

Grades  
K-2, 3-5

Like delicious dumplings, Grace Lin's books and website are stuffed with delicacies for the teaching connoisseur. They offer a full-course meal consisting of tantalizing appetizers of Chinese word pronunciations, meaty higher level thinking questions, and the delicate desserts of origami. And the stories and characters will leave the reader hungry for more.

Grace Lin has garnered many awards for both her illustrations and writing. Since she has written and illustrated both picture books and novels, Lin is a perfect author for a school-wide author study. Though the themes of her books are universal in nature and will appeal to all children, many of her books focus also on her Chinese background and make a great segue into multicultural studies.

Introduce the author study by sharing the video or written interview at [gracelin.com/outergrace.blogspot.com](http://gracelin.com/outergrace.blogspot.com) to give readers a taste of Lin's personality, her life, her aspirations, and goals. Learning how her experiences impacted her books helps students recognize how authors use life experiences in their writing. Lin's essays, which tell how and why she wrote her stories, also provide insights into each book's characters and events.

### Picture Books/Early Readers

Collect multiple copies of Grace Lin's books so that students may work in groups and more easily access the text and illustrations for discussion and activities.

#### *Lissy's Friends*

Being shy and entering a new school make it difficult for Lissy to develop friendships. So Lissy resorts to folding new friends from paper and using her imagination to make them talk. When the paper friends blow away, Lissy is left alone until one paper friend returns to her in the hands of a real girl who draws Lissy into a play group.

#### Activity

1. End pages give directions for creating an origami paper crane. Use these directions or choose an easier folded form from another source, and have students try their hand at creating their own.

#### *Thanking the Moon*

In *Thanking the Moon*, Grace Lin offers readers a glimpse at the traditions followed by Chinese families in America. The community gathers to give thanks for a good harvest with a nighttime picnic that features foods and decorations symbolic of the moon. The end pages explain the Mid-Autumn Moon Festival traditions and the story of the celebration.

#### Activities

1. At [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com), you will find reproducibles that show pictures of each item at the picnic. Enlarge each picture and mount them onto construction paper. Tape the pictures to the board and ask the class to sequence the events.
2. Discuss the Chinese use of symbolism in the foods and objects at the picnic.

#### *Bringing in the New Year*

Told in simple language, the reader follows a family as it prepares for and celebrates the Chinese New Year. Bright illustrations of customs and symbolic foods add flavor to the story will introduce unfamiliar readers to a holiday celebrated by millions of people.

#### Activities

1. Use two-column notes, labeling the left column "Preparing for New Year Festival" and the right column "Activities during the Festival." Ask the class to identify the event that shows the actual beginning of the festival and write it in the right hand column. Fill in the chart as a class, or put students into groups to write the information in each column.



2. Give one sheet of drawing paper to each student. Provide books with pictures of dragons. Have students draw dragons, but make sure they leave the eyes blank until the whole class can “wake the dragons” together.
3. Older students can research how other cultures celebrate the Chinese New Year (aka, Lunar New Year). Use thinking maps to compare the traditional activities.
4. Write spring couplets and/or wishes, glue them to red paper, and hang them on the walls.

### Fortune Cookie Fortunes

A young girl discovers that fortune cookies’ fortunes do come true, though the outcome may not be quite what is originally thought.

#### Activities

1. Give a fortune cookie to each student or assign them one fortune from the book. Have students write their fortunes onto the activity sheet from [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com), interpret the meaning, and illustrate it. Compile student work into a class Fortune Book.
2. Let groups of students create their own list of fortunes.
3. Don’t miss the historical information found at the back of the book, for it reveals surprising facts about the origin of fortune cookies.

### Red Thread

A red thread connects the hearts of adoptive parents to the heart of their adopted child. No matter that they are on opposite sides of the world, the thread pulls their hearts together.

