



Curriculum Connections

Rice

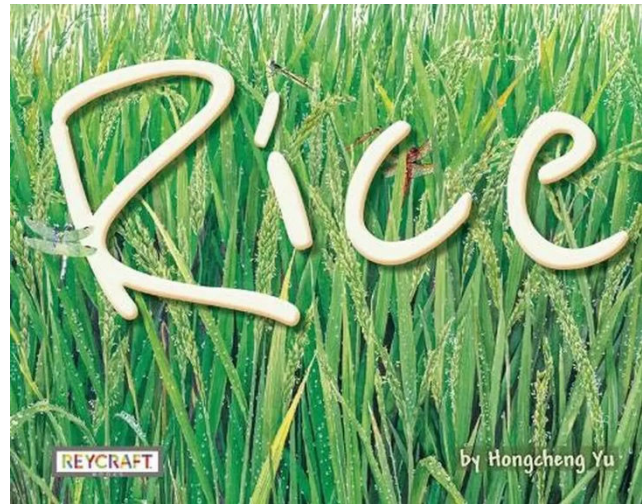
by Hongcheng Yu

Non-Fiction, set in China

Reycraft Books, 2020

2020 Honorable Mention, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

The picture book *Rice*, by Hongcheng Yu, is a beautifully illustrated exploration of the agricultural aspects of this food staple. Before writing this award-winning book, Yu spent two years living in the mountains with rice farmers to observe their planting and harvesting methods. Her deep understanding of the process is evident in the enchanting way that she writes about the planting and harvesting seasons, solidifying the book's universal themes of environment and family along with the literary themes of the beauty of nature and the importance of hard work.



Yu uses the twenty-four solar terms, along with dates from the Gregorian (Western) calendar, to provide readers with a timeline for the planting and harvesting process. Each set of pages includes a brief yet rich description of an aspect of rice farming. These descriptions accompany elaborate illustrations that provide views of the tools used in the agricultural process. The illustrations also depict the actions of the farmers, providing insights into the labor and collaboration required to grow rice. The mesmerizing details portray a variety of native flora and fauna as well. Even illustrations of the sky hold interesting details such as rainbows and clouds shaped as animals. The final scene in the book is the most elaborate illustration: a feast with all of the farmers gathered around tables full of food.

The notes section of the book is equally detailed. Yu uses the notes to provide further descriptions about processes used to grow and harvest rice. The notes are divided according to sets of pages and include grayscale versions of the illustrations. They begin with an explanation of the lunar calendar and the twenty-four solar terms used throughout the book. Additional illustrations are found in the notes, including intricately detailed diagrams and step-by-step processes, such as the steps used to germinate rice seeds. Tools used to prepare the fields and to



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harvest, dry, and mill the rice are also depicted. In addition, Yu details the life cycle of rice by including pictures of germinating seeds and plant development. Nutritional information is also illustrated and explained.

This book is suitable for all students, though the notes content is more accessible to students eight years old and up. Younger children will enjoy the narrative while elementary students and middle-school students will find the intricacies of the notes section interesting. This text can serve as a springboard for numerous environmental studies. Younger students might enjoy identifying the different types of wildlife portrayed in the book, ranging from dogs and chickens to dragonflies and butterflies. The text can also be used to explore ecosystems and biodiversity. For instance, after viewing illustrations of children catching the fish that live in the rice paddy, students could learn about symbiosis and the mutualism of rice-fish farming systems. Science aspects of structure and function could be explored while examining the tools used to plant, harvest, and mill rice. Students can also try to germinate seeds and compare the process they use with the process in the text. Health and nutrition can be addressed as students examine the nutritional aspects of a grain of rice. Students can also explore different species of rice and learn which types are common in the dishes that they may eat. The tools and machines used historically in rice farming can be compared with modern automated systems. Students can learn more about the origin of the twenty-four solar terms and the lunar calendar.

Science Standards (Next Generation Science Standards):

- K-ESS3-1. **Earth and Human Activity.** Use a model to represent the relationship between the needs of different plants or animals (including humans) and the places they live.
- 2-LS4-1. **Biological Evolution: Unity and Diversity.** Make observations of plants and animals to compare the diversity of life in different habitats.
- 3-LS1-1. **From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes.** Develop models to describe that organisms have unique and diverse life cycles, but all have in common birth, growth, reproduction, and death.



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- 4-LS1-1. **From Molecules to Organisms: Structures and Processes.** Construct an argument that plants and animals have internal and external structures that function to support survival, growth, behavior, and reproduction.
- MS-LS2-3. **Ecosystems: Interactions, Energy, and Dynamics.** Develop a model to describe the cycling of matter and flow of energy among living and nonliving parts of an ecosystem.

English Language Arts Standards (Common Core State Standards):

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.5. Analyze the structure an author uses to organize a text, including how the major sections contribute to the whole and to an understanding of the topic.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RST.6-8.6. Analyze the author's purpose in providing an explanation, describing a procedure, or discussing an experiment in a text.

Social Studies Standards (C3 Framework):

- D2.Geo.4.K-2. Explain how weather, climate, and other environmental characteristics affect people's lives in a place or region.

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