



# FINDING YOUR WAY TO THE NEVER-ENDING MOUNTAIN (OR ANYWHERE)

Things to Ponder and Things to Do After Reading

*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Activity Guide by Kirsten Cappy of Curious City



*Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*  
by Grace Lin  
www.GraceLin.com  
Little, Brown Books for Young Readers  
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Recommended Ages 8–12



## ABOUT THE BOOK

In the valley of Fruitless mountain, a young girl named Minli lives in a ramshackle hut with her parents. In the evenings, her father regales her with old folktales of the Jade Dragon and the Old Man of the Moon, who knows the answers to all of life's questions. Inspired by these stories, Minli sets off on an extraordinary journey to find the Old Man of the Moon to ask him how she can change her family's fortune. She encounters an assorted cast of characters and magical creatures along the way, including a dragon who accompanies her on her quest for the ultimate answer.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Grace Lin, author of the beloved *Year of the Dog and Year of the Rat*, returns with a wondrous story of adventure, faith, and friendship. A fantasy crossed with Chinese folklore, *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is a timeless story reminiscent of *The Wizard of Oz*. Her beautiful illustrations, printed in full-color, accompany the text throughout. Once again, she has created a charming, engaging book for young readers.

More at: [www.GraceLin.com](http://www.GraceLin.com)



## FINDING YOUR WAY TO THE NEVER-ENDING MOUNTAIN (OR ANYWHERE)

Minli starts her journey to the Never-Ending Mountain by using what appears to be magic to point the way. Using only a bowl, some water, a needle, a few rocks and bamboo, Minli finds her way.

You can use this same “magic” to find North, South, East, and West. Using the same tools as Minli, you can make a working compass.

### Gather These Things

- \* Bowl filled 3/4 full with water  
A bowl with a flat bottom and that is more than 5 inches across works the best.
- \* Something that floats.  
Minli uses bamboo, but you can use a cork cut in half the long way or a piece of foam cut from a food container.
- \* Magnet  
Minli uses a stone that is probably an iron ore called magnetite or lodestone, but you can use a strong refrigerator magnet or a magnet from your science supplies. Flat, flexible magnets don't usually work.
- \* Needle



### Try These Steps

1. Stroke all the way along the needle with the magnet 5-6 times in the same direction.
2. Cut a piece of foam large enough for the needle to sit on comfortably or split a cork the long way.
3. Fill the bowl with enough water that there is plenty of space for the foam or cork to float without touching the sides.
4. Place the needle in the center of the foam and float it in the bowl.
5. The float should start to turn all on its own and then settle and stop. Which direction is it pointing in?



### What Could Happen

One end of the needle should be pointing North and the other South. You just need to mark which end is pointing North and you will have built a working compass.

### Why This Works

Magnets are attracted to each other on their opposite ends. Meaning, one magnet's North end is attracted to the other magnet's South end. The earth is a giant magnet. The small weak magnet that you have created is attracted to the very strong magnetic pull of the earth. Your magnetic needle will get in line with the earth's North and South magnet ends (otherwise known as the North and South Poles). Minli was indeed using a type of magic, but one that is also available to you.

## DRAWING DRAGONS INTO LIFE

Minli's dear friend, Dragon, began as a drawing so lifelike that when his eyes were painted he burst off the paper and ran into the forest. Can you use what details you have read in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* to draw a dragon of your own?

(Do not be disappointed if your dragon does not come to life immediately. You may need a special inkstone that has been lost to history and legend.)

Here are the words used to describe Minli's friend, Dragon.

You can read them yourself in further detail on pages 46, 51-57, and 70 of the book.

- \* Brilliant red (the color of a lucky lantern)
- \* Emerald-green whiskers and horns
- \* Dull stone-colored ball like the moon on his head and the size of a melon
- \* As long as a street in Minli's village
- \* Tall as a bird's nest in a tree



And (of course) you do not need to draw the dragon from the story, but can create your own from the clues up.

## DETERMINING THE AGE OF A DRAGON (ONE PEACH TREE AT A TIME)

The peach is often a symbol of long life in China. In the story, Minli suspects that Dragon has already lived a long life. Dragon does not know how old he is, but he remembers a bird dropping a peach pit onto the ground of the forest when he first arrived.



That peach pit grew into a tree and then that tree dropped more pits that became more trees. It takes 4 years for a peach pit to become a peach tree old enough to produce peaches (and pits).

If that first peach pit grew one tree and now there are 400 trees, how old is Dragon? (Assume that each tree only manages to plant one new tree.)

