

Curriculum Connections

Big Enough by Regina Linke

Little, Brown Books for Young Readers, 2025

Fiction, set in China

2025 Of Note, Freeman Book Award for Children's Literature

"There once was a boy named Ah-Fu, who was so small he often got lost, especially in his own imagination." —*Big Enough*

Appropriate for Grades: 3–12

Best for Grades: 5–10

1. Themes of Growth and Courage

Throughout the story of *Big Enough*, Ah-Fu repeatedly tells himself, "I'm not big enough." His journey demonstrates that growth is not determined by physical size or age but by developing resilience, and confidence through experience. Each challenge he encounters becomes an opportunity to learn something new about himself.



The book also illustrates a growth mindset. Rather than giving up when faced with obstacles, Ah-Fu continues trying, learning from each experience until he realizes he has become "big enough" through helping others. This message aligns closely with social-emotional learning by encouraging perseverance, self-reflection, and confidence.

2. Essential Questions

- What can Ah-Fu's experiences teach us about courage and growth?
- Why are lotus flowers important symbols in Chinese culture, literature, and religion?
- How does nature influence both artistic expression and everyday life in China?
- How do family relationships shape our understanding of responsibility and kindness?
- How can works of art help us understand cultures different from our own while recognizing shared human values?



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3. Best Matched Curricular Units

- **Arts**

Students analyze how Regina Linke combines traditional Chinese painting techniques with contemporary picture book illustration. They examine brushwork, colors, composition, perspective, and the use of empty space to understand how visual elements communicate emotion and meaning.

Students may create their own ink-inspired landscape paintings featuring mountains, rivers, lotus flowers, birds, or bamboo, and understand their cultural meanings. Older students may compare Chinese landscape painting with western styles of paintings, discussing how different cultures represent nature.

- **Social Studies**

Big Enough introduces students to rural life in China. Students investigate how geography, agriculture, family traditions, and cultural values shape daily experiences and community life.

Teachers may compare childhood responsibilities, farming traditions, and family relationships in China with those in students' own communities. Older students can explore how Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism have influenced Chinese values reflected throughout the story.

- **Geography**

Students locate major mountain ranges, rivers, and agricultural regions of China using physical and digital maps. They investigate how mountains, rivers, climate, and seasonal rainfall influence farming, transportation, and artistic traditions.

Students may compare China's physical geography with their own state or country while discussing how environments shape architecture and cultural practices.

- **Family and Community**

Although Ah-Fu dreams of becoming independent, he grows by learning to care for others rather than simply proving himself. The story reflects traditional Chinese values emphasizing family cooperation, respect for elders, and shared responsibility. Success is presented not as individual achievement but as contributing positively to one's family and community.



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Teachers can encourage students to compare family traditions, responsibilities, and acts of kindness within their own communities, helping them recognize both cultural differences and shared human experiences. Teachers may invite students to interview family members about lessons they learned while growing up or write personal narratives describing a time they helped someone despite feeling uncertain.

- **Language Arts**

Students analyze dialogue and visual storytelling. They examine how the illustrations contribute to characterization and mood while identifying recurring symbols such as mountains, water, birds, and lotus flowers. Writing activities may include personal narratives, short essays, and poetry inspired by nature. Students are encouraged to compare cultures.

4. Note to Teachers

Teachers are encouraged to help students recognize that China is geographically and culturally diverse, with different climates, languages, agricultural products, and customs.

Big Enough also provides a natural entry point for discussing growth mindset and character education for self-confidence, courage, and personal growth. Students learn that making mistakes and facing challenges are essential parts of learning rather than signs of failure.

- **Possible Common Core and National Standards Alignment**

Arts

Language Arts

Framework for Social Studies (Family and Community)

East Asian Geography

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