#### Activities

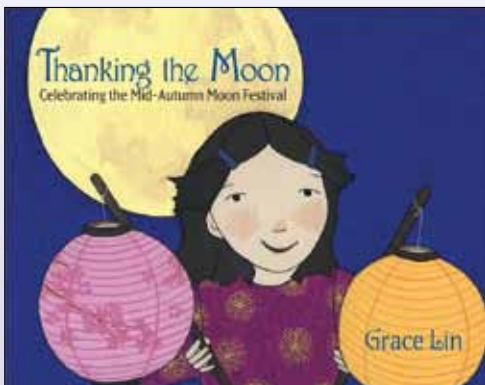
1. After sharing the story, read the last two pages of the book which explain the Chinese belief of the red thread that connects us to people who are significant in our lives, whether they are related or not.
2. Give students a large blank paper to sketch a self-portrait in the center, surrounded on the edges by people important to their lives. Have them label the people and attach a red piece of yarn from the center to each of the people on the perimeter. Be sure that they leave one string unattached for future relationships. Allow time for students to write or tell about the associations or about why these people are important in their lives.

### Kite Flying

A girl and her family work together to build and decorate a dragon kite. The history of kites and explanation of kite festivals around the world are explained on the back pages.

#### Activities

1. Symbolism plays a big part in the Chinese culture. Lin has depicted and labeled a variety of animal kite shapes on the back end pages. Review the meaning of symbolism.
2. Ask students to consider different animals for a kite picture. List choices and discuss the possible symbolic nature of each chosen animal. Let students draw a picture of their own kite and explain the symbolic meaning.
3. Have older students research the practical uses of kites and share their findings with the class.



## Author Extensions

### *Robert's Snow*

Robert, an inquisitive mouse, was granted a wish to play in the snow. When he loses his way home, he receives help from a friendly bearded man dressed in a red suit.

#### Activities

1. Demonstrate how to fold paper and cut snowflakes, and have students create their own blizzard.
2. Have students list things Robert could do in the snow.
3. Ask the students how the story might change if it were set in a different season. What would Robert do outside if it were spring or summer?
4. Distribute the boot activity sheet from [www.librarysparks.com](http://www.librarysparks.com) and give students crayons, colored pencils, markers, and collage materials. Have them turn the boot into a new house for Robert.



### *Olvina Flies*

Olvina is a nervous chicken who doesn't want to fly in an airplane, but nevertheless, she takes the reader on an adventure to the airport, through security, and into the air. A new friend eases Olvina's fears and together they enjoy the journey.

#### Activities

1. Prior to reading, discuss what the class knows about chickens, bringing up the fact that chickens don't fly. After reading the book, talk about the two meanings for flying (flapping wings vs. airplane wings).
2. Discuss how Olvina solved her problem, and ask students to share any fears that they may have. Ask them to draw a picture showing one way that they could make their fear go away. Let them help each other if needed.

### *Ling and Ting: Not Exactly the Same!* [Early Reader Geisel Honor book]

Vivid pictures compliment the amusing story of twins and their similarities and differences. Lin's wit and warmth shine through as these two little girls interact and tease each other. Each chapter introduces a new subject, but Lin cleverly ties everything together in the end.

#### Activities

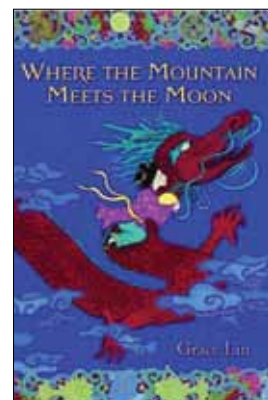
1. Create a thinking map showing Ling and Ting's differences and similarities.
2. Pair students and ask them to act out a scene from the book or to create their own scene that shows how twins can be different.
3. Read the back-story to writing this book on Grace Lin's web site. Also look for recipes for the foods described in the book and for activities to use with the included Dolch sight words.

### Novels Written and Illustrated by Grace Lin Intermediate Grades

Grace Lin's stories for older readers provides an opportunity for them to dig deep into the themes of each book and stress higher level thinking skills.

### *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* [Newbery Honor Book]

A sensitive and hardworking young girl wants to help her poor parents change their fortune. Fascinated by stories told by her father, Minli sets off on a magical adventure to ask the man in the moon for help. Her trials and tribulations are intricately woven together with Chinese folktales that ultimately help Minli find success.



