



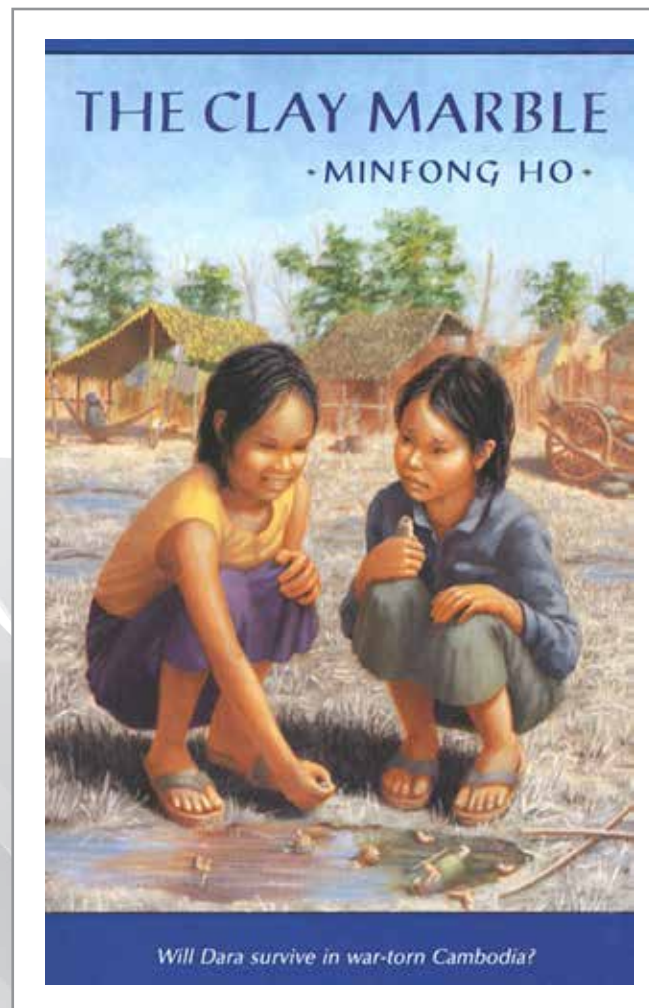
TEACHER GUIDE

GRADES 6-8

COMPREHENSIVE CURRICULUM BASED LESSON PLANS

The Clay Marble

Minfong Ho



READ, WRITE, THINK, DISCUSS AND CONNECT

The Clay Marble

Minfong Ho

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!

ISBN 978-1-50203-687-2

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Skills and Strategies

Thinking

Research, pros/cons, brainstorming,
predicting, critical thinking,
compare/contrast

Comprehension

Cause/effect, decision-making

Literary Elements

Characterization, setting, simile,
metaphor, personification,
symbolism, theme, point of view,
protagonist/antagonist, conflict,
plot

Writing

Letter, essay, advertisement, book
chapter, song, afterword, critique,
persuasive speeches

Vocabulary

Definitions, parts of speech,
synonyms/antonyms, word used
in context

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation,
public speaking, interview

Across the Curriculum

Art—sculpting, sketching; History—
Cambodia, Communism;
Geography—map reading, map-
making; Music—song lyrics;
Science—agriculture, monsoons

Genre: historical fiction

Setting: war-torn Cambodia, early 1980s

Point of View: first person

Themes: war, family, courage, faith, survival

Conflict: person vs. person, society vs. society, person vs. self, person vs. society

Tone: innocent, emotional

Date of First Publication: 1991

Summary

With her country ravaged by war, her father killed mercilessly, and her home about to be destroyed, 12-year-old Dara must flee to the Border with her mother and older brother, Sarun. At the Thai-Cambodian border, they settle into a refugee camp and join another fragmented family. Dara befriends Jantu, who seems to have magic hands, and Dara's brother falls in love with Jantu's cousin, Nea. Before long, the two families must leave the Border, but Jantu's baby brother is injured in the escape, and Dara and Jantu are separated from their families. Dara finds herself on a life-changing journey to find their families and reunite them with Jantu and her baby brother. She must also convince Sarun to move home before planting season rather than enlist in the military.

