

## RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

### *Dead Man's Gold and other stories*

Grades 6 - 10

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#### 1. Book Summary

The ten stories here are about immigration. They are also ghost tales. As well, each story features a common job of the Chinese in Canada. The tales cover the period from 1858 to the 1950s. Most stories are set in British Columbia, but others occur on the prairies (#8) and in Toronto (#9, #10).

These themes of immigration are reflected in the following stories:

High expectations of new homeland:	Stories 1, 9, 10
Disappointment in new homeland:	Stories 5, 8, 9, 10
The importance of family:	Stories 1, 2, 3, 7, 8, 9, 10
Adapting to the new homeland	Stories 6, 8, 9, 10
Trying to succeed	Stories 1, 2, 6, 7, 10
Impact of racism	Stories 5, 6, 8, 9
Long-distance relationships	Stories 4, 5, 8, 9
Different cultural practices	Stories 1, 2, 4, 8.

The stories focus on the Chinese, but one immigrant group's experiences often reflect those of another immigrant group.

The stories have historical settings, but the characters have vivid, personal quests. Under the titles below, each story is summarized and *Ideas for Classrooms* provide questions and activities.

## 2. Author's Note

I studied Canadian history at university and then worked as an archivist for many years. I was disappointed by people's lack of interest in the past. They thought it was dull, boring and not relevant to their lives.

I became interested in history because it explained the world I lived in and why people behaved as they did. I saw that people who studied history could hold power. By telling people where they had come from, a historian could suggest future directions. History was not merely about the past, but also about the future.

When I studied history in the 1970s, there were few books about Chinese-Canadians. People didn't know the Chinese had come to Canada as far back as 1858. People didn't know they played a key role in British Columbia's economy. I wanted people to recognize this history, but I also wanted to show them the human side of the past. That's why I wrote these stories.

## 3. Background: Chinese Immigration

- The Chinese came to British Columbia in 1858 from California, where they had worked the gold fields for a decade. By 1863, four thousand Chinese were mining for gold in the Cariboo region.
- Only in British Columbia did the Chinese work in a number of primary industries: fisheries, timber, farming, and mining.
- In the rest of Canada, they worked mostly in restaurants and laundries. After World War Two, Chinese began to be accepted by mainstream society.
- Anti-Chinese racism led the government to reduce Chinese immigration. Taxes were levied on Chinese newcomers, starting at \$50 in 1885, and then rising to \$500. In 1923, Canada Chinese stopped immigration.
- Chinese immigrants to Canada were mostly men whose wives and children stayed in China. Some merchants brought over wives and started families here. If not for the head taxes and the exclusion law, more wives and children may have come to Canada.

## 4. The Stories

### 4.1 'Dead Man's Gold' (page 10)

Two long-time friends Yuen and Fong go to North America for the gold rush. After trekking into gold territory, they go separate ways. After two winters, the friends meet again. Both have endured very difficult times. Fong is successful but Yuen is not. This leads to a fatal confrontation that has far-reaching impact.

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.1.1 Why did Yuen kill Fong? If this case came to trial and you were the traveling judge of the period, would you punish Yuen severely? Why or why not?
- 4.1.2 Yuen and Fong were friends since childhood. What details in the story make it believable that one of them would kill the other?
- 4.1.3 You are Yuen or Fong. During your first winter in North America, you stay in the port city. Write a letter to your family, describing your season in the gold field.
- 4.1.4 What role does geography play in this story?
- 4.1.5 What role does the word 'expectation' play in this story?
- 4.1.6 Read Paul Yee's other gold rush story, 'Rider Chan and the Night River' in *Tales from Gold Mountain*. What impressions of gold mining life emerge from these two stories?
- 4.1.7 Do research to find out why gold is so valuable even today.

### 4.2 'Digging Deep' (page 22)

Chung grew up as an only child, over-protected by his parents. As a result, he is fearful of many things. In North America, he can find work only underground, digging for coal. His deep-seated fears lead him to make a 'pact with the devil.' As a result of this, Chung becomes an expert miner, but can he outrun his fate?

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.2.1 What role does 'family' play in this story?
- 4.2.2 Chung and his mother both want him to find courage in North America. Chung gains it from the ghost miner. How does courage complicate the relationship between Chung and his mother?

- 4.2.3 What happens to remove the ghost miner's protection from Chung? You are Chung, and learn your protection is gone. What would you do to protect yourself?
- 4.2.4 Let's say the ghost miner does not come to help Chung. Instead, you are a miner who befriends him. How would you help him become less scared?
- 4.2.5 You are a reporter for a newspaper. After the mine disaster, you hear of Chung's death and his reputation among co-workers. Write a 'human interest' story about Chung for your newspaper.
- 4.2.6. 'Pact with the devil (Faust)' is a theme in literature. Find the original Faust story on the internet. How is 'Digging Deep' similar to and different from it?
- 4.2.7 *Boy of the Deeps* by Ian Wallace, is about coal mining on the east coast, in Cape Breton. The story can be quickly read. What is similar about coal mining as portrayed in *Boy of the Deeps* and in 'Digging Deep'?

