

ANIMATED TALES — OF THE — WORLD™

China: The Magic Paintbrush



Background

In folk literature, warnings are meant to be heeded or else.... That is the premise of cautionary tales. Though they can unfold in a variety of ways, the following plot structure is common. First, the warning is stated. Then, over the course of the story, that warning is disregarded. Finally, the violator meets an unpleasant fate. Elements of a cautionary tale are present in *China: The Magic Paintbrush* as Ma Liang, the main character and owner of the paintbrush, struggles against the greedy wishes of the emperor. Find out what happens when Ma Liang gives the emperor exactly what he wants! Additional folk literature terms relevant to this tale are provided below:

folk literature/folklore — Traditional tales, knowledge and beliefs handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth.

folktale — A type of folk literature that has grown from the lives and imaginations of people. Folktales often tell of the adventures of human or animal characters and sometimes attempt to explain the physical or spiritual world. Folktales can be organized into several different categories.

moral tale — A story in which a lesson is learned or a message is conveyed. Sometimes, the moral is left for listeners or readers to determine for themselves, and other times it is explicitly stated.

magic and wonder tales — A type of folktale. Magic and wonder tales contain some element of magic. This magic can be used for good or bad. Transformations from human to animal or animal to human are common in this type of folktale.

Program Summary

Ma Liang is a poor orphan who dreams of becoming a famous painter. In a dream one night, the young artist is given a magical paintbrush and is instructed to paint from his heart. He goes on to amaze onlookers as his artwork becomes real and leaps from the paper. When news of this spreads, the young boy finds himself at the hands of the landlord and then the emperor, whose interest in the paintbrush is driven by greed. The emperor commands the boy to paint him a room full of riches. Ma Liang knows in his heart that it would not be right to paint such a thing. Instead, he paints a tree of gold on a solitary island in the middle of a sea. He paints a boat for the emperor to travel to the island, and he paints wind to fill its sails...and more wind...and more wind. The emperor is blown away, learning the lesson that "emperors who rule and paint with greed in mind don't deserve to come back."

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Find the location of the story's origin on a map. Use the map and other geographical information to make inferences about the landscape and people of that place. How might this information be relevant to a story set in this location?
- Review some of the different types of folktales so that students can classify this tale after viewing.
- The protagonist of this tale receives an unexpected gift. Have students think about a time when they received a special gift. Was it for a special occasion or was it unexpected? Did the gift change their life in any way? If so, explain.

Follow-Up Discussion

- Motifs are recurring elements found in many folktales. They include everything from stock characters, such as tricksters, to magical objects, such as flying carpets. Recall the events, characters and details of the tale. What motifs can be found in this classic story?
- What types of responsibility comes with owning a magic paintbrush? What would you paint if you had the magic paintbrush? How would you stay true to the intentions of the paintbrush?
- What you think Ma Liang's life was like after his encounter with the emperor? Have students brainstorm continuations to this tale to highlight how his life may, or may not, have changed. Does he live "happily ever after"?

Follow-up Activities

- Before folktales were written or turned into films, they were passed down orally, from one generation to the next. Introduce students to the art of storytelling. Discuss different ways in which the storyteller can engage listeners (e.g., using sound and gestures, giving vivid sensory details). Practice storytelling techniques by having each student retell a portion of this tale.
- *China: The Magic Paintbrush* is an example of a folktale that has a moral, or lesson. Ma Liang believed in painting from his heart but the emperor wanted Ma Liang to paint things that would satisfy his greed. The emperor soon learned the hard way that those wishes would not be fulfilled. Discuss the wide use of stories to teach lessons. Consider watching *Japan: Crossing the Snow* or *Caribbean: The Chief and the Carpenter* — both tales teach great lessons. Encourage students to get creative and come up with their own moral tales. Students can write and illustrate their stories or prepare for a dramatic storytelling.
- Act it out! Recreate *China: The Magic Paintbrush* in your classroom. This can be done as a puppet show, a mime skit, a student play, etc. In preparation for the production, examine and critically think about the story's elements of characters, setting and plot. Consider how the story might change if the setting was a different time and place.
- Because folktales originate from oral tradition, details sometimes shift or change as the story passes from one storyteller to the next. A quick illustration of this is the classroom game of "Telephone" (also referred to as "Whisper Down the Lane") and how a message often changes as it is whispered down a line of students. Share with students the book, *Liang and the Magic Paintbrush*, by Demi (Henry Holt & Company, 1988). It is a classic retelling of the same folktale. After reading this story, ask them to compare the animated tale and the book. In what ways are they similar? How do they differ? Which version do they prefer?