About the Author

Minfong Ho was born in Rangoon, Burma, but grew up on the outskirts of Bangkok, Thailand. Her parents were Chinese, so she learned both Chinese and Thai. She later learned English and considers it the language of her head, while Chinese is the language of her heart. Ho began writing while attending college in America and longing for home. "When I wrote *Sing to the Dawn*, it was in moments of homesickness during the thick of winter in upstate New York, when Thailand seemed incredibly far away," says Ho.

Ho graduated from Cornell University, then returned to Southeast Asia where she worked as a journalist and lecturer. In 1976, she returned to the United States and married a scientist she had met at Cornell during her undergraduate years. She also went back to school to earn a master of fine arts in creative writing from Cornell. In 1980, Ho did relief work along the Thai-Cambodian border, an experience that inspired the writing of *The Clay Marble*. Among Ho's other works are *Rice Without Rain*, *The Stone Goddess*, *Sing to the Dawn*, and a picture book, *Hush!: A Thai Lullaby*.

Background Information

Pol Pot (or Saloth Sar) was the leader of the Khmer Rouge (Red Cambodians) and the Prime Minister of Cambodia from 1976–1979. It is estimated that 25% of the Cambodians, or almost 2 million people, were killed under his rule.

In an attempt to overthrow Cambodia's prince, Norodom Sihanouk, Pol Pot organized a large resistance force, which was active for many years. His hope was to revolutionize Cambodia the way he had seen Mao Zedong's Cultural Revolution unfold in Communist China. Prince Sihanouk was ousted from power in 1970 by a right-wing military faction, which was supported by the United States. U.S. military personnel invaded parts of Cambodia to fight the Viet Cong on the border of South Vietnam. This action led Prince Sihanouk to join forces with Pol Pot. When the United States left Cambodia in 1976, many people supported Pol Pot's faction over the military government that had been in place.

After gaining control of Cambodia in 1976, Pol Pot forced all citizens out of the cities to create an agrarian utopia. He closed Cambodia to the world by ousting all embassies, eliminating outside media, and forbidding any type of foreign assistance. Many Cambodians died of malnutrition or execution in what are today known as the “killing fields.” People worked from 4 a.m. until 10 p.m. every day and were allowed to eat only 180 grams of rice every two days. Anyone with education or beliefs that represented the “old society,” and anyone suspected of being disloyal to Pol Pot, was executed. Prince Sihanouk was never allowed to reinstate the Cambodian monarchy. In 1978, the Vietnamese entered Cambodia to remove Pol Pot from power, which happened in January 1979. A puppet government was put in place, led by Heng Samrin, a former Khmer Rouge soldier who had defected. Instability continued in Cambodia for the next 17 years as Pol Pot insurgents continued to fight.

Many groups with different interests sprung up along the Thai-Cambodian border. One of these groups was the Khmer Serei (Free Khmer), a right-wing guerilla movement that was anti-Communist and anti-monarchical. It garnered little support overall in the fighting. Note: This is the political faction that supports Kung Silor’s base camp in the book.

Sources: http://www.unitedhumanrights.org/Genocide/pol_pot.htm
http://encyclopedia.laborlawtalk.com/Pol_Pot (active at the printing of this guide)

Characters

Dara—a 12-year-old girl who flees her home after her father is killed; Sarun’s sister; becomes Jantu’s best friend

Sarun—Dara’s older brother; headstrong; must lead his family after his father’s death

Mother—Sarun and Dara’s mother; strong and wise

Nea—Grandpa Kem’s granddaughter; gentle and kind; flees to the Border with her grandfather and two cousins after her parents are killed; becomes engaged to Sarun

Grandpa Kem—travels to the Border with his three grandchildren, Nea, Jantu, and Baby; only remaining adult in the family

Jantu—Nea’s 13-year-old cousin; a storyteller and craft maker; becomes Dara’s best friend; dreams of a peaceful future with a “real” family; protector and caretaker of her infant brother, Baby

Baby—Jantu’s infant brother; wounded in an attack at the Border and sent to a hospital with Jantu

Chnay—an orphan who made his way to the Border; bullies Jantu but later befriends Dara

Kung Silor—the General at the base camp where Dara’s family takes refuge

Initiating Activities

1. Geography: Have students locate Southeast Asia on a map and identify all of the countries in that region of the world, especially noting the border between Cambodia and Thailand.
2. Brainstorming: Place “war” in the center of an Attribute Web (see page 6 of this guide). Allow students to brainstorm a list of meanings for this word and speculate on how war relates to the book.
3. Prediction: Give students the following words—children, death, courage, family, and home. Have students predict what the book will be about based on these clues.
4. Discussion: Lead the class in a discussion of how war affects children.

