A
Literature Unit
for

Dragon’s Gate

by Laurence Yep

Written by Mary Thomas-Vallens

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Introduction

Throughout our lives, there are many things we take for granted. Getting from one place to another, for instance, is something most of us do without thinking about the origins of travel. The means of transportation we have is the result of the blood, sweat, and tears of those who came before us. Books can open our eyes to those things we take for granted — to the struggles and hardships that others have experienced in order to make our lives better.

Through reading, we can witness the experiences of others. We can widen our perspective to encompass the lives of those who endured more than we can ever imagine. As books broaden our awareness, we can learn more about ourselves and the world in which we live. *Dragon’s Gate* is a book that will have a lasting impact on its readers.

In *Literature Units*, we have searched for novels that not only entertain but provide us with greater knowledge and understanding of our own humanity.

Teachers who use this unit will find the following features to supplement their own valuable ideas.

- Sample Lesson Plan
- Pre-reading Activities
- A Bibliographical Sketch and Picture of the Author
- A Book Summary
- Vocabulary Lists and Suggested Vocabulary Activities
- Chapters grouped for study into section activities which include:
  - quizzes
  - hands-on projects
  - cooperative learning activities
  - cross-curricular activities
  - extensions into the reader’s own life
- Post-reading Activities
- Book Report Ideas
- Research Ideas
- Culminating Activities
- Three Different Options for Unit Tests
- Bibliography of Related Reading
- Answer Key

We are confident this unit will be a valuable addition to your planning, and we hope your students’ lives will be positively affected by their involvement with *Dragon’s Gate.*
Sample Lesson Plan

Each of the lessons suggested below can take from one to several days to complete.

Lesson 1 — Pre-reading Activities
- Introduce the novel by completing some or all of the pre-reading activities. (page 5)
- Read “About the Author” with your students. (page 6)
- Introduce the vocabulary list for Section 1. (page 8)
- Discuss the “Vocabulary Activity Ideas.” (page 9)
Use this worksheet to vary the vocabulary study activities that you assign to the class.

Lesson 2 — Section 1 Activities
- Assign the vocabulary list for Section 1. (page 8)
- Read and discuss “Preface” in Dragon’s Gate. Define “genocide” and “reprisals.” Discuss paragraphs three and four to set the stage for the Chinese departure to America.
- Define point of view — first and third person. Have students skim page 1 to determine the point of view in which the story is told.
- Read chapters 1–3 and complete the top section of “Quiz Time.” (page 10)
- Do “Reasons for Immigration.” (page 14)
- Read chapters 4–6 and have students finish the bottom section of “Quiz Time.” (page 10)
- Model and assign “Character Analysis” chart. (pages 12–13)
- Do “Act It Out.” (page 11)
- Begin “Reader’s Response Journal.” (page 15)

Lesson 3 — Section 2 Activities
- Assign the vocabulary list for Section 2. (page 8)
- Introduce “Culture Clues” worksheet (page 18).
- Have students look for examples as they read.
- Discuss what it means to be adopted and the search for identity that adopted children commonly experience.
- Read chapters 7–9, and complete the top section of “Quiz Time.” (page 16)
- Do “Culture Clues” (page 18). Students may also add details to their “Character Analysis” and “Reasons for Immigration” worksheets.
- Read chapters 10–12 and have students finish the bottom section of page 16.
- Make a picture postcard. (page 17)
- Discuss status. (pages 19–20)
- Have students write using “Express Yourself.” (page 21)

Lesson 4 — Section 3 Activities
- Assign the vocabulary list for Section 3. (page 8)
- Read chapters 13–15 and complete the top section of “Quiz Time.” (page 22)
- Make Chinese rice and use chopsticks. (page 23)
- Build cabin models. (page 24)
- Read chapters 16–18 and finish the bottom section of “Quiz Time.” (page 22)
- Learn about idioms. (page 25)
- Discuss and interview others about the strength of the human spirit. (page 26)

Lesson 5 — Section 4 Activities
- Assign the vocabulary list for Section 4. (page 8)
- Read chapters 19–21 and complete the top section of “Quiz Time.” (page 27)
- Explore blindness. (page 28)
- Examine the first lines, last lines, and titles of books. (page 29)
- Read chapters 22–24 and complete the bottom section of “Quiz Time.” (page 27)
- Write a news story about an avalanche. (page 30)
- Share your dreams. (page 31)

Lesson 6 — Section 5 Activities
- Assign vocabulary list from Section 5. (page 8)
- Read chapters 25–27 and complete the top section of “Quiz Time.” (page 32)
- Share your treasure. (page 33)
- Do “Words with Multiple Meanings.” (page 35)
- Read chapters 28–30 and finish the bottom half of “Quiz Time.” (page 32)
- Analyze the story line of the novel. (page 34)
- Take a stand or debate an issue. (page 36)

Lesson 7 — Post-reading Activities
- Discuss any questions your students have about the novel.
- Assign a book report and/or research activity. (pages 37–38)
- Begin work on one or more of the culminating activities. (pages 39–41)

Lesson 8 — Assessment
- Administer unit tests 1, 2, and/or 3. (pages 42–44).
- Encourage students to explore related topics further. (page 45)
In July of 1865, two men are given heroes’ welcomes as they return from America. Uncle Foxfire and Father bring news of their travels. They create a driving urge in their teenaged nephew and son, Otter, to follow them to America. Uncle Foxfire wants to save China from the opium use that is ruining his country. In what he describes as the “Great Work,” Foxfire sees America as the answer to his country’s needs. He hopes to learn about the railroad and other technological advances and bring them home to China. Taken by his uncle’s passion and his goals, Otter wishes to go to America with Father and Foxfire.

Otter visits Dragon’s Gate, a place where people make wishes. He makes his wish to go to America, not realizing the fate that wish will bring.

After an arduous voyage, Otter and other Chinese immigrants arrive in America. They soon learn that they are the Americans’ cheap labor force, and they must endure horrendous conditions. The men are to break a railroad tunnel through the mountain the men call Snow Tiger.

Otter is angered by the false impressions Foxfire and Father unwittingly created about America. Until he is whipped by the boss, Kilroy, he cannot understand why the men are unable to change their situation.

An explosion in the mountain tunnels takes the sight of Father, and an avalanche traps Chinese workers who are left to die. Kilroy takes no pity on the men and pushes them hard. Otter and the men sink lower and lower into despair.

The threat of another avalanche is imminent. In what is their most daring mission, Otter, Foxfire, and Kilroy’s son, Sean, climb the mountain to set off explosives hoping to force the avalanche away from the cabins. An injury forces Sean back, but the uncle and his nephew continue. On the mountain’s summit, Otter discovers that Foxfire is indeed a great man. Foxfire is injured in the freezing snow, but Otter successfully sets off the explosives and saves the men below. Otter, delirious and sick with hypothermia, returns to the cabins. Meanwhile, Foxfire secretly hides away to die so that Otter can survive the way back, unburdened by his fallen uncle.

With the help of all the men, Otter is nursed back to health. Even when he is allowed to leave the mountain, Otter chooses to stay to find his Uncle’s bones and continue the “Great Work” Foxfire hoped to achieve. No longer the weak boy he once was, Otter leads the men in a strike, and stays on to finish the railroad.
Because the context provides clues to a word’s meaning, page numbers have been provided so students can locate the words in the book. Knowing the context is essential, as many of these words are used in uncommon ways.

### Section 1 (Preface to Chapter 6)

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