



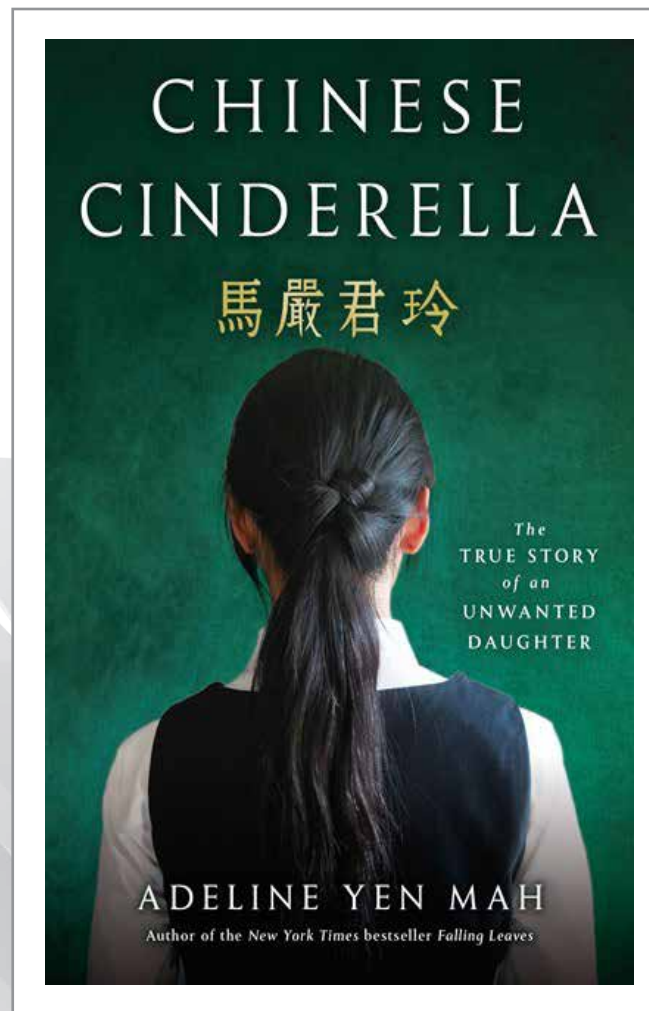
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 9-12

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

Chinese Cinderella

Adeline Yen Mah



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

Chinese Cinderella

Adeline Yen Mah

TEACHER GUIDE

NOTE:

The trade book edition of the novel used to prepare this guide is found in the Novel Units catalog and on the Novel Units website. Using other editions may have varied page references.

Please note: We have assigned Interest Levels based on our knowledge of the themes and ideas of the books included in the Novel Units sets, however, please assess the appropriateness of this novel or trade book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading with them. You know your students best!

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3901 Union Blvd., Suite 155

St. Louis, MO 63115

sales@novelunits.com

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, comparison, problem solving, decision making, recalling, interpreting evidence, forming opinions, point of view

Comprehension

Analyzing, cause/effect, classifying, details, generalizing, inferencing, predicting, summarizing, main idea, evaluating

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral report, dramatization, panel discussion, presentation, storytelling, oral argument

Vocabulary

Context clues, synonyms, antonyms, definitions

Writing

Report, diary entry, essay, encyclopedia entry, biographical sketch, how-to, letter, description, creative writing, note-taking and listing, newspaper journalism, television script

Literary Elements

Characterization, identifying main events, simile, metaphor, plot, theme

Across the Curriculum

Art—posters, collage, illustration, origami, pictographs; Health—exercises, medicine; Literature—literary review; Science—animal behavior, weather; Social Studies—culture, geography, government, history, maps, politics, sociology; Women’s Issues—customs

Genre: memoir

Setting: Tianjin, Shanghai, and Hong Kong (China); 1941 to 1952

Point of View: first person

Themes: self-motivation, courage, strength of character, loss, triumph over adversity, family relations, child abuse