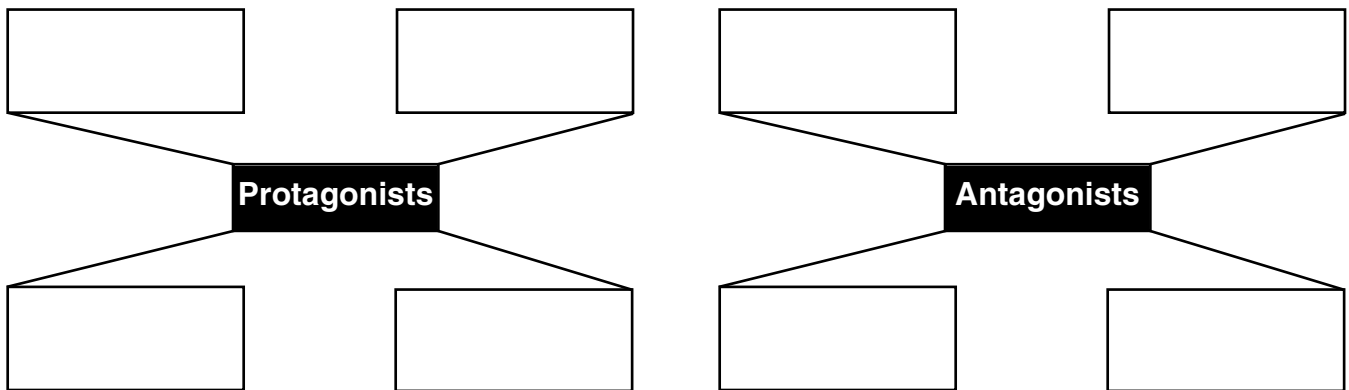
Protagonists and Antagonists

The main character in a story is called the **protagonist**. Sometimes we call the protagonist the hero or heroine (the "good" person). The character who opposes the hero in a story is called the **antagonist**. Sometimes we call the antagonist the villain (the "bad" person).

Directions: Think about stories you have read. Who were some of the protagonists (heroes/heroines) in these stories? Who were the antagonists (villains)? List some of the protagonists and antagonists and the stories in which they appeared.

Protagonists	Antagonists	Story

Complete the charts below by listing some common characteristics of protagonists and antagonists. For example, a protagonist is often brave. An antagonist may be cunning or cruel. Sometimes the antagonist is not just a person but a belief or custom.



As you read, decide who is the protagonist and who or what is the antagonist. Notice their characteristics and compare/contrast them to the characters you listed in the chart above.

Chapters 13–15, pp. 105–135

Sarun is growing more enthralled with the military than ever before. Dara and Nea begin to prepare the oxcarts to leave for home alone, without Sarun’s knowledge or help. As time draws near, Sarun reluctantly gets Dara a pass to travel to the hospital to get Jantu and Baby. Dara and Nea visit the hospital and meet Jantu’s new friend, Duoic, who was injured in a landmine accident. As the three girls and Baby return to the base camp in the dark, they are mistaken for enemy soldiers, and Jantu is shot in the chest. The decision is made to wait to take her to the hospital until the next day, when travel is safer.