Use the space below to figure out the solution to the problem. Some of you might use mathematics and some of you might draw pictures to solve the problem. Turn to page 71 of the book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* to see if your guess is close to Minli's guess.

## FOLLOW THE RED THREADS AND MAP YOUR CONNECTIONS



It is said that the Old Man of the Moon connects us all by tying red threads between all of our ancestors and all the people we will meet. Can you map your own life in a web of red threads like the Old Man of the Moon does?

### Gather These Things

- \* Pictures of your family (photos or drawings)
- \* Large piece of paper
- \* Transparent tape
- \* Red thread or a red marker

### Try These Steps

1. Gather up pictures of your friends and family and one picture of yourself.
2. Get a large piece of paper and place your picture in the middle. Lay your friends and family out around your picture.
3. Using the red thread with tape or marker, connect your picture to all your friends and family.

4. Now connect the people on your page to each other. Does one person live with another? Is one person the relative of another? Is one friend friends with another?

5. You can also do this activity with members of your family or with friends. Try making those connections across each other's papers.

### What Could Happen

You should see when you are done what an important person you are. You are tied to many people, and each of those people is tied to more people. Reread pages 246–250 of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* and think about the complex web of threads in the room of the Old Man of the Moon. Are you possibly connected to everyone in the world? Even to those whom you have not met?



### Something Else to Try

There are many connections between the characters in the story, the characters and events in the legends, and the things that happen along Mini's journey. Can you create a special red thread map of the story?

## COMING TO JOURNEY'S END

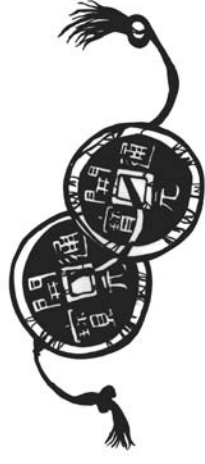
Reading a book is like taking a journey. Some of the things that happen do not make sense until the journey is over or the book is finished. The book *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* or any story is like the Old Man of the Moon's connection of red threads—many things are connected that do not seem to be on first glance.

Here are some questions you might ask yourself or other people who have read the book to help see those many connections.

1. Minli's name means "quick thinking." As the book opens, she wishes her name meant "gold" or "fortune." Do you think her name suits her? How do the other names also suit her in the end? (Page 3)
2. Ma thinks her family has a "poor fortune" because they have plenty of stories, but not plenty of food. How do stories turn to fortune? (Pages 9-10)
3. Where does the inkstone that the painter used to create the dragon come from? Does the origin of the inkstone have anything to do with the dragon coming to life or the Fruitless Mountain coming back to life? (Pages 53 and 90)
4. Ba says that Minli is like the Paper of Happiness. If the Paper of Happiness says "Thankfulness," how is it like Minli? (Page 87)



5. The buffalo boy's friend is only a weaver. How would she know where to find the king and why does she look toward the moon as she considers the question? (Page 112-114)
6. Why do you think the buffalo boy refuses Minli's coin, as he is obviously poor? What does that teach Minli? (Pages 120 and 159)
7. How are A-Fu and Da-Fu able to trick the tiger? How is the tiger the opposite of the villagers? (Pages 168-174)
8. Why does Minli choose to ask Dragon's question above all the other questions she has? (Pages 246-250)
9. In the end, Ma is also a storyteller and tells her own story. How are her story and what she learns similar to what Minli learns? (Pages 252-255)
10. What happens because Minli's family decides to give away the dragon pearl and not keep those riches for themselves? (Pages 271-278)



## LOOKING FOR WHAT IS HIDDEN

In Chinese culture, an object, a number, or a word can have another meaning. Sometimes what a word looks like or sounds like can turn it into a symbol for another thing. For example, in Chinese, the word for the number “4” sounds the same as the word for “death.” When this happens in the English language, like with the words bear (animal) and bear (carry), we call it a homonym. Because of the homonym for the number four in Chinese, the number is seen as unlucky.

Or perhaps an object appeared in a story once and now that object will always remind people of that story. When Ba tells “The Story of the Dragon Pearl,” he describes the Banquet of Peaches, where the peaches of immortality are served. Are peaches symbols of longevity because the immortal Queen Mother serves them? Many would have answers to that question and many would not. That is the puzzle with symbols; sometimes we know their origin, and sometimes the origin is lost to history.

There are many Chinese symbols woven into *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. Some of those symbols are in the boxes on the left and right below. Can you connect the scenes from the story with a symbol? Symbols are not always easy nor is looking for what is hidden.



Draw a line between the symbol and the scene.

