



Curriculum Connections

Morning Sun in Wuhan

by Ying Chang Compestine

Clarion Books, 2022

Fiction, set in China

2022 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Young Adult/Middle School Literature

I read about a young woman leading a volunteer group cooking for frontline medical workers ... and I decided I had to write this book.

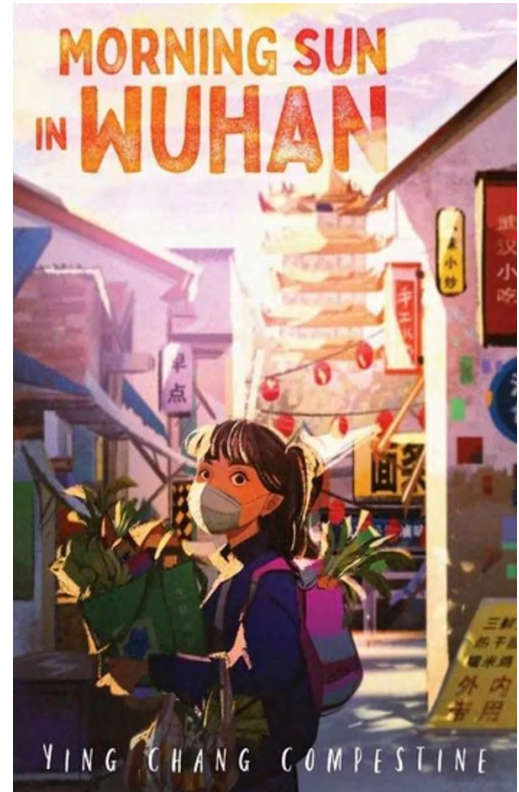
—*Morning Sun in Wuhan* (p. 191)

Appropriate for Grades: 5–8

Best for Grades: 6–7

Introduction to the Book

Morning Sun in Wuhan is a highly engaging quick read for younger readers. Thirteen-year-old Mei Li (pronounced: may lee) is a foodie and a gamer who has found herself caught at the nexus of the Covid-19 pandemic in Wuhan, China. This fictionalization of a true story is told as a traditional first-person narrative. It includes messaging app conversations as well as full cooking recipes (with illustrations), offering readers numerous opportunities to engage with different types of texts.



Morning Sun in Wuhan never delves deeply into any one issue—other than food—nor does the story use literary language, making it especially accessible for the early middle grades. The strength of the reading experience derives from its concrete connections to students’ own pandemic experiences, the generally relatable protagonist Mei, and the cross-cultural touchstone of yummy Chinese food.

Best Matched Curricular Units

- Empathy for strangers (Humanities)
- Government responses to crises (Social Studies)
- Disease and epidemics/pandemics (Science)
- Cooking (Home Economics)
- Cultural studies (Chinese)

To learn more about the Freeman Book Awards, please visit:

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Essential Questions

- How can citizens help their own communities during crises?
- What role should the government play in public health?
- How does family affect one's sense of well-being?

Key Vocabulary for Teacher to Know

1. *Baidu*—the Chinese search engine used in lieu of Google, which is not accessible behind China's Great Firewall
2. *Wet market*—an open-air market where meat, vegetables, seafood, fruits, eggs, and other fresh produce and food can be purchased
3. *Discord*—a messaging app, particularly popular among gamers who can livestream their gameplay
4. *Spring Festival*—an important national holiday that had begun around the time of the Covid-19 outbreak.
5. *Juan*—the name of a character (pronounced: joo-anne)

Essential Background Information

A. First Wuhan lockdown

Wuhan, a Chinese city with a population comparable to that of New York City, was the epicenter of the Covid-19 pandemic. In a delayed attempt by the Chinese government to contain the virus, Wuhan experienced the first major lockdown, during which residents were consigned to their homes and/or neighborhood compounds for 76 days. ([CNN Article](#))

B. Field hospitals in Wuhan

These were built in under two weeks as a rapid response to the virus in China. ([Video: Timelapse of Construction](#))