Vocabulary

bountiful (107)
indignantly (107)
placatingly (107)
belligerent (108)
dejectedly (110)
axle (111)
tarpaulin (112)
sentry (116)
bullock (118)
emigrate (120)
distended (122)
reverie (125)
subdued (129)
stanch (135)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you think caused Dara to find her family—the magic marble, good thinking, her mother’s prayers, or something else? *(Answers will vary. pp. 105–106)*
2. Why doesn’t Sarun think it is important for Dara to see Jantu quickly? How does he seem different than he did the last time Dara saw him? Why do you think Sarun is changing? *(Sarun assures Dara that Jantu is in a very safe place, and that it may take time to get a pass to see her. He says that the flag-raising is more important to him right now than thinking about getting home and planting rice. He also eats all of the fritters without thinking to share with others, even Dara, whose homecoming they are all celebrating. Before, he seemed less selfish, and continued to refuse offers to enlist because he would rather go home and plant a new rice crop. Answers will vary, but note the propaganda the military is teaching the new volunteers/recruits. pp. 107–109)*
3. What does Dara suggest to Nea when Nea says Sarun isn’t interested in going home yet? What does this tell you about Dara’s character? Would she have acted this way in the beginning of the story? *(Dara suggests that she and Nea load the carts without Sarun knowing. Nea thinks the task is too large and difficult for her and Dara to do alone. Dara assures her they can do it, and will not take no for an answer. Dara is more assertive and bold than she was at the beginning of the novel, when she cowered even in Chnay’s presence. pp. 110–111)*
4. Why does Sarun wait so long to ask for the pass when he gets it so quickly? Do you think Sarun will ever be the way he was before joining the military? *(Answers will vary. Students should mention that Sarun seems happy being a soldier and is reluctant to leave the base for home. Bringing Jantu and Baby back moves the family a step closer to being ready to move home. pp. 116–117)*
5. What is the purpose of the barbed wire at Khao I Dang? How does Khao I Dang compare to Nong Chan? *(to keep the refugees who belong there inside the fence, and also to keep the refugees who do not belong there out of the camp; Because of the regulation of people coming and going, Khao I Dang is more orderly than Nong Chan with clearly organized roads and guards to keep watch. The people at Khao I Dang seem more captive than those at Nong Chan. pp. 119–120)*
6. What injustice does Dara see after visiting the children’s ward of the hospital? What do you think of Nea’s question, “These children...why must the children suffer, when it’s the men who are fighting” (pp. 122–123)? *(Children in the hospital are dying of malnutrition. The soldiers a camp away are eating rice seed, supposedly to keep their strength up to “protect” the*

people, while these children—those needing the most protection—are starving. Answers will vary. Discuss the effects of war on children and whether or not the young suffer alone while the adults fight to decide who will rule.)

7. How was Jantu's friend, Duoic, injured? What message do you think the author is trying to communicate by introducing his character into the story? Do you agree or disagree with the author's message? (*He stepped on a land mine. Answers will vary. Suggestions: The author is trying to reinforce her point that war hurts children, who have not asked for the war and are unable to participate in it except as victims. Others may think the author is making a point about the danger of land mines, which is a political "hot topic" because children are often injured by land mines while the soldiers, for whom the land mines are intended, are trained in how to avoid them. pp. 125–126*)
8. What message does Duoic send when he is able to pick up the water bottle by himself? (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: He won't give up, he will overcome the obstacles in his life, he will refuse to give in to feelings of failure or hopelessness when bad things happen. pp. 127–128*)
9. It "doesn't seem fair" to Dara that Duoic cannot return home like she can (p. 130). How would you characterize Dara's feelings, and do you agree or disagree with Jantu's feelings on the subject? (*Answers will vary. Suggestion: Students may note that Dara's feelings are those of compassion, and while compassion is an important emotion for people to have, there are also sometimes difficult realities to face. Some may agree with Jantu that Duoic would not have made it, while others may believe he should have been given the chance to try to live a normal life again somewhere.*)
10. Do you think it was right for the soldier to shoot at unidentified people approaching the base camp? Why or why not? Do you agree with Sarun's decision to wait until after the flag-raising to send Jantu back to the hospital? (*Answers will vary. pp. 133–135*)
11. **Prediction:** Will Jantu survive the gunshot wound?

Supplementary Activities

1. Science: Research monsoons in Southeast Asia. Report on what causes monsoons, how often they come, and how they affect agriculture.
2. History: At Kung Silor's base camp, a loudspeaker continues to blare out propaganda for the soldiers and citizens to hear. Research the term "propaganda" and rulers who have used propaganda to persuade people to join their cause. Analyze whether or not the use of propaganda is the best way to gather a following. Create a poster of examples of propaganda and write a report about your findings.
3. Literary Devices: **Similes**—"Nea and I...like a crab scuttling across the sand" (p. 112); refugee camp...like stepping into our toy village (p. 120); "people were cooped up here like turtles in a stagnant pond" (p. 120)