### Hidden Symbols

**9** is a homonym with the Chinese word for “forever,” so it is imbued with the meaning of longevity or long-lasting.

**4** is a homonym with the Chinese word for “death,” so 4 is seen as an unlucky number.

**A pearl** is a symbol of good fortune.

**A fish** is a symbol of good fortune.

**A peach** is a symbol for longevity.

**Red** is the color of happiness and good luck.

**Blue** is the color of immortality and thus the color worn by the gods and goddesses.

### Scenes From the Story

The Jade Dragon loses her children when they sacrifice themselves to become rivers. (Pages 4-8)

Minli spends one copper coin on something that will bring gold into her home. (Pages 12-15)

The Old Man of the Moon extends the life of the goldfish man. (Pages 62-67)

Minli and Dragon begin their long friendship in the grove after tricking the monkeys. (Page 78)

The buffalo boy’s mysterious friend wears a silk dress and carries a bag the same color as the sky. (Page 112)

A-Fu and Da-Fu in their matching clothing look like “two rolling berries.” (Page 175)

The villagers think that the seeds raining from the sky are jewels from the moon. (Pages 184-187)

# BUILD A MOUNTAIN, STROKE THE MOON: DRAWING CHINESE CHARACTERS

Chinese character lesson by educator / artist, Betsy Thompson

A very long time ago, over 2500 years ago, before there were books or schools or even pens or pencils, people in China drew simple pictures of important things by carving into bone, clay or mud. People could understand what the symbols meant because the drawings looked like the actual things.

Over time and with the invention of brushes and pens, these ancient symbols evolved into modern characters that people in China read and write.

Ancient character  
(circa 500BC)

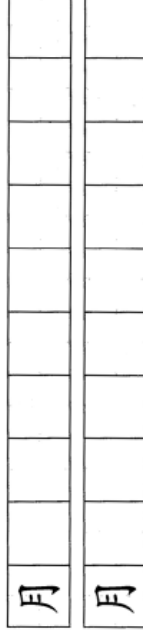
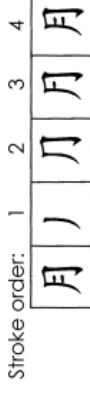
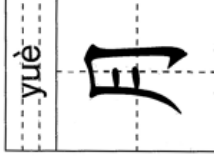
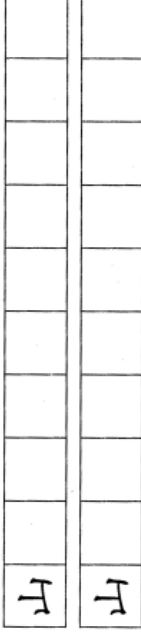
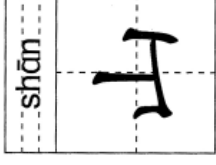


mountain



moon

Modern character  
(20th century)



If you would like to learn more about Chinese calligraphy, here are some good books to read:

- \* *Long is a Dragon: Chinese Writing for Children*  
by Peggy Goldstein
- \* *Liu and the Bird: A Journey in Chinese Calligraphy*  
by Catherine Louis
- \* *Beyond the Great Mountains: A Visual Poem about China*  
by Ed Young

Before you learn how to write the two Chinese characters for mountain (shān) and moon (yuè), it is important to know that each part of a character is called a stroke, and each stroke needs to be drawn in the correct order.

## FOOD FIT FOR A KING

When the King invites Minli into the Clasp of the Moon Pavilion, he opens a bamboo basket full of so many food aromas that Minli's stomach grumbles. (Page 133-134)

You could enjoy parts of that meal served under the moon. Guessing that you do not share the luxury of the King's kitchens, the recipes for savory noodles and turtle cakes have been modified. Invite an adult cook to try making these treats with you.

### SAVORY PEANUT SESAME NOODLES

Modified from a recipe from [www.smittenkitchen.com](http://www.smittenkitchen.com)

*The King and Minli eat savory noodles with pork. "Savory" can mean many things. You might imagine savory to include the tastes of sesame and peanut. In this recipe, you will combine savory sauce with noodles. This is delicious on its own. You may add the ingredients listed in Group D. Maybe you will add pork or chicken instead of tofu. It is up to you as you are the cook!*

This makes 6 small bowls or 4 large bowls.

