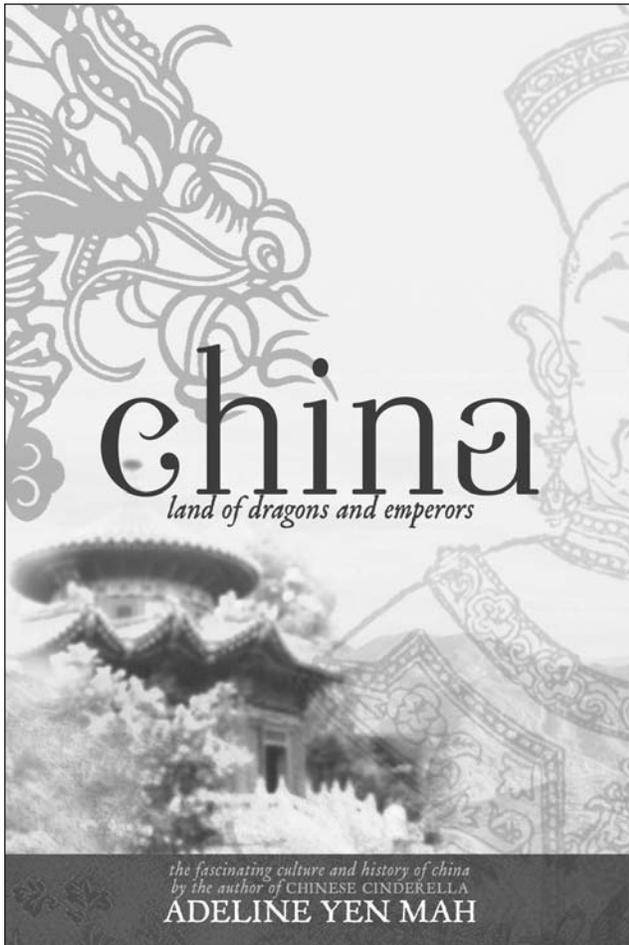


BOOKNOTES

educators guide



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THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

Symbolism & Myth • Power
Ingenuity • Women • Isolationism

GRADES 4-7

ABOUT THE BOOK

“I bring you gifts from China: treasures more enchanting than pearls, more precious than jade.” (p. IX) So begins *China: Land of Dragons and Emperors*, a history spanning nearly 2,300 years. Starting with a detailed explanation of the many symbols important to the Chinese people, the author creates a context in which readers can absorb the enormously rich and layered history of a land that has fascinated and intrigued the world for centuries. Focusing on the six dynasties, the emperors who ruled during them, and the important people and events that shaped each period, *China: Land of Dragons and Emperors* reads like a fast-paced drama filled to the brim with heroes and villains, foreign invaders, and battles ending in both stunning victories and crushing defeats. Readers will discover that many of the household objects that they use everyday were invented in China. They will travel back in time to witness the building of the Great Wall and travel the Silk Road in search of goods such as jade, porcelain, and of course, silk. They will be gripped by the ongoing dynastic sagas that played out over the course of Chinese history up until the close of the 20th century. But most of all, readers will come away with a deep understanding of a complex and culturally rich country, one that continues to awe and intrigue the world.

“Among these pages you will find tales of dragons and emperors, battles and love [These] stories have enthralled me throughout my life. If knowledge gained from history is the truest education, then this book is the best present I can give you.”

—Adeline Yen Mah, author (p. IX)

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PRE-READING ACTIVITY

To activate prior knowledge on China, post a KWL chart on the board or as an overhead transparency. The chart should have three columns with the following headings: K—What do you think you know about China?; W—What do you want to learn about China?; and L—What did you learn about China? Brainstorm with students what they already *know* about China. Record student responses on the chart under the letter K. Next, challenge each student to share at least one thing they *want to learn* about China. Record these responses on the chart under the letter W. Inform students that they will be reading a book about the history of China; one that contains an enormous amount of information on this country. After students have completed the reading, return to the chart and fill the L column with facts that the students have *learned*. Students can also use a personal KWL chart to record information as they read the text.

THEMATIC CONNECTIONS

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

SYMBOLISM & MYTH

Discuss the significance of myth as it relates to the dragon and its symbolic importance to Chinese history, its culture, and its people. How does China's dragon symbolism compare to western/European folklore about dragons? Discuss the significance of color and number symbolism to the Chinese people. How do red, white, black, green, blue, and yellow compare symbolically to the same colors in Western cultures? How did the Chinese display their history through symbolism during the 2008 Summer Olympic Games in Beijing?

POWER

Reread pages 55–71. Discuss examples of abuses of power by the emperor. Discuss the patterns that occurred in each dynasty in which emperors rose to power and then eventually lost it. How did ambition, greed, corruption, and deception lead to the ultimate demise of the dynastic system? Reread pages 77 and 78 and discuss why Taizong is considered by many Chinese to be the greatest of all the emperors. How did infighting, rival factions, and jockeying for power ultimately weaken China?

