

Real Reads: The Chinese Classics

INTRODUCTION TO THE SCHEMES OF WORK

THE CHINESE CLASSICS: WHAT CHILDREN LIKE ABOUT THEM

Journey to the West: This tale is the best known of the Classics in the West. With magic, animals and a good dose of cheeky behaviour alongside deities that try their best to help, it can easily appeal to all ages and is a good place to start amongst the four classics for KS2.

Dream of the Red Chamber : A tale of growing up amongst many influences, this book helps transition into an adult world where choices must be made in the midst of emotions that are more vivid. By giving the child insights into social relationships, it can be used to think about how these vary in history, in between cultures and how they are still very relevant today and always will be! Children feel for the youngest of the characters.

The Water Margin: An ancient story of heroes, outlaws, rebellion centered around a lake in China make this a questioning tale of right and wrong and the role of power in making these judgments. The large number of characters creates a vision that the children enjoy embracing. Important elements of Chinese culture that have relevance today including friendship, family duty and ethics feature amidst the struggle.

The Three Kingdoms: More easily used at KS3/High school, the way in which this book introduces the concept of strategy appeals to children beginning to understand how individuals fit into a social world. Specifically, the notion that innovative planning can ensure success despite overwhelming odds introduces leadership, followership and the dynamics of allegiances. It helps that it is also a book full of action and passion.

OVERVIEW – ACTIVITIES & CURRICULUM

		Journey to the West	Dream of a Red Chamber	The Water Margin	The Three Kingdoms
Cross curricular	Activity 1	Re-creating the story and presenting. Create top trump cards of the main characters. <i>Curriculum areas: Literacy /ICT.</i>	Making and learning to use a Chinese Abacus. <i>Curriculum area: Maths/Art and design.</i>	Focussing on marshlands in the book and comparing with examples globally. <i>Curriculum area: Geography.</i>	Creating a leadership speech. (* note 1) <i>Curriculum area: literacy (persuasive) writing, oracy.</i>
	Activity 2	Create a map of the actual journey using different media. <i>Curriculum area: Geography.</i>	Creating an alternative ending to the story. <i>Curriculum area: Literacy (creative writing).</i>	Exploring the making of steel in China and its impact on the contemporary world. <i>Curriculum area: Science.</i>	Writing and then debating about pros/cons of conscription for armies. (* note 1) <i>Curriculum area: Literacy (writing).</i>
	Activity 3	Make a poster that advertises a new stage show version of Journey to the West. <i>Curriculum areas: Art and design/ICT.</i>	Looking at architecture in China and internationally at the time. Developing criteria for architectural genres. <i>Curriculum area: History.</i>	Making and comparing Chinese armour. <i>Curriculum areas: History, Art and Design.</i>	Creating a class campaign strategy map. (* note 1) <i>Curriculum areas: Geography/Art.</i>
Chinese Language	Activity 1	Learning key words from the story.	Counting 1-100.	Exploring and creating Chinese nicknames.	Learning different country names in Chinese. How to ask where someone is from and be able to reply.
	Activity 2	Incorporating key words into existing sentence constructions.	Identifying Chinese homophones.	Taking a created nickname and justifying it in a sentence.	Using measure words with sentences in Chinese.
	Activity 3	Comparing literal and actual translations of tang poetry.	Learning how to write questions in Chinese.	Looking at Chinese words that when combined create new and interesting meaning.	Look at literal translations from Chinese proverbs.
Bi-Cultural	Activity 1	Exploring personal perceptions and familiarities with elements of the story.	Focussing on Taoism. For upper primary/elementary (KS2 in the UK).	Looking at Chinese outlaws in the book and comparing with global examples.	Focussing on Chinese inventions and their adoption globally. Parallels with innovation in other countries.
	Activity 2	Looking at the bi-cultural nature of ancient objects and artifacts and how they connect globally.	Focussing on Taoism. For lower senior/high school (KS3 in the UK).	Exploring the Chinese dynasty of the time and comparing with other governments.	Exploring the concept of unity and division in China and across different contexts.

* note 1 : Themes of Persuasion/Opinion run through all three activities.

