare the two places and ask students to speculate how it would feel to live in one place after having grown up in the other.
2. Talk with students about how Nancy made a difference in Ni Ni’s life. Point out that there are many ways in which children can make a difference in their families, their communities, and the world. Encourage students to get involved. There are numerous websites with suggestions about how kids can make a difference, such as [Kids Can Make a Difference](#), [Kids Make a Difference](#), and [100 Ways to Make a Difference in Your Community](#).

Language Arts

Ask students to interview people who have had to learn a new language as adults. What language did they learn? How comfortable did they feel speaking that language when they first started learning? How comfortable do they feel speaking that language now? Have students chart the different responses they receive. If there are any students whose first language is not English, let those who wish to, share their language-learning experiences with the class.

Science/Math

Ask students to design a backyard pond garden. Create a worksheet of shapes that represent plants, flowers, trees, and garden features (benches, paths, etc.) for students to cut out. Have students paste these shapes on graph paper to represent their design. On the graph paper, each square should equal a predetermined unit of measurement. Students should then determine the area each part of their garden will take up, as well as the perimeter and area of the entire backyard pond garden.

Writing

If students wrote a draft of the letter Ni Ni will write to her brother about “Ba Ba’s Garden in America” as a Reader’s Response activity, they can now revise and edit their letters. The final letters may be shared orally, or posted on a bulletin board for other students to read.

Art

Let interested students draw or paint their own fantasy backyard fishponds. What kind of plants would they plant around their ponds? What kind of fish would they keep in their pond?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR & ILLUSTRATOR

Andrea Cheng has written numerous books for young readers. Cheng hopes her books will help readers understand the role different cultural customs play in the ways loving families interact and raise their children. Cheng also teaches English as a Second Language at a community college. She and her husband live in Cincinnati, Ohio. They have three grown children. You can find her online at andreacheng.com.

About the Illustrator

Michelle Chang is a full-time illustrator with a fine arts degree from the San Francisco Academy of Art. Her work has appeared in numerous magazines including *The New Yorker*, *Time*, *Rolling Stone*, *GQ*, and *The Atlantic Monthly*. Chang lives in Brooklyn, New York. This was her first picture book. You can visit her online at illustration.michellechang.com.

Book Information

\$8.95, PAPERBACK

978-1-60060-8-896

32 pages, 8 1/4 x 10 3/8

Reading Level: Grade 2

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades 1-3

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/Points: 3.2/.5

Themes: Intergenerational Relationships, Children Making a Difference, Grandparents, Family Bonds/Traditions, Sharing and Giving, Gardening, Asian/Asian American Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB

Learn more about *Goldfish and Chrysanthemums* at:

http://www.leeandlow.com/books/56/pb/goldfish_and_chrysanthemums

Order Information

On the Web:

<http://www.leeandlow.com/order> (general order information)

By Phone:

212-779-4400 ext. 25

212-683-1894

By Mail:

Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, NY NY 10016

Copyright © 1997-2012 The Active Learner

Lee & Low Books, all rights reserved.

For questions, comments and/or more information
please contact us at general@leeandlow.com