#### 4.3 'Sky-High' (page 32)

Shu comes from a rich city family in China. He grew up reading poetry, amidst carefully tended trees. When a family disaster takes him to North America, Shu becomes a logger. His fellow workers laugh at his upper-class ways, but Shu stays aloof. He also forges a special tie with the forest that brings trouble to him and his fellow workers.

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.3.1 Why do the loggers dislike Shu? Why doesn't Shu try to get them to like him?
- 4.3.2 What different things do trees symbolize in this story?
- 4.3.3 The loggers think Shu died accidentally. What is a different explanation for his death?
- 4.3.4 How do Shu's character and motivations change and/or stay the same in the story?
- 4.3.5 You are Shu. Write a poem about Sky-High.
- 4.3.6 Look at the illustration for this story. What is the artist conveying in this work?
- 4.3.7 Do research to see how environmentalists challenge logging companies today.

#### 4.4 'The Memory Stone' (page 40)

In China, Willow, a widow, falls in love with Ox, a man who looks just like her late husband. Ox leaves for North America, and promises to love Willow. But he proves unfaithful, and Willow vows to never marry again. But a jade gift carries this betrayal into the next generation.

##### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.4.1 Can this story be called a revenge story, even though Willow never thought to hurt Ox or Blossom?
- 4.4.2 Coincidences are things that happen by chance in a surprising way. Which of the following is NOT a coincidence in the story? How does the non-coincidence item fit into the story?
- Ox looks exactly like Willow's late husband.
  - The canary disappears when Ox's love fades.
  - Willow sees Ox and his wife, but doesn't meet them.
  - The crack in the jade is the same shape as Blossom's scar.
  - The jade pendant is found inside the fish.
  - Willow looks exactly like Blossom.
- 4.4.3 Willow's story is framed at the beginning and end by modern day references. How do these references contribute to the story?
- 4.4.4 You are Willow. The canary has vanished. Write a letter to Ox.
- 4.4.5 When Willow returns to China, she vows to never love another man. Was this a wise thing to do?
- 4.4.6 Why does the author make Blossom an animal lover?
- 4.4.7 Willow is an inn-keeper. What kind of a person would do well in that job?

#### 4.5 'Seawall Sightings' (page 50)

In the late 1910s, a modern-thinking father in China allows his daughter Jee-yun to get an education. To his dismay, she falls in love with a fellow student Wah, from a poor family. The father separates the two young lovers, who decide to flee to Canada. Wah goes first to find work. But before Jee-yun can join him, Canada bans Chinese immigration. Wah buys false identification papers for her. When she arrives, she meets hard-hearted officials, and a tragedy follows.

### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.5.1 This story is framed at the beginning and end by modern day references. How do these references contribute to the story? Do they change the overall impression the reader leaves with, after reading the story?
- 4.5.2 In traditional China, females were often not given any education. What roles do education and literacy play in this story?
- 4.5.3 Write an alternate ending to this story. Let's say the ship arrives safely in China, and Wah-lung and Jee-yung must face her father. What happens?
- 4.5.4 In the past, the interrogation methods used at Pig Pen were actually used. Why would they have been effective at that time? If you were trying to come into Canada on false papers, what could you do?
- 4.5.5 The practice of 'buying papers' was used by immigrants to gain entry to Canada. If you were Wah-lung, how do you justify taking this illegal action?
- 4.5.6 Jee-yun was an early practitioner of graffiti. What similarities does she share with modern-day practitioners of this urban practice?

### 4.6 'The Peddler' (page 60)

Little Lo is mentally-challenged and lives in Chinatown in the 1930s. He has no future until a kind-hearted peddler wins big in a lottery and gives his business to Little Lo. He turns into a skilled vegetable peddler and cherishes the horse that pulls his wagon. But a mean boy, the son of a customer, ruins Little Lo's life.

### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.6.1 Why do you think the author portrays Little Lo as a misfit at the start of the story?
- 4.6.2 You are one of Little Lo's fellow peddlers. After he dies, you meet the person who is taking over the route. The newcomer asks about Little Lo. Describe the special relationship between him and Old Poon's horse.
- 4.6.3 You are the neighbour living next door to Tommy. You think Little Lo is doing a good job. What could you have done to prevent the disaster in this story?
- 4.6.4 What makes the changes in Little Lo's character believable?
- 4.6.5 How do we know the playground built on the site of Tommy's house is haunted?

- 4.6.6 When Little Lo sets fire to the funeral pyre of his horse, he says a prayer. Write that prayer. Would the word 'forgive' be included?
- 4.6.7 People still go door-to-door to sell goods. Is this a hard job or an easy one? Give reasons.