#### Activities

1. *Developing Schema:* Before reading the book, explore Chinese landscapes via a virtual tour, either with a movie or on the web at various travel sites.
2. *Simile Collectors:* Grace Lin used many unique similes in this book to evoke images that enrich the reading experience. Help students learn how these comparisons add clarity and an originality of expression. As students read the second chapter, ask them to place a small sticky note by each simile they find. At the end of the chapter, stop and record all of the similes onto a chart. Some examples from Chapter 2 include:
  - "Her arms and legs were so tired that she felt like an old crab crawling on rocks."
  - "The goldfish man's cart was full of bowls of flashing fish that glittered like jewels."
  - "His gentle calling drew Minli to him like a moth to a lit lantern."

When the similes have been recorded, invite students to determine the two nouns being compared in each sentence. Have one student underline them on the chart. Discuss the images evoked in each sentence and why Grace Lin probably used them.

Assign groups of students to each of the next five chapters to compile similes as they read. Write the similes onto a chart or into thinking maps. At the end of chapter seven, let each group demonstrate their ability to identify the comparisons and describe the similarities. Continue this exercise throughout the rest of the book.

3. *Folklore Retelling*: Grace Lin intertwines Chinese folklore throughout the story. Collect other versions of these folktales and assign one to each group of three students. (Anthology references are provided at the end of her book.) Give each group a one foot long piece of red yarn. One student retells part of the story by moving his/her fingers along the string. The string passes from person to person until the entire story is retold. Students can move their fingers at any speed, but when reaching the end of the string, it must be handed to the next person in the group, and the story continued.
4. *Dragon Research*: Dragons display prominently in the Chinese culture. Invite students to research the symbolic nature of the dragon. Find other Chinese folklore stories featuring dragons and compare each dragon's nature and purpose.

### The Pacy Novel Series

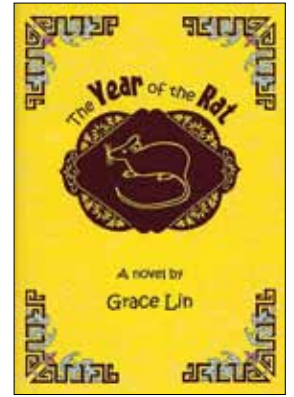
This series focuses on Pacy, an artistic and insightful Chinese American girl, living in a suburban community with few others like herself. The reader gets to know her family and friends through Pacy's narrations and stories. The sibling and friend interactions are universal in nature, but Pacy must also deal with the feelings and frustrations that can come from living as a minority in our multicultural society.

### *Year of the Dog*

Pacy searches to find her special talent. She must navigate through superstitions and peer pressure to discover her ability to believe in herself.

### *Year of the Rat*

Pacy discovers her inner tiger as she navigates through a year wrought with changes. Her best friend moves away, and Pacy feels that others do not appreciate her talents. Ultimately, Pacy must face her own prejudices as well as confront prejudice in others—not an easy task for a young girl.



### *Dumpling Days*

Pacy's family takes a summer trip to Taiwan to spend time with her mother's and father's families, and she discovers delicious new dumplings. Here she experiences living in a place where she looks like the majority of people, but because she can't understand or read the language, she feels like an outsider. Frustrations and adventures result, but in the end, Pacy develops an appreciation for both her American self and her Taiwanese self.

### Activity

In this series of books, Grace Lin interjects Pacy's mother's back-stories seamlessly into the text. The lessons are pertinent to the difficulty that Pacy has at the moment, and are subtly taught through the telling of a story. Use any of these books to instigate writing family stories. Ask students to interview parents and grandparents and other family members about stories they remember from their childhoods. Invite students to write the story and illustrate it either in book form, coupled with other family stories, or placed into a digital story format (digital stories use computer tools like slide show or presentation software to display student illustrations and record student's reading their own story).

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Be sure to check Grace Lin's excellent website for additional book activities, crafts, recipes, and more.

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*Judith Snyder* is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the Jump-start Your Library series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008) and two picture books, *What Do You See?* (2009) and *Stinky Feet* (2010) from *Odyssey Books*. Visit [www.judithsnyderwrites.com](http://www.judithsnyderwrites.com) for additional literacy ideas and articles featuring integration of the arts and creative thinking.