

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Tales from Gold Mountain

Grade 3 to 7

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1. Book Summary

The eight stories in this collection use the many occupations of the Chinese in 19th century British Columbia as background. These include railway workers, merchants, servants, tailors, farmers, gold miners and salmon cannery workers.

These themes of immigration are reflected in the following stories:

High expectations of new homeland:	Stories 3, 7
The importance of family:	Stories 1, 4, 6, 7
Adapting to the new homeland	Stories 3, 6,
Impact of racism	Stories 5, 6, 8
The working life	Stories 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, 8
Cultural differences	Stories 2, 4

Under each title below, each story is summarized and *Ideas for Classrooms* provide questions and activities.

2. Author's Note

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

I became interested in history because it explained where I came from and why people behaved as they did. I believed that students of history could have

great power. By telling people where they had come from, a historian could suggest directions for the future. History was not merely about the past, but also about the future.

When I studied history in the mid-1970s, there were few books about Chinese-Canadians. People didn't know the Chinese had first arrived in Canada in 1858. People didn't know they played a key role in British Columbia's economy. I wanted people to know this history, but I also wanted them to think about the human aspects 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.
- Other Chinese immigrants served the all the miners with laundries, restaurants and vegetable farms.
- Victoria, the port for newcomers arriving here, was the first Chinatown in Canada. It grew into a thriving economy, and employed many Chinese in stores and small factories. Other Chinese were barbers, jewellers, woodcutters, photographers, servants and bakers.
- In the 1870s, fish canneries were started along the B.C. coast, and Chinese workers were used due to the labour shortage.
- The Chinese immigrants were mostly men whose wives and children stayed behind in China. Some merchants brought their wives over and started families here.

4. The Stories

4.1 'Spirits of the Railway' (page 9)

Chu goes to North America to search for his missing father. Unable to find him, Chu ends up working in railway construction. Then his crew reaches a tunnel that other workers claim is haunted.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.1.1 What problems did young Chu face in North America? How did he deal with them?
- 4.1.2 You are young Chu. Write a letter to your mother describing railway work.
- 4.1.3 Why do you think Chu's offering to the spirits took place "high above the nest of eagles"? Did this offering benefit only the deceased railway workers? Who else benefited?
- 4.1.4 *The Kids Book of Canada's Railway* by Deborah Hodge, illustrated by John Mantha, (Kids Can Press, 2000) also has a few pages about the Chinese railway workers. Which book do you like better, and why?

4.2 'Sons and Daughters' (page 17)

Merchant Moy wants sons so badly that he takes his twin daughters to China and switches them for twin boys. His wife is broken-hearted. Will Merchant Moy go unpunished?

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.2.1 Why did Merchant Moy want sons? Was it wise to be so choosy?
- 4.2.2 "Do good, and good happens; do bad, and bad happens." How does this saying apply to Merchant Moy? To Madame Moy?
- 4.2.3 Look for a map that shows Vancouver and Hong Kong. What is the distance between these two ports? If you were Merchant Moy's servant, what supplies would you bring along on the trip?
- 4.2.4 Choose three words to describe Merchant Moy as he appears in the painting for this story. Choose three words to describe what Merchant Moy did to his own baby girls. Does Merchant Moy look like the kind of man who would do what he did to his daughters?

4.3 'The Friends of Kwan Ming' (page 25)

On the long boat trip coming to North America, Kwan Ming makes friends with fellow travellers. But when they arrive and find jobs, they each go in a different direction. How will their friendships survive?

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.3.1 How does this story show that ‘family’ is very important to immigrants?
- 4.3.2 How many sets of ‘threes’ (people, things, places, events, etc.) can you find in this story? Can you think of other stories where sets of threes appear?
- 4.3.3 You are Kwan Ming. Write a letter to your mother telling her about your new job and how you feel about it. Remember, you don’t want to make her worried.
- 4.3.4 One day, Kwan Ming’s friends Chew Lap and Tam Yim meet on the street in Chinatown. Create a conversation between these two friends as they talk about their work and about their friends.

4.4 ‘Ginger for the Heart’ (page 33)

Yenna is the daughter of a tailor. She falls in love with a young man, but he must go to gold fields. She waits many years for him. When he returns, the two lovers are unable to be together until a lump of ginger reveals something powerful.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.4.1 Yenna was caught between taking care of her father and following her lover. Why would such a decision be difficult?
- 4.4.2 Look up ginger on the internet. Does ginger have powers to heal sick people? What illnesses is ginger supposed to help cure?
- 4.4.3 Yenna sings while she works. Write the words to a song that she would sing as she thinks about her young man.
- 4.4.4 You are new in town. You walk into a teahouse and overhear a conversation between two men talking about Yenna. Write the conversation that you hear. Yenna recently rejected one of these men as a possible husband.

