

Finding China

by Eva Wong Ng

From *School Journal*, Part 3, Number 3, 2006

Overview

At the age of eleven, Yani travels alone to China to attend school and learn about her Chinese heritage. This text has strong links to social studies and could be used as a guided text for a small group or a shared or independent text for whole-class discussion. The clear structure provides support for less confident readers.

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.

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">To support the students in developing the comprehension strategies of making connections, asking questions, and summarising. |
|---|

Features of the Text to Consider in Context

What features of this text would support the teaching purpose?

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The teaser on the contents page |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The decision of the writer to adopt Yani's persona (to use the first person so it sounds as if Yani has written this report and is addressing the reader directly) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The personal tone and humour, for example, "even if I do say so myself", the honest opinions that Yani gives, for example, "On the whole, I didn't like the food", and the use of exclamation marks for impact |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The clear structure of the report with an introduction, information grouped into sections, and a reflective conclusion |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The mixture of factual information about China and personal observations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The opportunities for the students to make comparisons between China and New Zealand and between Yani's experiences of school in Shanghai and their own experiences of school |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The rhetorical questions that engage the reader, especially in the first and final sections |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The inclusion of a definition and explanations |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The supportive photographs, in particular the example of calligraphy, and the use of "tape" to help personalise the photographs. |

Readability

Noun frequency level: 9–10 years for guided reading

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

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Particular words and concepts, including "Shanghai", "dubious", "teary-eyed", "Ping-He Bilingual School", "dormitory", "boarded", "one child per family rule", "calligraphy", "compulsory", "characters" (to mean Chinese words), "novelty" |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">The Chinese context, including concepts such as a city with a population of 13 million. |

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

- | |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Their experiences of other cultures and of travelling |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">Their experiences of being in unfamiliar situations, on their own, or homesick. |

- Their experiences of how asking questions and making connections can help them understand what they read.

Sharing the learning outcome and success criteria with your students

Learning outcome

I will be able to make comparisons between going to school in China and my own experiences of going to school.

Success criteria

I will be successful when I have:

- thought of questions about Yani's experiences in China and looked for answers as I read;
- summarised the information about school in China and made connections to my experiences of school in New Zealand.

A Framework for the Lesson

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

Before reading

- "Today we are going to be making connections to experiences of being on our own in unfamiliar places." Encourage your students to share their experiences of travel. "What were some differences between home and the place you visited?" Students who have recently come to New Zealand or who may have attended different sorts of schools within New Zealand, for example, moving from a small to a large school, or from a rural to an urban school are likely to have interesting experiences to contribute. (Making connections)
- Have the students read page 9 and discuss what they know about Shanghai (or China). Locate Dunedin and Shanghai on a map. "What could be some differences between these places?" (Making connections)
- Discuss the idea of Yani going to Shanghai on her own. "Why do you think she went?" If necessary, draw attention to her Chinese name so that the students realise there is a family connection, for example, she may want to find out more about her family heritage. Some students may also be aware of the concept of student exchanges. "Based on your own experiences of school and of travelling to unfamiliar places, what questions do you have about Yani's trip?" Record the students' questions in the group reading book. (Forming hypotheses; making connections; asking questions)
- Have the students think, pair, and share about the sorts of connections to their own experiences they expect to make while reading about Yani's trip. (Making connections)
- Share the learning outcome and success criteria with the students.

During reading

- Have the students read page 10 and review their predictions about why Yani went to Shanghai. Make connections to any experiences the students have of learning another language or of being in a place where most people speak a different language. Remind the students that making connections to their own experiences will help them to understand what it's like for Yani. (Testing hypotheses; making connections)
- "What questions do you think Yani had? What do we know about the experiences of people in our class that could help us to imagine what she might be thinking or wondering about?" (Making connections; asking questions)
- Have the students use sticky notes to mark examples of new and interesting words in the texts, to discuss after the reading. (Building vocabulary)

- Create a T-chart using the headings on pages 11– 14 for comparing information about school in Shanghai with your students’ experiences of school. Have the students preview the headings and photographs on pages 11–15 and think, pair, and share some of the questions they have about the text. (Making connections; asking questions)
- Ask the students to read page 11. “Has this page answered any of your questions? Has it made you think of new ones?” Draw out the idea that effective readers continually ask themselves questions as they read. (Asking questions)
- Have the students summarise the main points from page 11, using the text and photographs. Add their summaries to the T-chart along with the connections to their own experiences of school, as in the example below. Prompt the students to use the chart as a tool to highlight points of particular interest to them. Allow plenty of time to discuss unfamiliar concepts, such as the immense size of the school, sharing a dormitory, and the one child per family rule.

†	Our Experiences	Yani’s Experiences
School (buildings)	some of our classes are bilingual	bilingual
	built in 1963, one storey	modern buildings, 3 storeys
	240 pupils	2000 pupils
	not a boarding school	dormitories, boarding school
	same	often both parents working
	mostly more than one child	no brothers and sisters (one child per family)
	we have our own mums at home (sometimes grumpy)	grumpy dorm mum
	quite cold in winter but we have good heaters at school (and at home)	very cold
	doors!	no doors on toilets or showers
	same	friendly students
Schoolwork		
Food		
Homesickness		

(Summarising; making connections)

- Have the students read pages 12–15, summarising the key points, adding them to the comparison chart, and discussing points of interest. (Summarising)
- Prompt the students to visualise themselves in Yani’s situation. “Why do you think Sophie asking to be Yani’s friend was one of the best things that happened to Yani? How would you feel if you didn’t know how to introduce yourself? How does thinking about your own experiences help you understand Yani’s feelings?” (Visualising; making connections)
- Discuss how the experience affected Yani. “Why do you think she says she understands people better?” You could discuss what “respectful” might mean in New Zealand and China. (Analysing and synthesising; inferring; evaluating)

- Encourage deeper discussion about Yani’s school experiences. “Do you agree that the Chinese children work harder? What could an old-fashioned way of teaching be?” Support them to share their ideas without being too quick to judge. “Can we talk about one way being better or worse than another — or are the ways just different?” Remind the students that the text presents one person’s experience and that other people’s experiences might differ, so it’s important not to generalise. (Making connections; visualising; evaluating)
- “Do you think you could do what Yani did? Why or why not? What words would you use to describe Yani?” (Making connections; evaluating)

After reading

- Review the students’ questions and discuss how they might be able to find the answers to any remaining questions. (Asking questions)
- Ask the students to share their examples of interesting words from the text and why they chose them. Discuss their meanings and the strategies the students used (or could have used) to work them out. For example, using the context clues (the series of questions) to work out the meaning of “dubious” in the third paragraph on page 10. Look for opportunities to incorporate new vocabulary into classroom conversations, for example, “dubious” or “novelty” (or “novel”, meaning “new”). (Building vocabulary)
- Review the learning outcome and success criteria and reflect with the students on how well the learning outcome has been achieved. “How did making connections to your own experiences help you to get a better sense of what it was like for Yani? Where in particular?” 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?

- Your students could interview someone else about their experiences in China or another country. They could use the headings in the report as a guide. (Making connections; asking questions)
- Have your students research answers to any remaining questions. (Asking questions)
- Your students could read other texts about experiences in a new country, for example, “Against the Wind” in SJ 3.2.05 and “Walking on the Grass” in SJ 1.4.06. (Making connections)
- Have the students find out more about schooling in other countries, for example, by finding information in the library or on the Internet or by setting up an email relationship with another school. (Making connections)

ISBN: 978 0 7903 2359 6