4.7 'The Brothers' (page 51)

Two brother Shek and Ping arrive in North America. Ping is lazy and unreliable, but Shek has vowed to look after him. Shek works hard and sends money to their mother. Eventually, the brothers farm together. One spring, Ping tries to sell the farm, but buyers are frightened off by ghostly happenings. Then, Ping gets into a fight with white farmers, and is forced to confront the truth about his brother.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.7.1 Make a list of all the ways in which Shek and Ping are different from one another. How does working on the farm and in the laundry heighten their differences?
- 4.7.2 Shek takes care of his brother despite Ping's many faults. How can one explain why a man would do so much for a 'loser' such as Ping?
- 4.7.3 Do the two surprises at the story's end work? Were you expecting them?
- 4.7.4 From the list below, choose the main idea of this story and say why you chose it.
- a. Helping Others.
  - b. Doing the right thing.
  - c. Working hard.
  - d. Keeping promises.
  - e. Family comes first.
- 4.7.5 The brothers come from a very poor family. How can this explain the different paths taken by Shek and Ping in life?
- 4.7.6. What does land symbolize to Shek, and to Ping, in this story?
- 4.7.7 Do research to find out what it would take to become a successful farmer today.

4.8 'Alone No Longer' (page 80)

Ko goes to Canada and learns western-style cooking. He returns to China to marry his long-time sweetheart. Canada won't let him bring his wife back to Canada, so Ko returns alone and opens a café in a small prairie town. The café is

haunted by a former employee. Ko is not afraid. Many years later, Ko's wife joins him in the café. But time has changed Ko and his wife too much. Do they have any chance for happiness?

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.8.1 This story refers to Canada's law of 1923 which banned Chinese immigration for 25 years. Why did Canada stop Chinese immigration?
- 4.8.2 Explain the different elements of the illustration for this story.
- 4.8.3 What do the last words spoken by Ko's wife (on her deathbed) reveal about her character?
- 4.8.4 After Ko's wife dies, he bitterly regrets staying in Canada. Does he have the perfect wife at the end? Why or why not?
- 4.8.5 What could have been done to make Ko's wife's adjustment to a new life in Canada easier?
- 4.8.6 Why did Ko not have any friends in town, even though his café popular was popular with his customers?
- 4.8.7 In the past, a café was a place where a customer could get a meal at a low cost. What are some of the different kinds of places that customers go to get low-cost meals today?

#### 4.9 'First Wife' (page 90)

So-ying raises her son in China while her husband Lok-hay works in Canada. After Communists take over China, Lok-hay finally brings them to Canada. So-ying learns Lok-hay has another wife and two Canadian-born daughters. Second Wife treats So-ying with respect, but she is unhappy, especially when her son spends more time with Second Wife's family. So-ying meets an old immigrant, and finds temporary escape from her unhappiness. Is there a longer term solution?

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.9.1 In the story, Jee-wah the son adjusts easily to the new life than his mother. Why is it easier for young children to adjust to a new homeland?
- 4.9.2 You are So-ying. Write a letter to your sister in China, telling her what you found when you arrived in Toronto and, more importantly, how you felt.

- 4.9.3 Was Lok-hay justified (page 95) in not telling So-ying about his second family? Why or why not?
- 4.9.4 So-ying and Lan are in conflict, but they are both good woman. Explain this statement.
- 4.9.5 What do the meetings between So-ying and the old man in Room 424 represent?
- 4.9.6 Why do So-ying and Jee-wah drift apart? Is it anyone's fault?
- 4.9.7 Having more than one husband or one wife is against the law in Canada. Do research to find out why other cultures, in the past, allowed men to have more than one wife.
- 4.10 'Reunited' (page 102)

In the 1950s, teenager Tong Lung is brought to Canada by his father and forced to attend school and work in a laundry. Tong feels out-of-place and resentful. He wants to buy a car but his father says no. They have many disagreements. Then his father is killed in a robbery at the laundry. After the funeral, Tong uses his inheritance to buy a car. He is surprised when his father shows up to tend to unfinished business.

#### Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.10.1 What does the car symbolize in this story? Do cars continue to mean those same things today, fifty years later?
- 4.10.2 What are the two different approaches to life held by Tong and his father? Which one would you choose to follow?
- 4.10.3 How does Tong show himself to be both a good son and a not-so-good son in this story?
- 4.10.4 Why is the illustration for this story so effective?
- 4.10.5 Is this story more about a difference in age (a generation gap) or about a difference in culture? Explain your answer.
- 4.10.6 When Tong meets his father for the first time, they shake hands 'like businessmen.' What does this tell us about the relationship that will develop?
- 4.10.7 The hand laundry described in this story has largely disappeared from towns and cities in Canada. What happened in society that caused this change?

## 5. General Questions and Activities

- 5.1 Divide students into groups. Assign each group a story and have the students a scene to be performed in front of the class.
- 5.2 Look at all the illustrations in the book. Which one most strongly attracts you to read that particular story? Why?
- 5.3 Mix and Match. Let's say that characters from different tales are forced to share a table at a crowded tea-house in Chinatown. Create conversations between these characters from different tales as they chat:
  - a. Yuen from 'Dead Man's Gold' and Ping from 'The Brothers'
  - b. Ko's wife from 'Alone No Longer' and So-ying from 'First Wife'
  - c. Chung from 'Digging Deep' and Tong Lung from 'Reunited'
  - d. Wah Lung from 'Seawall Sightings' and Little Lo from 'The Peddler'.
- 5.4 You are a film-maker about to choose one of the stories in this book for making a film/animated film. Which story would you choose and why?