

Curriculum Connections

Picking Tea with Baba

by Xu Bin

Illustrated by Yu Yin

Translated by Shan Chen

Charlesbridge, 2025

Fiction, set in China

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

"Delicious tea leaves come from the tea garden."

"Delicious tea is made from the tea leaves."
—from *Picking Tea with Baba*

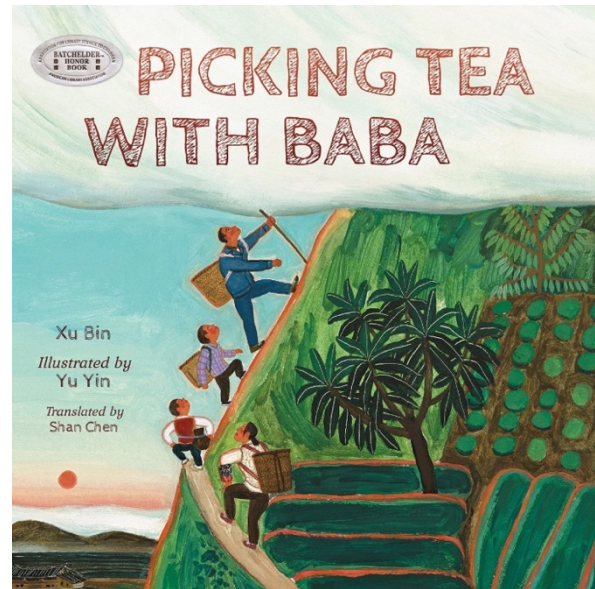
Appropriate for Grades 3–12

Best for Grades 5–10

1. Introduction to the Book

Picking Tea with Baba is about a young boy and his brother who travel with their parents up the mountainside to their tea garden for a day of work. They are happy with the animals they see while picking tea leaves.

After taking a lunch break, they experience an unexpected rainstorm. At the end of the day, they go down the mountain to sell the tea leaves before going home.



Picking Tea with Baba provides natural connections to social studies, geography, science, art, environmental studies, and language arts. Students learn that every cup of tea represents careful work performed by families over generations. They will learn respect for labor, cultural heritage, and gratitude for everyday products.

2. Best Matched Curricular Units

• *Chinese Culture*

Students explore how tea has shaped Chinese daily life, family traditions, hospitality, and celebrations for thousands of years. The book provides an example of contemporary rural China to demonstrate how everyday activities preserve cultural heritage.

• *East Asian Geography*

The story offers opportunities to examine how mountains, climate, rainfall, and elevation influence agricultural production. Students can compare China's tea farms with tea production in other parts of the world (for example, India and Japan).



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- *Environmental Science*

Tea farms provide excellent case studies for discussing ecosystems, soil conservation, biodiversity, pollinators, and climate change. Students can explore how environment affects agricultural production.

- *Family and Community*

The story emphasizes cooperation, responsibility, and shared work among family members. Students can compare family roles and traditions across cultures while recognizing universal values such as helping one another and taking pride in family work.

- *Global Trade*

Tea is one of the world's oldest internationally traded agricultural products. Students examine how tea connects farmers, processors, exporters, retailers, and consumers across continents through global supply chains.

3. Essential Questions

- *Why has tea been important in Chinese culture for thousands of years?*

Students investigate how tea has served as both a daily necessity and an important symbol of hospitality, family, health, and cultural identity throughout Chinese history.

- *How does geography influence what people grow and eat?*

By researching tea producing regions, students learn how climate, rainfall, and soil affect agricultural products and regional food traditions.

- *How do family traditions preserve cultural heritage?*

The story demonstrates how cultural knowledge is passed from one generation to the next through hard work, family, and community traditions.

- *How are local traditions connected to global trade?*

Tea is a good example of a food product that is grown in one part of the world becoming important to the international market. At the same time, tea continues to have cultural significance in China.



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4. Suggested Activities

- *Tea Garden Mapping*

Students locate China's major tea-producing provinces, including Fujian, Zhejiang, Anhui, and Yunnan. Discuss why mountain environments and humid climates are ideal for tea production. Students could compare tea traditions from their own cultural backgrounds.

- *The Tea Horse Road*

Students research the trade routes that connected tea-producing regions of southwestern China with other parts of Asia. Students examine the geography and how it affected trade and cultural exchange.

- *Chinese Tea Ceremonies*

Students investigate the history and purpose of traditional tea ceremonies, including the Tie Guanyin ceremony. Students compare Chinese tea customs with ceremonies from Japan (Chadō, the Way of Tea) and other cultures.

- *Rural Life in Contemporary China*

Students discuss how rural communities maintain traditional practices in the modern era. Students compare rural lifestyles in China with those in their own communities.

5. Note to Teachers

The story offers an authentic portrayal of contemporary rural China. Teachers are encouraged to help students recognize that China is geographically and culturally diverse, with different climates, languages, agricultural products, and customs.

- *Possible Common Core and National Standards Alignment*

Framework for Social Studies

East Asian Geography

Global Trade, Framework (Economics & Geography)

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2026