C. WeChat

An essential app used throughout China for communication, social media postings, financial transactions, and much more. ([Video: Intro to WeChat](#))

D. Chinese cooking methods

Even beginners can try some basic Chinese cooking methods, especially for the easier stir-fry dishes described in the book. ([Video: Chinese Cooking 101](#))



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E. Supplementary resources

- [76 Days](#)—A film documenting the early days in the hospitals of Wuhan. *Teacher Note: Content may be difficult for some young viewers.*
- Fang Fang’s [Wuhan Diary](#)—a day-by-day record of the Wuhan experience written by a Wuhan resident during the 76-day lockdown. Consider matching Fang Fang’s daily postings to the dates/times of the chapters in the novel.

Below are suggested cross-curricular activities, followed by several discussion/writing prompts. Page numbers from the book refer to each activity’s inspiration.

Suggested Activities

Front cover. Before students read the book, ask them what they recognize in the cover art (for example, face mask, pagoda, Chinese lanterns). Have students raise questions in response to the cover art (for example, What do the Chinese characters mean? Where is the girl going? Why is she holding a bag of food?). Using the images and words on the cover, make predictions for the story.

Teacher Note: The back cover divulges the synopsis of the story, so this activity would best be done by projecting the front cover on a screen before handing out books to the students.

Geography (cover). Find Wuhan using [Google Earth](#), and then explore the city. As Mei identifies specific locations (for example, Yellow Crane Tower, **p. 14**), students can locate those places as well.

Foreshadowing (every chapter). Using the Chinese proverbs included at the start of every chapter, ask students to predict how the proverb might foreshadow events in the chapter. After reading the chapters, have students discuss the accuracy of their predictions.

Translations (every chapter). Draw lines matching each Chinese character to the English word in the provided English translation. Discussion: Do the words appear in the same order? Are any words added? Are any words removed? Then have students run



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the entire proverb through an online translator such as Google Translate. Discuss how/why the online translation is different from the author's translation.

Favorite recipe (pp. 22, 43, 83, 122, 133, 161, 177, 184). Using the recipes provided throughout the book, have a Chinese food celebration day. To make the experience less overwhelming, consider having a lesson demonstrating the basics of Chinese cooking. Students can discuss some of the challenges they faced learning to cook new kinds of food.

Teacher Note: For the dumplings, it is recommended that students purchase premade frozen dumplings and then panfry them rather than making the dumplings from scratch.

Coloring (every recipe). Print out various recipes and have students color them. Look up the actual dishes on Baidu and discuss.

Suggested Discussion/Writing Prompts

Prediction (p. 1). From the outset, the reader knows Mei has lost her mother. Predict how this will impact her decision-making as well as her mindset as she confronts the outset of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Food descriptions (pp. 19–20). Throughout the book Mei provides several highly descriptive food passages. Ask students to identify a passage they find particularly mouthwatering. After sharing the passages they have chosen with the class, have each student use similar techniques to compose their own description of a dish they especially love.

Contextualizing the Wuhan lockdown (p. 63). The initial lockdown of Wuhan was an enormous event in modern Chinese history, but it was hardly discussed in the U.S. media at the time; instead, NBA star Kobe Bryant's death dominated the headlines. Why do you think the U.S. failed to take note of the gravity of lockdown in a city of 12 million people?

Masks (pp. 66–67). Describe and illustrate creative substitutes for N-95 masks.



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Collectivism vs. individualism (p. 93). “Sacrifice one’s interests for the greater good.” Have students respond to this quote. They might consider whether this notion always holds true, sometimes holds true, or never holds true; they might explore whether they think such a mindset can possibly work; or they might wonder how this mindset differs or aligns with their own.

Unexpected difficulties (p. 100). What are other unforeseen challenges people in lockdown might have had to deal with? Students might draw from their own memories, or they might draw on examples from the book to make educated guesses.

Sudden ending (p. 185). The book ends rather suddenly—still in the early days of the lockdown. Ask the students to speculate on why the author chose to end on this specific date and not tell more? Consider other resources explored, such as the film *76 Days* or the excerpts from *Wuhan Diary*.

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