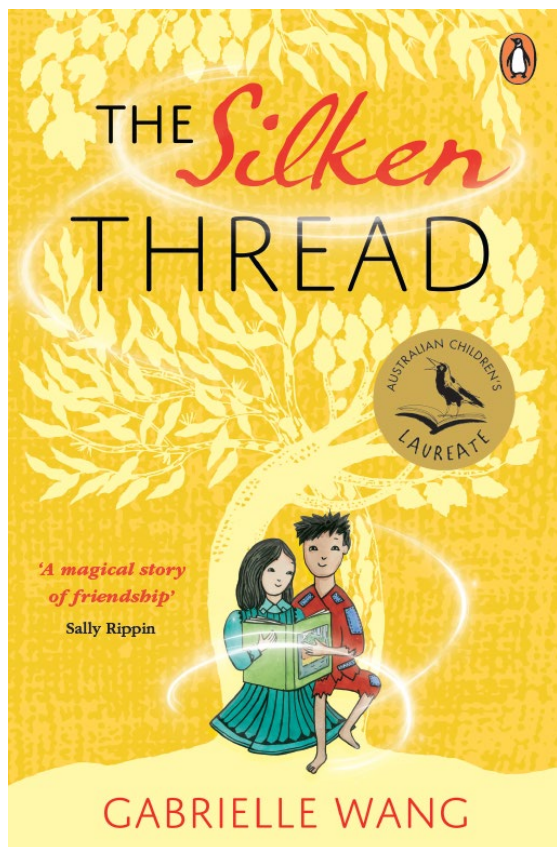




# Teachers' Resources



## PLOT SUMMARY

Moonie lives in Melbourne and dreams of designing dresses for movie stars. Eight thousand kilometres away, on Chongming Island in China, peasant boy Little Dipper cares for the silkworms on his family's farm and hopes to learn English.

On the day Moonie's beloved Ma Mi goes away, Little Dipper appears in her house. Before they can speak, he is whisked back home. Aided by a magical silk cocoon, Little Dipper's visits become a regular event and although neither knows how or why they are connected, their bond grows each time.

Will the silken threads of friendship be enough to help Moonie bring Ma Mi home, or to save Little Dipper from the troublesome ghosts who stand between him and his dream of learning English?

A magical story of kindness, courage and friendship's power to make dreams come true.

## RECOMMENDED FOR (ages 8+; years 3 to 7)

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### KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- Learning areas: English, History, Arts and Languages
- General capabilities: Literacy; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical understanding; Intercultural understanding
- Cross-curriculum priorities: Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

### REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- A charming story from a former Australian Children's Laureate.
- Explores Chinese and Chinese-Australian history and culture.
- Celebrates art and storytelling.

### THEMES

- Friendship • Family • Belonging • Resilience • Loss
- Chinese culture

### PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781761350740 (paperback); 9781760149994 (ebook); 9781761350764 (audio book). These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools, but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.



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## The Silken Thread

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Gabrielle Wang is an author and illustrator, and the Australian Children's Laureate for 2022 to 2023. Born in Melbourne of Chinese heritage, her maternal great-grandfather came to Victoria during the Gold Rush and her father was from Shanghai. Her stories are a blend of Chinese and Western culture with a touch of fantasy.

Gabrielle's first children's novel, *The Garden of Empress Cassia*, won the 2002 Aurealis Award, was shortlisted for the Queensland Premier's Literary Awards and was a CBCA Notable Book. *The Pearl of Tiger Bay* was shortlisted for the 2004 Aurealis Award and *The Lion Drummer* was a Notable Book in the 2009 CBCA Book of the Year Awards. *A Ghost in My Suitcase* won the 2009 Aurealis Award, was a CBCA Notable Book, was shortlisted for the 2011 Sakura Medal and received a Highly Commended in the 2010 Prime Minister's Literary Awards. Gabrielle has created two popular characters for the Our Australian Girl series.

*The Wishbird* was a 2014 CBCA Notable Book and was shortlisted for the 2014 Australian Book Design Awards, Yabba Awards, Kroc Awards, Koala Awards, Cool Awards and Crystal Kite Award. *Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon* was shortlisted for the 2023 Prime Minister's Literary Awards, the Patricia Wrightson Prize for Children's Literature in the New South Wales Premier's Literary Awards, and the Queensland Literary Awards.

### AUTHOR'S INSPIRATION

The inspiration for stories often comes from a 'what if' question.

My parents loved each other so deeply, it was as though they had a connection even before they met.

So I asked myself, what if they *had* met back then, but in an otherworldly dimension? What if a silkworm thread reaching through time, distance and culture had tied

them together? This was the inspiration for *The Silken Thread*.

It was my father's job as a young boy growing up on a farm in China to tend the silkworms. He would collect mulberry leaves twice a day to feed to them, clean their bamboo trays and, once they had spun their cocoons, take them to sell.

Born into a peasant family in Jiangsu Province, one of five brothers, he was desperate to go to school. He never finished high school because Japan invaded China in 1937 and all the schools were closed. A few years later, his family pooled their life savings and he went to Shanghai to study radio communications. He then served in the intelligence section, quickly rose to the rank of captain and at the age of twenty-two was sent to Melbourne with the Chinese Military Mission to liaise with General Douglas McArthur's headquarters.