4.5 ‘Gambler’s Eyes’ (page 39)

A blind man appears at the gambling table in a small Chinatown and wins again and again. When angry gamblers try to give him a beating, they get the surprise of their lives.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.5.1 Scientists have shown that gamblers are more likely to lose money than win. Why do you think people still continue to gamble?
- 4.5.2 This story shows how people treat individuals who look different from them. In what ways was the gambler's response effective? In what ways was the gambler's response not effective?
- 4.5.3 Can you write an alternate ending to the story? If the blind man isn't allowed to gamble, what can he do to keep himself alive?
- 4.5.4 You are the dealer in a game hall that the 'blind' gambler recently visited. You decide to send a letter to all the other game halls in the region, to tell other dealers not to let the 'blind' gambler play. Write that letter.

4.6 'Forbidden Fruit' (page 45)

Farmer Fong loves his farm, but his sons leave it to work elsewhere. His daughter stays behind to help. When she falls in love with a hired farm-hand, Farmer Fong refuses to let them marry. Her heart is broken. Is it too late for Farmer Fong to restore things?

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.6.1 How does Farmer Fong change in this story? At the start, what makes him happy? What made him angry? How did he lose his anger?
- 4.6.2 Regret means 'to feel sorry and sad about something that now appears wrong or mistaken.' Do you think Farmer Fong felt regret? Over what incidents?
- 4.6.3 Write the letter that Farmer Fong sends to his three sons to bring them home after their sister falls ill.
- 4.6.4 Why did the first and second brother lie to their sister when they came home? Is there ever a good time to tell a lie?

4.7 'Rider Chan and the Night River' (page 51)

Rider Chan carries messages to and from gold miners throughout the frontier. One night, he has to cross a river. But he has heard that at night, ghosts of drowned people emerge from the water. Will he continue his journey?

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.7.1 This story has a ghost, but is the story scary? Why or why not?
- 4.7.2 You are Rider Chan. Write a letter to your mother describing your work.
- 4.7.3 Does your opinion of the ghost change from the time you first encounter it to the time at the end of the story?
- 4.7.4 From the list below, choose the main idea of this story and say why you chose it.
 - a. Conquering your fears.
 - b. Doing the right thing.
 - c. Working hard.
 - d. Keeping promises.

4.8 ‘The Revenge of the Iron Chink’ (page 57)

Chimney Head, the owner of a salmon cannery, installs many machines to lower his costs and make the work go faster. He doesn’t care that the machines take jobs away from the workers. Finally, one man stands up against him.

Ideas for Classrooms

- 4.8.1 For each of the work settings listed below, give examples of work that was once done by humans but is now done by machines. Name the machines.
 - a. bank
 - b. busy crosswalk
 - c. kitchen
 - d. airport
 - e. office
 - f. parking lot
- 4.8.2 Lee Jim was caught between his boss Chimney Head, and his crew of workers. Why did Lee Jim feel loyal to Chimney Head?
- 4.8.3 Could the workers have done anything to stop Chimney Head’s use of machines in the cannery?

- 4.8.4 Now that Chimney Head cannot send the final shipment of canned salmon to the Queen of England or to paying customers, what should he do with it?

5. General Questions and Activities

- 5.1 Divide students into groups. Assign each group a story and have the students make it into a play to be performed in front of the class.
- 5.2 Choose a character from below and write a song or poem that expresses his or her feelings:
- Young Chu from 'Spirits of the Railway'
 - Madame Moy from 'Sons and Daughters'
 - Kwan Ming from 'The Friends of Kwan Ming'
 - Yenna from 'Ginger for the Heart'
 - The 'blind' gambler from 'Gambler's Eyes'
 - Farmer Fong's youngest son from 'Forbidden Fruit'
 - Rider Chan from 'Rider Chan and the Night River.'
 - Lee Jim from 'The Revenge of the Iron Chink.'
- 5.3 Choose two or three paintings from the book and compare them. What are the differences and similarities in mood, people, faces, background, and small details? Which painting do you like best, and why?
- 5.4 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:
- Yenna from 'Ginger for the Heart' and the daughter from 'Forbidden Fruit'
 - Chu from 'Spirits of the Railway' and Rider Chan from 'Rider Chan and the Night River'
 - Lee Jim from 'The Revenge of the Iron Chink' and the 'blind' gambler from 'Gambler's Eyes.'
 - Kwan Ming from 'The Friends of Kwan Ming' and Madame Moy from 'Sons and Daughters'.
- 5.5 Let's say that, after their meal, the pairs of character from Question 5.4 decide to go the photographer's studio and have a picture taken. Draw a picture of these two characters posing together for a photograph.