#### Gather These Things

- |                    |                 |                  |
|--------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Group A            | * sharp knife   | * 2 pot holders  |
| * measuring cups   | * cutting board | * colander       |
| * measuring spoons | * blender       | * large spoon    |
| * mixing bowl      | * 6-8 quart pot | * serving dishes |

#### Group B

- \* 1 tablespoon peeled & chopped fresh ginger
- \* 1 garlic clove, chopped
- \* 1/2 cup smooth peanut butter
- \* 1/4 cup soy sauce
- \* 1/3 cup warm water
- \* 2 tablespoons rice vinegar (or cider vinegar)
- \* 1 1/2 tablespoons toasted sesame oil
- \* 1 tablespoon honey
- \* 1 teaspoon hot red pepper flakes (or a splash of hot sauce or chili paste)

#### Group C

- \* 3/4 lb dried soba noodles (dried linguine or spaghetti will work too)
- \* 1 teaspoon of salt

#### Group D (Optional)

- \* 4 scallions, thinly sliced
- \* 1 red bell pepper, cut into 1/8-inch-thick strips
- \* Half a cucumber, thinly sliced
- \* 1 cup firm or extra-firm tofu, cubed
- \* 3 tablespoons sesame seeds (toasted if you like)



## Try These Steps

1. Have the adult cook chop up the garlic and ginger.
2. Add the garlic, ginger, and all the other ingredients in **Group B** into your blender. Select “puree” on your blender and let the blender run until the mixture is smooth. You have savory sauce! Leave the sauce in the blender until it is needed later.
3. Fill the pot with water and add salt. Set the pot on the stove and have the adult turn the stove to medium high.
4. When the water is boiling hot, add soba noodles or pasta. Boil the noodles until they are fully cooked. (You can tell this by having the adult cook pull out a noodle, break in half, and see if the color is the same all the way through.)
5. Place a colander in the sink. Give the adult cook two pot holders to pick up the pot and to pour the noodles and water into the colander. Run cold water over the noodles for a few minutes. Leave the noodles to drain in the colander for a few minutes.
6. Put the noodles in the mixing bowl. Pour the sauce from the blender onto the noodles. Gently mix the sauce and noodles together with a large spoon.
7. *Optional: Have the adult cook chop up the ingredients in Group D. Mix the chopped ingredients into the noodles and sauce.*
8. Divide the mixture in the large bowl into serving dishes.
9. *Optional: Sprinkle the top of each serving dish with sesame seeds.*
10. And now your savory dish is ready to feed the grumbling stomachs of your guests!

## GREEN TEA CAKES WITH RED BEAN PASTE

Modified from a recipe from [belachan2.blogspot.com](http://belachan2.blogspot.com)

*Minli finishes her meal with the King with a turtle-shaped cake filled with red bean paste that has a “taste not know to her before.” You can recreate that taste by following this recipe which includes another taste from China—green tea.*

### Gather These Things

#### Group A

- \* cupcake/muffin paper cups
- \* measuring cups
- \* measuring spoons
- \* 2 oven mitts (or pot holders)
- \* whisk (or large spoon and regular fork)
- \* wire rack or towel
- \* large mixing bowl
- \* small mixing bowl
- \* regular spoon

#### Group B

- \* 1 1/2 cup all purpose flour
- \* 2 tsp. baking powder
- \* 1/4 tsp. salt
- \* 1 cup sugar
- \* 1 tsp. green tea powder

#### Group C

- \* 1 cup plain yogurt
- \* 3 large eggs, whisk
- \* 1 tsp. vanilla extract
- \* 1/2 cup canola oil

#### Group D

- \* 2 7-8 oz. cans of red bean paste

### Try These Steps

1. Turn the oven on to 350°F.
2. Place 16 muffin paper cups into the cupcake pans.
3. In a large mixing bowl, add in all the ingredients from Group B. Use a whisk (or large spoon) to combine the ingredients.
4. Crack the eggs into a small mixing bowl and use the whisk (or fork) to mix the yolks and whites of the eggs.
5. Add the eggs and the other ingredients from Group C into the large mixing bowl. Use the whisk again to blend in these ingredients.
6. Scoop batter with a regular spoon into each paper cups until each is 1/3 full.
7. Place a dollop (or close to a teaspoon) of red bean paste in the center of each paper cup.
8. Scoop more batter into each paper cup until each cup is about 3/4 full.
9. Place the tins in the oven to bake for 25 minutes or until you can stick a toothpick in center of each little cake and it comes out clean. (Remember to never touch the inside of the oven or the cupcake tins without wearing oven mitts.)
10. Still wearing your oven mitts, wiggle each cake from the tin and place them on a wire rack or towel to cool.
11. Eat and enjoy the “taste not known to you before.”



*Minli's red bean cakes were shaped like turtles. Can you think of anything you can add to these cakes using items from your kitchen to make them look like turtles? You an always use toothpicks to attach things to the cake.*