Conflict: person vs. person, person vs. self

Style: narrative

Tone: serious; dark except for the ending

Date of First Publication: 1999

Summary

Adeline Yen Mah recounts her suffering from parental abuse between the ages of four and fourteen. In 1941, as a kindergartner in Tianjin, China, Adeline is at the top of her class but is unwanted at home. She is considered bad luck because her mother died giving birth to her. Her four older siblings mistreat her for taking away their mother. Their father takes a new wife who rejects her stepchildren and vents her wrath on Adeline. After school, first-grader Adeline gets lost because no one bothers to pick her up. She sees her pet duckling killed when her father uses it to test his dog's obedience. She is chastised for attending a friend's birthday party. She is beaten because schoolmates visit to honor her election as class president. To separate her from a supportive aunt, she is left at a Tianjin convent school threatened by the Communist advance. Rescued by another aunt, Adeline rejoins her parents in Hong Kong. She is placed in a boarding school and largely forgotten. Then, in 1952, she wins an international play-writing competition. Finally, in a moment of pride, her father grants her request to study in England.

About the Author

Adeline Yen Mah was born in Tianjin, China, in 1937. Her father, a tycoon, cared too little to recall the date she was born. He later gave Adeline his November 30th birthday. A year after his wife died at Adeline's birth, he married a beautiful Eurasian woman who controlled him and abused his children. *Chinese Cinderella* records a frightful situation from which Mah escaped solely through fortitude and scholastic triumph. At last permitted to go to college, she studied medicine in England. She became an anesthesiologist in California. There she married her second husband, university professor Robert Mah, and raised two children. Although Mah hoped for acceptance by her family, she was disinherited through the machinations of her siblings and stepmother. Her first book, *Falling Leaves* (1997), exposes the rivalries and betrayals within her family. It became an international bestseller. Mah's adaptation for younger readers, *Chinese Cinderella*, was named a *Publishers Weekly* Best Book and an ALA Best Book for Young Adults.

Background Information

Chinese Cinderella can be understood in general terms as a study on the effects of child abuse. Mah's life story also personalizes significant developments in Chinese political and cultural history. Examples of Western influences and changing traditions mark the memoir. One example is the situation of Mah's grandmother (Nai Nai). Dialogue about her grandmother's bound feet reveals a shifting status for women. Another example is deviation from traditional Chinese concepts of filial piety and veneration of family. Change can be inferred from the situation of

Mah's grandfather (Ye Ye), who is disregarded by his son, Mah's father. A source to consult is *China: A New History* by John King Fairbank and Merle Goldman (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992, 1998). Useful for chronology is the *Encyclopedia of World History* (ed. Peter N. Stearns, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001). Maps and a geographical/historical perspective can be found on pages about China in *Geography: Realms, Regions, and Concepts* by H. J. de Blij and Peter O. Muller (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2000). Other aids are Mah's *Falling Leaves* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1997) and *Watching the Tree* (New York: Broadway Books, 2001).

Characters

Adeline/Yen Jun-Ling/Wu Mei—narrator whose experiences from ages 4 to 14 form the memoir

Niang—Adeline's abusive stepmother; a Eurasian (half-French) beauty who rules her husband

Father—Adeline's indifferent parent; a business magnate enthralled by his second wife

Aunt Baba—a strong support to Adeline; unwed sister of Adeline's father

Ye Ye—Adeline's paternal grandfather; a positive influence in Adeline's life

Big Sister—sibling six years older than Adeline who mistreats her

First (Big) Brother—sibling five years older than Adeline who mistreats her

Second Brother—sibling four years older than Adeline who mistreats her

Third Brother—sibling three years older than Adeline; a support to her but unreliable

Fourth Brother—Adeline's half-sibling favored by her parents

Little Sister—Adeline's half-sibling favored by her parents

Wu Chun-mei—Adeline's ten-year-old school friend

Aunt Reine Schilling—sister to Niang; a positive mother figure who rescues Adeline from the Communist advance on Tianjin

Victor Schilling—Aunt Reine's son who protests Adeline's ostracism by Niang

Nai Nai—Adeline's paternal grandmother whose death allows Niang more power in the family