TEACHERS NOTES - UNDERSTANDING THE STORY AND PUTTING IT INTO CONTEXT

SCHEME OF WORK 1: JOURNEY TO THE WEST

What children like about *Journey to the West*: This tale is the best known of the Classics in the West. With magic, animals and a good dose of cheeky behaviour alongside deities that try their best to help, it can easily appeal to all ages and is a good place to start amongst the four classics for KS2.

When was the story set?

- Based on the real life of the monk Xuan Zang (ca.602-664) who made a 17 year journey to India and back to collect Buddhist scriptures
- Xuan Zang wrote his own account of his travels on which the novel is partly based
- The modern city of Xi'an stands on the site of Tang Dynasty Chang'an, and you can still see the pagoda built to house Xuan Zang's scriptures
- Xuan Zang lived during the reign of Taizong, 2nd emperor of the Tang Dynasty (618-907)
- The Tang Dynasty was another of China's golden ages, when its capital Chang'an was the largest city in the world
- The wealth of the Tang Dynasty was built on trade along the Silk Route that stretched from China to the shores of the Mediterranean
- Buddhism was the principal religion of China, but Islam reached the Tang capital during the reign of Taizong

Implications:

In literary terms the book is interesting for its creation of a story from an interpretation of true events that left a physical presence, some of which remain intact and can be visited today. It reveals just how important diverse characters are to good story telling in any language. In a cross curricula sense, the story reminds us of another time when China's influence over global affairs was large, as it is now. Linked to global flows, a very current topic, the story shows the importance of trading routes and how cultural exchange (in this case religion) can occur along side commercial exchange.

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe*: end of Roman Empire; Dark Ages; Moors invade southern Spain
- *Near East*: Byzantine Empire
- *Americas*: middle Maya period in Mexico
- *India*: King Harsha, ruler of North India, establishes diplomatic relations with China.

When was the story written? Written in the 2nd half of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) when corruption in central and local government was increasing

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe*: Tudor period- Henry VII and Elizabeth I; Spanish Armada; Reformation; Age of Discovery
- *Americas*: Cortez in Mexico, Pizarro in Peru; Spanish in Mexico; Raleigh in Virginia
- *Middle East*: Suleiman the Magnificent
- *India*: beginning of Mogul Period – Akbar the Great

SCHEME OF WORK 2: DREAM OF THE RED CHAMBER

What children like about *Dream of the Red Chamber* : A tale of growing up amongst many influences, this book helps transition into an adult world where choices must be made in the midst of emotions that are more vivid. By giving the child insights into social relationships, it can be used to think about how these vary in history, in between cultures and how they are still very relevant today and always will be! Children feel for the youngest of the characters.

When was the story set?

- Invading Manchus from north of the Great Wall deposed the Chinese Ming Dynasty and established the Qing Dynasty in 1644
- The Qing empire extended over 13,000,000 km², almost 1.5 x larger than the USA
- The three greatest emperors of the Qing Dynasty, Kangxi, Yongzheng and Qianlong reigned between 1661-1796
- 18th c a period of great literary and artistic development in China

Implications: A story of growing up amidst a network of family and friends, this story explores choice and influence of others. How much may you rely on your own values or should you learn and be influenced by others including your parents? In almost a philosophical way, the story wonders how much you can and should choose your future. Reflecting the majestic period it represents the story reveals insights into how life was led and how social interaction worked. Written in the period recognized as the pinnacle of Chinese writing, one can but wonder how many of the issues play out today as families gain and lose wealth and hope for the new generation.

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe:* George I & II ruling Great Britain; Act of Union unites England, Scotland & Wales; War of Spanish Succession; Louis XIV ruling France; 7 Years War
- *Middle East:* Decline of Ottoman Empire; foundation of first Saudi State
- *India:* Mughal rule of India weakening; growth in power of British East India Company

When was the story written? Written by Cao Xueqin (ca 1720-1763/4) and published after his death. China ruled by the Manchu invaders of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912)

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe:* George II King of Great Britain; Louis XV King of France; Peter the Great of Russia; War of Austrian Succession; 7 Years War
- *Americas:* Anglo-French War; build-up to War of American Independence
- *Middle East:* Decline of Ottoman Empire
- *India:* Increasing power of British East India Company

SCHEME OF WORK 3: THE WATER MARGIN

What children like about *The Water Margin*: An ancient story of heroes, outlaws, rebellion centered around a lake in China make this a questioning tale of right and wrong and the role of power in making these judgments. The large number of characters creates a vision that the children enjoy embracing. Important elements of Chinese culture that have relevance today including friendship, family duty and ethics feature amidst the struggle.