My mother was born in Carlton, Melbourne. She was third generation Chinese Australian; her paternal great grandfather came to Australia as a labourer in the 1830s, followed by his son who was sent to the Victorian goldfields in the mid 1800s.

Mum was eighteen and on her way to RMIT, where she studied fashion illustration, when she bumped into her husband-to-be and the love of her life. She said he was so handsome with beautiful teeth and a lovely smile. Even though they couldn't speak the same language, she knew at once that he was the one. In her memoir, she wrote how he was dressed in civilian clothes and was wearing a Western hat with the brim turned up all around. He looked so comical. Feeling bad for him, she reached up and turned it down, even though she barely knew him.

I have written about my parents' love story previously in *Little Paradise*, published by Penguin Books Australia. Written in 2011, it is a young adult novel set during World War Two in Carlton and Shanghai, where their true romance took place.

At the end of 2023, I had just completed two years as Australian Children's Laureate and I had no idea what my next book would be. I had just published *Zadie Ma*



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and the Dog Who Chased the Moon and it was a busy time, talking at festivals and schools and travelling around the country. I have never believed in writer's block but for a while back then, I did.

When the idea for *The Silken Thread* came to me with that 'what if' question, I had been editing Mum's memoir, which she calls *Not a Boring Life*. She wrote so vividly about her childhood, remembering funny things like the day her teacher's underpants fell down around her ankles when she sneezed. And how she had a reoccurring dream about the end of the world. Everyone was flying up to heaven, but she could only get as high as the trees. And then there were the ghost children who visited her at night and would stand at the end of her bed.

I have written nineteen novels. Each one assumes a personality of its own and dictates how it wants to be written. *The Silken Thread* was my easiest and fastest novel so far, probably because much of the material was already there – in my mum's memoir and from anecdotal stories my dad's younger brother told me. At times it felt as though my parents were beside me whispering the words in my ear. Throughout my Australian Children's Laureate journey, I need not have worried. *The Silken Thread* was there, quietly waiting in the wings for its turn to glimmer.

Gabi, Autumn 2025

## Pre-reading Questions

1. Look at the cover of *The Silken Thread*. Based on the title and the illustrations, what do you think the book is about? Where do you think it might be set? Can you identify what the book's genres (like fantasy, action, crime) are?
2. Now, read the blurb and add to your ideas about what the story might be about and the concepts it might explore. What elements capture your interest?
3. Have a go at writing a paragraph about what you think will happen in the story. Then, once you have finished reading the book, re-read your paragraph and see if you were close. You might like to swap your answer with the person next to you and see

what they thought would happen too. Which version do you like better?

## Writing Style

In *The Silken Thread*, Gabrielle Wang has written a dual-perspective narrative. This means that the story is told from two different points of view, alternating between Moonie's perspective and Little Dipper's. Both perspectives are written in first person.

### Questions and activities

1. Why do you think Gabrielle chose to write from both characters' perspective?
2. How has the author ensured that the reader knows whose point of view they are in during each section of the story? How does the design of the book help with this?
3. Gabrielle has not only written the story but has illustrated it as well. Did you notice that some of the illustrations are Moonie's drawing? What specific elements make these different from the other illustrations?

## KEY STUDY TOPICS

### History

*The Silken Thread* is set during a period called the Great Depression. Moonie talks about this on pages 14 to 15:

*Many men don't have money to pay rent or buy food for their wives and children because they lost their jobs. Lots of people live in lodging houses. Some are so poor they have to sleep out on the street or in the park with newspapers for blankets and a mound of earth or a rock for a pillow. Every day someone comes knocking on our front door begging for food. Ma Mi and De Di always give a loaf of bread or vegetables. We are in a time the grown-ups call the Depression. De Di says the whole planet is in a Depression, not just Australia. I don't understand what it means really. All I know is it's about the economy, which is about money, which runs everything in the world. But it can also ruin everything.*



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## Questions and activities

1. When did the Great Depression start? What caused it?
2. Moonie says she and her family are better off than most people, because De Di has his own business selling food, which people always need. But they are still affected by the Great Depression. For example, Baby John lives with them because Uncle Peter is out of work. What are the other signs of the Great Depression in the book?
3. Research what life was like in Australia during the Great Depression and make a poster showing what you find out.

## Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

Chinese culture and Chinese Australian history play an important role in the story, from the ghosts that Little Dipper encounters, to Granny's experiences as a young bride, and the foods Moonie and Little Dipper eat.

## Questions and activities

1. Little Dipper lives on Chongming Island in China. How big is the island? How many people live there today? How far away is Chongming Island from Melbourne, where Moonie lives?
2. Moonie is a Chinese Australian. Her grandfather – De Di's father – came to Australia during the Gold Rush, while Ma Mi came in the twentieth century. Find out more about the history of Chinese migration to Australia.
3. At first, Little Dipper and Moonie have trouble communicating, because she speaks Cantonese and he speaks Mandarin. Research the different dialects of Chinese. How many are there?

