

Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen

by
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Book Information

Lloyd Alexander, The Remarkable Journey of Prince Jen
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Interest Level: UG

Bearing six unusual gifts, young Prince Jen embarks on a perilous quest and emerges triumphantly into manhood.

Topics: Adventure, Discovery/Exploration; Family Life, Growing Up; Fantasy/Imagination, Misc./Other; People, Royalty

Main Characters

Fat-choy an official who beats Jen and sentences him to wear the cangue
Fragrance of Orchid, Plum Blossom minor characters in the story, who benefit from Jen's gifts for Yuan-ming
Hong the innkeeper who benefits from Voyaging Moon's flute playing
King T'ai Prince Jen's father
Li Kwang the commander of palace troops, who agrees to journey with Jen
Mafoo Prince Jen's servant and companion on his journey
Master Fu an old man whom Jen rescues from drowning
Master Hu Jen's beloved teacher, who has disappeared
Master Shu a wise old man, who has been sentenced to wear a cangue
Master Wu a stranger who tells King T'ai about the Kingdom of T'ien-kuo
Moxa a professional thief who helps Jen on his travels
Natha Yellow Scarf a villain who terrorizes the countryside and attempts to take over the Kingdom of T'ang
Niang-niang, Chen-cho, Lao-hu, Master Chu minor characters in the story, who benefit from Jen's gifts for Yuan-ming

Voyaging Moon a flute player Jen meets on his journey, whom he eventually marries
Young Lord Prince Jen Shao-yeh the principal character in the story; a young prince who knows the essential information to rule, but lacks experience
Yuan-ming the ruler of T'ien-kuo

Vocabulary

alms free gifts for the poor
litigant person involved in a lawsuit
scabbard sheath for a sword or bayonet
yamen residence of an official in the Chinese Empire

Synopsis

Prince Jen is a young man who has been taught all the essentials of royalty, but he has little knowledge of his kingdom or how to rule fairly. When Master Wu tells Jen's father, King T'ai, about an ideal kingdom, Jen wants to travel there and learn all he can.

Jen sets out on his journey with his servant, Mafoo, General Li Kwang, and some troops. Prince Jen takes along six gifts that Master Wu has chosen for Yuan-ming, the ruler of this kingdom.

Many things occur during this trip that cause hardships and delays for Prince Jen. Jen rescues Master Fu from drowning and ends up traveling miles out of his way. At Fu's destination, Jen meets Voyaging Moon, a flute player who agrees to help Jen resume his journey by avoiding the villain, Natha, and his Yellow Scarves.

Jen returns to meet up with Li Kwang and his troops, only to find them missing. Little does Jen know that Li Kwang borrowed the saddle meant for Yuan-ming, and he has turned into stone.

When Jen, Voyaging Moon, and Mafoo track Li Kwang, they are robbed by Natha. Jen loses any proof of his royalty, as well as the sword for Yuan-ming.

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As the journey continues, Jen encounters many people who help him, as well as many who ridicule and hurt him. He falls in love with Voyaging Moon, but is separated from her when their ferry capsizes during a storm.

Jen decides to abandon his trip to T'ien-kuo in favor of searching for Voyaging Moon. During his search, he gives away the three remaining gifts for Yuan-ming. Each gift seems to have magical powers that help Jen in the end.

When all seems lost for Jen, he is found by Mafoo and Moxa, a scrupulous robber. They free him from the cangue he has acquired and nurse him back to health. They decide they must return to Ch'ang-an as soon as possible, because Jen's father has died, and Jen is now king.

When Jen returns home, he discovers Natha has taken over the throne by force. However, Voyaging Moon is at the Palace to help him, and soon everyone Jen has met and helped during his travels returns the favor to him. Natha is destroyed, and Jen reigns with Voyaging Moon as his wife. He creates a nearly ideal kingdom, using wisely the experience gained during his journey.

Many years later, Jen and Voyaging Moon decide to strike out again to find T'ien-kuo. It is then that they discover they have already found it in their own kingdom.

Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

Initial Understanding

Why did the sword constantly say to Natha Yellow Scarf, "Give me a drink"?

The sword was "thirsty" for blood. Although it was an unbeatable weapon, it came to control Natha's actions by forcing him to kill. Once Natha took control of the awesome power of war, he could not simply let it rest. He had to wage it constantly.

Literary Analysis

How does Jen change during the course of the story?

He matures and becomes more physically strong. He learns from his mistakes and becomes more knowledgeable about life in the "real" world.

Inferential Comprehension

Why was Prince Jen particularly remorseful about his first encounter with Natha Yellow Scarf?

Prince Jen regretted saving himself by giving Natha the sword intended for Yuan-ming. More than a simple weapon, the sword's magical powers represent the full power of war. As Natha uses it to gain control of much of the kingdom, Jen realizes it was a mistake to give his enemy so much power so easily.

Constructing Meaning

At the end of the novel, Master Hu tells King Jen, "Tug at the end of a spiderweb and the center moves." What is the king's teacher trying to explain?

All events in time are connected. Without the mistakes he made and tribulations he suffered on his journey, Jen would not have arrived at the triumph of his just rule over the Kingdom of T'ang. Master Hu goes on to tell Jen it is therefore fruitless to search for T'ien-kuo. That journey for the perfect kingdom is already woven into Jen's experience.

Teachable Skills

Recognizing Setting The story is set in the Kingdom of T'ang in China. Have the students

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study a map of China and compare it to the map found in the beginning of the book. Is this kingdom completely fictitious, or would it match some existing part of modern China? The destination of Jen's journey is the nearly perfect Kingdom of T'ien-kuo, which readers discover is a fictitious kingdom. Have the students research whether this fictitious kingdom is mentioned in Chinese folklore.

Understanding Characterization Have the students list the four Master characters--Hu, Wu, Fu and Shu. Have them compare and contrast them by writing down their similarities and differences. How do they influence the course of the story? How do they relate to Prince Jen? What do the students think the author's purpose is in introducing these characters?

Understanding the Author's Craft There are many characters in the story, and the way they are introduced is significant to the story's outcome. Have the students list the title of each chapter on slips of paper. They should mix them up and then try to put them in order again. How close did they come? Were there questions about where some of them should go? How did they resolve any confusing sequence problems?

Responding to Literature One of the themes of the story is that gifts that are given away will come back to help you. Ask the students to think of any situations where they have given something away, perhaps something they wanted to keep. How did they feel? What was the situation? Did they ever have a gift returned to them in an even better way than it was given? Ask them to think of something that would be difficult for them to give away. What might make them give it up?