INGENUITY

In the Note to Readers, the author writes that the English philosopher Francis Bacon “wrote in 1620 that there were ‘three world-changing inventions: printing, gunpowder, and the compass.’” Do you agree with Bacon? Why or why not? Since 1620, mankind has created many more “world-changing” inventions. Name three inventions that you feel have produced the most global change and defend your reasoning. Reread pages 116–118, “Explosion of Inventions.” Discuss why so many of these very important inventions were created by the Chinese. What societal influences encouraged this ingenuity? How did foreign invaders over the course of China's history exploit Chinese inventions to their benefit?

WOMEN

Discuss the role of women throughout Chinese history. (Reread page 119, “Song Women.”) How were practices such as foot binding and the taking of concubines reflective of the way women were regarded in Chinese society? Discuss examples from the text in which China was ahead of its time in its treatment of women. How did the teachings of Confucius play a role in the lives of women throughout Chinese history? How does the China of today regard women and women's rights?

Note: This author has written her own life story and touches upon the role of woman in Chinese Cinderella.

ISOLATIONISM

Reread “The Great Wall.” (pp. 175–179). Do you think the First Emperor's decision to build the wall was sound? Effective? Reread “Defeat on the Talas River” on page 88. How did conquests from foreign invaders, such as the Arabs Muslims from Baghdad, affect other parts of Asia and Europe? Why would Chinese historians and Western historians have such differing points of view about this battle? During the Ming Dynasty, it was decided that all ocean voyages and naval exploration would cease, just as the Europeans were beginning an age of discovery. Why was this decision a mistake? Reread pages 184–192. How did the decision by China's late dynastic emperors and 20th-century Communist leaders to shut China off from the world ultimately weaken its power? What have been the results of reversing this tendency toward isolationism in today's China?



CONNECTING TO THE CURRICULUM

LANGUAGE ARTS/LITERACY

China has a rich tradition of proverbs. Review some of the proverbs in the text and discuss their meanings. (p. 209) Give your students time to research the proverbs of Confucius. Work with the art teacher or incorporate an art element in your lesson. A folded book can be created that uses the researched proverbs as textual content. (p. 46)

SOCIAL STUDIES

On pages 48 and 49, the author compares the Silk Road to the Internet by saying “another name for the Silk Road could be the Information Superhighway.” Have student begin a research project on the Silk Road, focusing on how the route encouraged trade as well as ideas.

Conduct a Web quest of a selection of the great archeological sites and architectural sites of China, such as the Great Wall, the Forbidden Palace, and the caves of Dunhuang and Luoyang. Assign students a site and challenge them to create a virtual tour and presentation of the site to present to the class. Remind them to emphasize the date of the archeological site and its enduring importance.

Place students into eight small groups and assign each a period presented in the book, beginning with “First Emperor of China” and ending with “Crippled Dynasty: The Qing.” (pp. 17 and 181 respectively) Each group should use the Internet and other reference materials to research their time period. Students can present their learning in a variety of ways, including written reports, artwork, or multimedia presentations.

SCIENCE

Place students in research pairs. Assign each pair one Chinese invention noted in the text. Pairs should use the Internet and other reference materials to research the invention, and report back to the class about what they learned and how this invention affected the world.

THE ARTS

China has a long and rich tradition of excellence in the arts. Work with the art teacher to embark on a unit focusing on the arts of China. If possible, take students on a field trip to a museum that has a collection of Chinese art and artifacts, such as jades, porcelains, bronzes, paintings, and scrolls.

Woodblock printing was invented in China around AD 710, during the Tang Dynasty. Have students reread pages 92 and 93 and discuss the importance of this invention. Next, share examples of and discuss how the Chinese language is comprised of characters that represent one or more meanings. (pp. 206–208) Give students time to write a short sentence using Chinese characters. During another session, students can create a woodblock print of their sentence using the technique described in the text.

VOCABULARY | USE OF LANGUAGE

Ask students to identify unfamiliar words and write definitions taking clues from the context of the story.

Such words may include:

p. 12	<i>currency</i>	p. 22	<i>plaited</i>	p. 50	<i>pagoda</i>	p. 113	<i>dispatched</i>
p. 13	<i>smuggled</i>	p. 22	<i>tunics</i>	p. 55	<i>disunion</i>	p. 166	<i>export</i>
p. 18	<i>elaborate</i>	p. 46	<i>proverb</i>	p. 91	<i>figurehead</i>	p. 184	<i>commerce</i>
p. 18	<i>immortality</i>						



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Adeline Yen Mah was born in Tianjin, China, and trained to be a doctor in London. She had a distinguished career in medicine in the United States. She published her memoir in 1997; *Falling Leaves* was an international bestseller that was translated into 18 languages. *Chinese Cinderella* is her memoir for young adults. She is also the author of *Chinese Cinderella and the Secret Dragon Society*. She is married to the artist Robert A. Mah, and they have two grown children. Mah and her husband divide their time between Los Angeles, London, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. For more information, visit her Web site at www.adelineyenmah.com.

INTERNET RESOURCES

The Great Wall of China

school.discoveryeducation.com/lessonplans/programs/greatwall/

Belief Systems Along the Silk Roads

www.askasia.org/teachers/lessons/plan.php?no=48&era=&grade=&geo=

China: An Ancient Country in a Modern World

www.education-world.com/a_lesson/lesson099.shtml

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