## Critical and creative thinking

## Questions and activities

1. Choose a paragraph from the story and rewrite it in third person. How is it different? If the whole book was in third person, would it affect how you relate to or understand Moonie and Little Dipper?
2. Imagine that *The Silken Thread* is being made into a TV series, and you have been asked to design the costumes. Choose either Moonie or Little Dipper

and design an outfit for them to wear in the scene where they see each other for the last time. Using the paper doll activity at the back of the book as a guide, dress up a paper doll in your design.

3. Pretend that you are an influencer who wants to tell their followers about *The Silken Thread*. In a video, a slideshow, a poster or a short talk, let them know what the book is about, who wrote it, the thing you liked best about it and whether you recommend it.

## KEY QUOTES

1. I suddenly realise that this is what family really means and my eyes fill with tears. If Ma Mi were here it would all be perfect.
2. Scrolls hang on the walls. One is of a bird sitting on a rock, painted simply with a few brushstrokes. The other is a landscape of towering mountains. Small and insignificant in the mountains, a man sits in a simple hut by a waterfall. This painting is how I feel. My world has suddenly opened up and I can see over the trees, over the rocks and boulders to the distant mountains and beyond.

3. Teacher Sun touches the silk. 'Do you know what kind of flowers these are, Little Dipper?'

I shake my head.

'They are called the lotus. They grow out of the mud of ponds and marshes and yet they produce the purest, whitest blossoms. Therefore, they symbolise change and transformation. I would like you to have this silk, Little Dipper. A new beginning for you, your friend and for this silk cloth.'

4. That's what life is about though, isn't it? You have to try new things so you don't get stuck in the one place like those frozen silkworms Little Dipper told me about.
5. 'The choices you make have a lot to do with your destiny,' says Ma Mi. She takes my hand. 'Granny's sister was too afraid to come to Australia to marry your grandfather and she is still in China. But not Granny. She was brave and chose to come instead. That was Granny's choice. You see, Moonie, she made her own fate. But then again, a person only plays a small part. The rest depends on what has gone before, the choices others make and what is happening around them. All you can do is make good choices. That is your responsibility.'





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## WORKSHEET

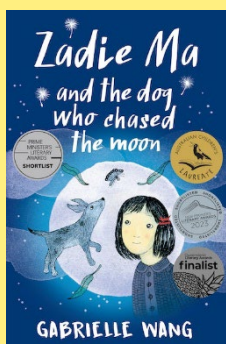
Cut out the pictures below or write numbers next to each to put them in story order.





# Teachers' Resources

## Further reading from Penguin Random House



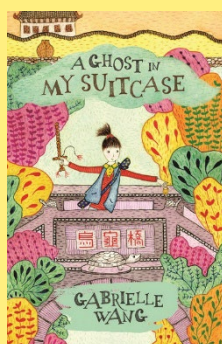
*Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon*  
by Gabrielle Wang

Zadie Ma has a special talent for telling stories . . . and it seems that some of Zadie's stories come true. Zadie's dearest wish is to have a dog of her own, so she starts to write the story of a poor unwanted dog called Jupiter, who's just waiting to be rescued by a loving girl like Zadie.

Can Zadie's most important story of all finally come true?

**A heartwarming story set in postwar Melbourne about courage, friendship, the magic of stories and one girl's unwavering love for her dog.**

[Teachers' Resources available.](#)



*A Ghost in My Suitcase*  
by Gabrielle Wang

When thirteen-year-old Celeste travels to China to visit her grandmother, Por Por, she uncovers an incredible family secret. And with this secret comes danger and adventure.

If Celeste is to save her family and friends, she must learn to harness her rare and powerful gift . . .

**An award-winning magic realism story for 10+ readers about finding yourself, ghost-hunting, Chinese mythology and culture.**

[Teachers' Resources available.](#)



*Ting Ting the Ghosthunter*  
by Gabrielle Wang

Ting Ting has learned the ancient skills and art of ghost hunting from her adopted grandmother, Por Por. Sick of capturing harmless 'fat belly' ghosts, Ting Ting decides to take matters into her own hands and prove that she is a true ghost hunter. But what she discovers is much more dangerous than she had thought. Can Ting Ting conquer her own pride to save Por Por and the villagers before it's too late?

**A powerful magic realism story for 10+ readers about ghost-hunting, finding yourself, Chinese mythology and culture.**

[Teachers' Resources available.](#)



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## Order form

TITLE	AUTHOR	ISBN	SCHOOL YEAR	RRP	QTY	TOTAL
<i>The Silken Thread</i>	Gabrielle Wang	9781761350740	3-7	\$17.99		
<i>Zadie Ma and the Dog Who Chased the Moon</i>	Gabrielle Wang	9781761046513	3-7	\$16.99		
<i>A Ghost in My Suitcase</i>	Gabrielle Wang	9780143303794	5-8	\$16.99		
<i>Ting Ting the Ghost Hunter</i>	Gabrielle Wang	9780143787334	5-8	\$16.99		
TOTAL						

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

SCHOOL: \_\_\_\_\_

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POSTCODE: \_\_\_\_\_

TEL: \_\_\_\_\_

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