

Against the Wind

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Overview

This narrative blends fantasy with reality as it explores the emotions Ai Mei experiences when she has to leave her grandfather in China to start a new life with her family in New Zealand. Grandfather gives Ai Mei a kite as a farewell gift and the kite becomes a link between them.

There is an audio version of this text on the *School Journal Part 3 and Part 4 CD 2005*.

Suggested Teaching Purpose

Based on the information I have about my students' learning needs, what would be an appropriate teaching purpose for this session?

Examples of an appropriate teaching purpose are listed below.

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| • | To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of inferring , identifying the main idea, or analysing and synthesising. |
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Features of the Text to Consider in Context

What features of this text would support the teaching purpose?

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| • | The magical elements |
| • | The personification of the kite, for example, “glorious golden dragon”, “landing like a tame bird at her feet” |
| • | The frequent references to the distinctive Chinese colours of red and gold (but note that the “red” is actually more of a “pink” in the illustrations) |
| • | The relationship between the grandfather and Ai Mei |
| • | The themes of separation and overcoming adversity |
| • | The wise Chinese proverbs that suggest the main idea – that “It’s only by overcoming difficulties that you will succeed.” |
| • | The symbolism of the kite linking the granddaughter with the grandfather |
| • | The dramatic, highly descriptive opening sentence |
| • | The Mandarin calligraphy on the wings of the kite |
| • | The Chinese language included in the text. |

Readability

Noun frequency level: 11–13 years

What other features of this text might constitute challenges for my students? (For example, features that may require a prompt or a brief explanation.)

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| • | The use of the subjunctive on page 13, “... he flies as if he were in China ...” |
| • | The words and concepts: “writhes”, “unpredictable”, “calligraphy”, “obediently”. |

What prior knowledge would support my students in reading this text?

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| • | Some awareness of Chinese life and customs, for example, the tradition of respect for older people, the lucky colours of red and gold, Chinese dragons, and Chinese New Year |
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| • | Awareness of possible challenges faced by new immigrants |
| • | Familiarity with the concept of proverbs or whakatauki. |

Sharing Learning Outcomes with Your Students (select one or two)

I will be able to:

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| • | use inference to identify what is happening and how the characters are feeling; |
| • | make connections within this text and with my own experiences to help me infer the main idea; |
| • | consider how the writer has tried to convey her main idea. |

A Framework for the Lesson

How will I help my students to achieve the learning outcomes?

In the sections below, particular comprehension strategies, reading processes, and links to other aspects of literacy learning have been identified in brackets. Many of these relate directly to the highlighted teaching purpose, but others have also been identified where appropriate.

Before reading

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| • | In order to support your students with pronunciation of the Chinese words in this text, you could listen to the audio version before the lesson. |
| • | Tell the students the title of the story and ask them what ideas it suggests to them. (Making connections; inferring) |
| • | Confirm that this story is about facing challenges and that it includes some aspects that may be a bit surprising. |
| • | Share the learning outcome(s) with the students. Defer a discussion of the ideas and the Chinese cultural content in the text until the students have had an opportunity to read and infer meaning from the first two pages. |
| • | Clarify the learning outcome(s) with the students. |

During reading

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| • | Ask the students to read to the end of page 9 and to consider what the challenges might be. Prompt them to make connections to anything they know about China. “Use what you know about life in China to consider what things might be hard for Ai Mei in New Zealand.” (Making connections; forming hypotheses) |
| • | Ask the students to review pages 8 and 9 and to infer exactly what is happening here. For example, “Who is Jin Long?” “How do you know?” (Inferring) |
| • | Take some time to discuss the possible significance of the kite. “How has the writer conveyed that the kite is very special?” Reread the opening paragraph together, relishing the descriptive vocabulary and the writer’s use of personification. “Why has Grandfather chosen a kite as a farewell gift?” (Analysing and synthesising; inferring) |
| • | Draw the students’ attention to the final paragraph on page 9. “This paragraph has more ideas about why Grandfather gave Ai Mei the kite. Does it match with your earlier inferences?” (Inferring and cross-checking; synthesising) |
| • | Briefly explain that Grandfather is using proverbs to prepare Ai Mei for the challenge of her new life in New Zealand. (The students may notice that Grandfather doesn’t explicitly mention the challenge of being separated from his family.) “Why do you think the grandfather chose to speak to Ai Mei in this way?” Draw out the idea that proverbs are wise sayings and that the proverbs help to suggest that grandfather is old and wise. (Inferring) |

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| • | Explain to the students that there is another proverb in this text that will help them with their inferences about the main idea of the text. (Identifying the main idea) |
| • | Have the students read page 10 and ask them to clarify some of the challenges that Ai Mei has had to face. “Does this fit with your earlier predictions?” (Summarising; testing hypotheses) |
| • | “How is Ai Mei feeling?” “How do you know?” (Inferring) |
| • | Have the students read pages 11 and 12 and discuss the addition of the fantasy element. “What do you think is really happening?” “Who do you think is right, Ai Mei or her mother?” Encourage the students to predict what will happen next. (Inferring; forming hypotheses) |
| • | Ask the students to read page 13 and to discuss how this episode is different from the previous one. See whether they pick up on the idea that Ai Mei says nothing to her parents about the calligraphy this time. (Making connections) |
| • | Encourage the students to predict how the story will end and then have them read to the end of the story and review their hypotheses. (Forming and testing hypotheses) |
| • | “What does this ending suggest about Ai Mei and her life in New Zealand from this point on?” (Inferring; identifying the main idea) |

After reading

Select from these suggestions according to your purpose for the reading and what you’ve observed about the students’ needs during the reading.

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| • | Encourage the students to share their ideas about why the magical writing was important to the narrative. For example, the magical calligraphy made Ai Mei feel that Grandfather wasn’t too far away; the kite and the writing were like a direct link to Grandfather; the messages reminded her of Grandfather’s wise words; or the suggestion that you can get through difficult times if you have something special to believe in. “So, do you think the writing was really there or did Ai Mei imagine it?” (Inferring) |
| • | You could have the students reflect more deeply on the writer’s craft by drawing out the idea that she prepares the reader for the idea of magic by personifying the kite. The vivid, animated description in the opening paragraph helps to create the idea that this kite is something extraordinary. (Analysing and synthesising) |
| • | Have the students reread the messages from Grandfather in the text and analyse the meaning they have in common. (Analysing and synthesising; identifying the main idea) |

Reflect with the students on how well the learning outcome has been achieved and note any teaching points for future sessions.

Links to further learning

What follow-up tasks will help my students to consolidate and/or extend their new learning?

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| • | Share some proverbs and whakatauki together and draw out the idea that they are like guidelines to help people make sense of the world. List them and their meanings on a reference chart and challenge yourself and the students to use them in appropriate contexts. (Making connections; building vocabulary) |
| • | The students could read “On the Reclaim” in SJ 4.3.04 and consider the main idea of the text, drawing on what they’ve learnt about proverbs. |