When was the story set?

- Set at the beginning of 12th c during the Song Dynasty (960-1279) before a 200 year period of invasion by northern nomadic peoples, including Mongols
- Divided into Northern (960-1127) and Southern Song (1127-1279) after invaders forced them to move their capital from Kaifeng in north China to Hangzhou in the south
- Novel is a mixture of historical fact and folk-tales
- Tells story of 106 outlaws who take refuge in the marshlands of Shandong province in north-east China
- The outlaw leader, Song Jiang, and others are mentioned in real historical records
- Story ends with the outlaws being pardoned and sent to fight against the emperor's real life enemies: both internal rebellions and invading nomads

Implications:

It is impossible not to compare the outlaws of the Water Margin with the tales of Robin Hood and his Merry Men. Both are stories of righteous men driven beyond the law by injustice, and both end with the heroes being brought back into loyal service, with mixed consequences. As with the moralities exhibited in Journey to the West, however, it is not always possible to reconcile some of the Chinese outlaws' behavior with our image of the noble hero, more worthy than those who outlawed him.

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England, Europe & Middle East:* Henry I King of England; 1st Crusade ends in capture of Jerusalem 1099
- *Americas:* Mayas in Mexico
- *India:* rise of Islam in India

When was the story written? Attributed to Shi Nai'an (ca.1296-1372). China was under Mongol occupation during Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368). Empire in the grip of famine, floods, popular unrest and incompetent government

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe:* Edward III King of England; 100 Years War – battles of Poitiers and Crecy; the Black Death
- *Americas:* Inca and Aztec Empires
- *Middle East:* foundation of Ottoman Empire
- *India:* Mongol invasion of N India by Tamerlane (Timur)

SCHEME OF WORK 4: THE THREE KINGDOMS

What children like about *The Three Kingdoms*: More easily used at KS3/High school, the way in which this book introduces the concept of strategy appeals to children beginning to understand how individuals fit into a social world. Specifically, the notion that innovative planning can ensure success despite overwhelming odds introduces leadership, followership and the dynamics of allegiances. It helps that it is also a book full of action and passion.

When was the story set?

- Set between the 2nd halves of the 2nd and 3rd centuries CE: 169 -280 CE
- The great Han Dynasty, one of the golden ages of China, is losing its grip on power, and the states of Shu, Wei and Wu emerge as the main contenders for power
- Based on fact and legend and its main characters are some of the most famous leaders and strategists in Chinese history: Liu Bei, Cao Cao, Zhuge Liang and Guan Yu
- Spanning over 100 years of history it includes some of the greatest campaigns and battles of Chinese history: the Yellow Turban rebellion, the Battle of the Red Cliffs
- The novel ends with the, albeit temporary, re-unification of China under the Jin Dynasty.

Implications

This story has characters that reveal the dynamics of political change, bringing to the child a sense of realism provided in an exciting form. It is a story that helps the child grow-up into a world that can be full of strife that is reacted to. In cross curricula terms, the story provides rich detail as to how history develops through the interaction of people who take on different definitions of leadership. It allows for discussions of personal characteristics, specifically comparing and contrasting humble leadership by Liu Bei with the manipulative leadership of Cao Cao.

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

- *England & Europe*: Roman Empire
- *Near & Middle East*: spread of Christianity; Jewish revolts against Rome
- *Americas*: early Mayas in Mexico
- *India*: rise of Kushan empire

When was the story written? Attributed to Luo Guanzhong (ca.1340-ca.1400). Period of transition in China when Mongol invaders of Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368) were being driven out by native Chinese Ming Dynasty (1368-1644)

What was happening elsewhere in the world at the time?

England & Europe: Edward III King of England; 100 Years War – battles of Poitiers and Crecy; the Black Death

Americas: Inca and Aztec Empires

Middle East: foundation of Ottoman Empire

India: Mongol invasion of North India by Tamerlane (Timur)