



Curriculum Connections

An's Seed

By Zaozao Wang

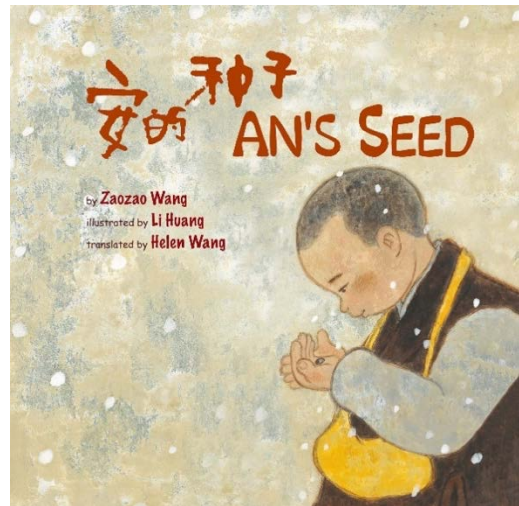
Illustrated by Li Huang

Translated by Helen Wang

Candied Plums; bilingual edition, 2017 Fiction, Set in China

2017 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

Appropriate Grade Levels: This book would be best used with 2nd and 3rd graders, to expose younger children to different cultures and languages. It could also be used to touch upon larger philosophical influences in a simple and straightforward way with 7th and 8th graders.



Activities

Activities that students could potentially engage in to further their understanding of this text include the following:

Discussion: Ask the students *why* An did what he did. What does this say about him as a character and what are the lessons of the book?

Creative project: Students are given the chance to make their own origami lotus flowers (or other flowers, depending on the skill set of the students). The teacher can then follow up with the students and ask them how they feel about their origami flowers and how they would make sure they were maintained and taken care of. The teacher can connect this to the lessons learned through the text. Here's a link to one of the many videos on how to fold a lotus flower:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RiBpQS_6bG0

Vocabulary: If the teacher would like to focus on the use of Chinese vocabulary and have students learn these words and their associated meanings, students could engage in a **mix-and-match** vocabulary and drawing activity. Students can be split into groups, with each member of the group given a different word to learn and draw (either the object or action associated with that word). A simple mix-and-match activity could include romanized Chinese words, such as *zhong zhi* (seed) and *fa ya* (sprout/sprouting). Each student would study the meaning of their word, and once all students are finished studying and drawing, they can explain to the others in their



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group how to pronounce the word, what they drew, and what they learned in the process.

Common Core Standards

- CCSS. ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1. Ask and answer such questions as *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
- CCSS. ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2. Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
- CCSS. ELA-LITERACY.RL.3.1. Ask and answer questions to demonstrate understanding of a text, referring explicitly to the text as the basis for the answers.

Literature and Media Connections

If this were a higher-level text, I would suggest connecting it to philosophical and historical texts that would illuminate the details of this story. However, for lower-level learners, I would suggest supplementing the use of this text with other children's picture books that communicate similar value systems. The best and most easily accessible supplementary children's books that also focus on Asian philosophy and Buddhist parables are written by Jon J. Muth. The three most approachable texts are *Zen Shorts*, *Zen Socks*, and *Zen Ghosts*. Each has adapted Zen Buddhist parables to fit within the lessons of the main character, the giant panda known as Stillwater. These texts can be used to deepen the understanding of what the students just learned through *An's Seed*, with a teacher discussing how they share common themes.

One piece of visual media that could be used to grab students' attention and provide a more vivid picture of the Buddha's life story and values is the film *Little Buddha* (1994). Starring Keanu Reeves and Bridget Fonda, the movie tells the story of the Buddha alongside the story of children discovering that they are the rebirths of Buddhist masters. Through the movie, we find out how the children's characteristics and their exciting journey align with the lessons the Buddha learned throughout his journey to



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enlightenment. The movie may work well with third graders, but it would probably work better with students in fifth grade and above. Teachers of different grade levels can meet to figure out how best to present information to the students over a series of years, reinforcing concepts that students would have first been exposed to in *An's Seed* by watching *Little Buddha* later on in their school career.

Common Core Standards

CCSS. ELA-LITERACY.W.2.2. Write informative/explanatory texts in which they introduce a topic, use facts and definitions to develop points, and provide a concluding statement or section.

CCSS. ELA-LITERACY.W.2.7. Participate in shared research and writing projects (for example, read a number of books on a single topic to produce a report; record science observations).

Guidelines

How is this book in response/relation to previous literature?

This book is a quick summation and presentation of key Buddhist and East Asian philosophical values, as explained in the Culture Notes for this book. This is mainly a response to the religious and philosophical literature that has influenced certain communities for centuries. If a teacher is looking for a greater understanding of the concepts in this book, I recommend reading *The Dhammapada* and *Tao Te Ching*—key texts that are approachable and short.

How could the book address universal themes or common literary tropes?

An's Seed, while addressing the specific themes mentioned in the Culture Notes, could show the student one of many ways a person can understand and express the values of compassion, wisdom, understanding, and appreciation of the natural world, particularly when paired with the Jon J. Muth books mentioned.



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What curricular entry points would the book fit into?

This book would be a good use of literature to emphasize what may have been covered about Buddhism or Chinese philosophy in the course of discussing Buddhist or Chinese history and culture. It is also a good entry point for these topics.

Any specific suggestions for teachers using the book?

While it is satisfying to talk about compassion, wisdom, and understanding—which will inevitably be the relevant topics of discussion—it is also important to be clear about what is culturally relevant and philosophically significant when presenting this book within a certain context. Please see the Culture Notes for help in this regard.

Recommended Teaching Resources

Bertolucci, Bernado, dir. *Little Buddha*. 1994; Los Angeles: Miramax, 2004. DVD.

The Dhammapada. Translated by Valerie J. Roebuck. New York: Penguin Classics, 2010.

Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by D.C. Lau. London: Penguin, 2009.

Muth, Jon J. *Zen Shorts*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2005.

Muth, Jon J. *Zen Ghosts*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2010.

Muth, Jon J. *Zen Socks*. New York: Scholastic Press, 2015.

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