(Continued)

- Share the *Jade Stone: A Chinese Folktale* by Caryn Yacowitz (Pelican Publishing Company, 2005) with students. Like the *China: The Magic Paintbrush*, it features a clash of artistic ideas and values. In this story, the conflict is between a humble stone carver and the Great Emperor of China. Discuss the similarities and differences between the two tales in terms of character, setting and plot. Then, ask students to share their opinions about the moral, or lesson, which can be taken from each story. How can lessons from centuries-old tales be applied to modern-day life?
- Take an up-close look at Ma Liang's paintings and discover a style of Chinese painting that has been practiced for many centuries. Calligraphic brushstrokes, nature themes and black ink on silk or paper are all elements of this style. Visit www.metmuseum.org/explore/Chinese/html_pages/colors.htm to learn more and then invite students to paint in this style by using black watercolor paint and a brush. If student paintings are in a vertical format, they can be hung like scrolls around the room.
- Compare modern-day China with the setting and people portrayed in the folktale. Organize these similarities and differences using a Venn diagram.

Suggested Internet Resources

- www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/prehistory/china/
This site, by Minnesota State University, presents information on the history and culture of ancient China and the imperial dynasties.
- www.chinaculture.org/gb/en_chinaway/node_147.htm
Visit this site for a wealth of information on the people and culture of China. Find out what many in China do for fun, what they eat and what festivals they celebrate.
- www.darsie.net/talesofwonder/
This archive of folk and fairy tales from around the world presents a sampling of the many stories that make up our world's oral tradition.

Suggested Print Resources

To learn more about the land and people of China:

- Gree, Robert. *China*. Thomson Gale, Farmington Hills, MI; 1999.
- Simonds, Nina, Leslie Swartz and Children's Museum of Boston Staff. *Moonbeams, Dumplings & Dragon Boats: A Treasury of Chinese Holiday Tales, Activities & Recipes*. Harcourt Children's Books, Orlando, FL; 2002.

If you are interested in tales from China, you might also enjoy:

- Poole, Amy Lowry. *How the Rooster Got His Crown: A Chinese Folktale*. Holiday House, New York, NY; 1999.
- Young, Ed. *The Lost Horse: A Chinese Folktale*. Harcourt Children's Books, Orlando, FL; 2004.
- Young, Ed. *The Sons of the Dragon King: A Chinese Legend*. Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, New York, NY; 2004.

Teacher's Guide written by Megan Carnate, M.Ed., Curriculum Specialist, Schlessinger Media

Teacher's Guides for titles in this series are available at www.LibraryVideo.com

- | | | | |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|
| • Alaska: Raven Steals the Daylight | • Denmark: The Shepherdess and the Chimney Sweep | • Ireland: The Boy Who Had No Story | • Scotland: The Green Man of Knowledge |
| • Arabia: The Crown and the Sceptre | • England: Cap O' Rushes | • Israel: King Solomon and the Bee | • Scotland: The Loch Ness Kelpie |
| • Armenia: The Shoemaker's Son | • Finland: The Raspberry Worm | • Japan: Crossing the Snow | • Singapore: Redhill |
| • Australia: Bad Baby Amy | • France: Ewenn Congar | • Mongolia: Shepherd Boy Tumur | • South Africa: How Tortoise Won Respect |
| • Burkina Faso: The Tyrant and the Child | • Germany: Frau Holle | • Namibia: Omuninyan | • South Africa: Ummemo |
| • Canada: Timoon and the Narwhal | • Germany: The Enchanted Lion | • Norway: The Three Sisters Who Fell Into the Mountain | • Taiwan: Aunt Tiger |
| • Caribbean: The Chief and the Carpenter | • Greece: The Myth of Persephone | • Poland: Podna & Podni | • U.S.A.: John Henry: Steel-Driving Man |
| • Catalonia: The Manairons | • Holland: The Tree with the Golden Apples | • Poland: The Flower of Fern | • Wales: King March |
| • China: The Magic Gourd | • India: The Multi-Coloured Jackal | • Poland: The Story of Flax | • Wales: Merlin and the Dragons |
| • China: The Magic Paintbrush | • Ireland: Fionn | • Russia: The Two Brothers | |



Teacher's Guide Copyright 2007 by Schlessinger Media, a division of Library Video Company
 P.O. Box 580, Wynnewood, PA 19096 • 800-843-3620
 Programs © 2005 S4C International All Rights Reserved