Initiating Activities

1. Social Issues/Math: Tell students that *Chinese Cinderella* recounts the true story of a girl who grew up in an abusive family situation. Her experiences and feelings can be used to understand family and child abuse in general. On a bulletin board, display statistics on child abuse and information on where abused children can go for help.
2. Multimedia: Have reference sources about Chinese life, folklore, history, and geography available for students to consult as they read the book. Show videotapes or photographs relevant to Chinese life, World War II as it affected China, and internal politics with emphasis on Chiang Kai-shek, Mao Ze-dong, Nationalist forces, and the Red Army.
3. Geography/Economics: Show a map of China. Locate Tianjin, Shanghai, and Hong Kong. Research and give a brief overview of the commercial and financial roles of these cities. Research and briefly note the role of Hong Kong in Sino-British relations.
4. Culture/Discussion: Have students read the Preface of the memoir. Direct them to the section about names. Ask what names might be used in the text to mean Adeline. Tell students that they will use the name Adeline for writing assignments and discussion about the book.

Chapters 1–4, pp. 1–21

Four-year-old Adeline brings her top-of-the-class medal to Aunt Baba. Big Sister says Adeline is bad luck for causing Mama's death. The Japanese control Tianjin; the French rule Adeline's family's concession. Adeline basks in Father's notice of her medal, but no family members attend when Adeline is given a special award. Father disappears, then Niang and Fourth Brother disappear, too. Nai Nai complains about her bound feet and dies of a stroke while taking a bath.

Vocabulary

concessions (5)
bilingual (6)
maimed (8)
assent (10)
identical (13)
tranquil (17)
episode (20)
virtues (20)

Discussion Questions

1. What does Big Sister tell Adeline about Mama's death? How would you feel if you were Adeline? (*Big Sister tells Adeline she is bad luck because she caused Mama's death. Students may list feelings of being unhappy with themselves, unwanted, unloved, and blamed for others' troubles. Answers will vary. pp. 3–4*)
2. When Adeline begins her memoir, which family members reside in the home? What is the family's social level or degree of wealth? Support your answer with examples from the text. (*Family members besides Adeline include Father, Niang, Ye Ye, Nai Nai, Aunt Baba, Big Sister, Big Brother, Second Brother, Third Brother, Fourth Brother, and Little Sister. The family is very wealthy.*

Niang wears expensive perfume and jewelry and dresses in clothes from Paris. Their house has a garden, porches, and balconies. They have seven maids, a cook, a chauffeur, and a rickshaw puller. Father is so successful in business that the Japanese want to be his partners. pp. 4, 12–13, 16–17)

3. What is the political situation in Tianjin? in the concession where Adeline resides? (*Foreign soldiers occupy Tianjin. At the time Adeline begins her memoir, the Japanese had conquered most of China, including Tianjin. Adeline resides in a concession still governed by French officials. pp. 5–6*)
4. Describe the relationship between Adeline and Aunt Baba. How does Aunt Baba feel about Adeline's school achievement? (*Aunt Baba began to care for Adeline when Adeline's mother died. Adeline and Aunt Baba share a room and are very close. Aunt Baba takes great pride in Adeline's school achievement. She locks Adeline's award in her safe-deposit box. pp. 1–2, 5*)
5. Why is Father's recognition of her medal so special to Adeline? What does the scene tell you about this father-daughter relationship? (*It is the first time Father singles out Adeline or says anything to her. Because Father has ignored her, Adeline is thrilled by his recognition. She wants to please Father by studying harder and continuing to wear the medal. pp. 11, 15*)
6. How do Big Sister and the three brothers treat Adeline? Is a belief in bad luck the sole reason they behave as they do toward her? (*Second Brother hits Adeline because of her school medal. Third Brother praises Adeline's medal but joins Big Sister and his brothers in stealing Adeline's dragon's eyes. Adeline knows her siblings, especially Big Sister and Second Brother, are displeased with her for wearing the medal. Students may assume that the siblings are jealous of Adeline's scholastic success. pp. 4, 9, 11, 15*)
7. Why does Father disappear? How do the absences of Father, Niang, and their son change the lives of Adeline and the others still at home? (*Students should infer that Father disappears to avoid a business partnership with the Japanese. Life becomes peaceful and happy with Father, Niang, and Fourth Brother gone. pp. 16–17*)
8. **Prediction:** Will Adeline be able to keep Father's attention by winning awards at school?
9. **Prediction:** Will Adeline ever be able to change the way her sister and brothers feel about her?