

## LITTLE JIANG

SHIRLEY MARR

ILLUSTRATED BY KATY JIANG

ISBN (PB): 9781925816471

YEAR LEVEL: Y3–6

CROSS-CURRICULUM PRIORITY: Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Mei Ling Pang was born at an inauspicious time on an inauspicious day, so wherever she goes, misfortune follows. When Little Jiang hops out of his grave and into Mei's life, fangs and all, her luck goes from bad to worse. But in trying to help Little Jiang, Mei might just make her own future brighter.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Shirley Marr (馬雪莉) is a first-generation Chinese-Australian. While working on a very dry accounting PhD she realised she'd much rather be writing stories instead. She is still a bespectacled accountant by day, but is now a masked writer by night. Shirley describes herself as having a Western mind and an Eastern heart. She takes milk and sugar with her tea much to the dismay of her oolong-drinking friends and eats chicken feet much to the disgust of her Aussie friends. She is the only person she knows who has ever been kicked out of a bookstore for disruptive behaviour.

### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Katy Jiang, also known as Hong Jiang (江泓), was born, raised and educated in Shanghai, China. From a young age, Katy learned traditional Chinese ink painting. Later, she studied Western painting directed by Chen Youqun (Chinese artist, illustrator and art educator). She excelled at still life drawing, figure painting, Chinese ink painting, and Chinese Baimiao drawing. Katy also has a Bachelor degree in interior design, but after she immigrated to Australia in 2006, she quit design and returned to art and illustration.

### THEMES

- Friendship
- Family
- Belonging
- Chinese legends and folklore
- Supernatural fiction

### AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Y3–6 English

Y3–6 Art

### USEFUL WEBSITES

- Author's website: <https://www.shirleymarr.net>
- Illustrator's website: <https://katyjiangart.com>



## CLASSROOM IDEAS

### Discussion questions

1. What does *inauspicious* (p. 5) mean? What does *superstitious* (p. 13) mean? What are some examples of being superstitious?
2. What does the word 'supernatural' mean? What are the characteristic of the 'supernatural fiction' genre? Have you read any other books or watched films in this genre?
3. What adjectives would you use to describe the character of Mei?
4. Are there any 'baddie' characters in the book? How do they change by the end of the book? What makes them change?
5. Consider Jimmy Sweet's behaviour towards Mei and Jiang at school (pp. 44–45).
  - a. How does it make Mei feel? Why are Jimmy's words hurtful?
  - b. Why does Mei feel disappointed in Sunny Kim and Arthur De Castro (p. 45)?
  - c. Does Mei decide to accept Jimmy's apology (p. 191)? What about Sunny and Arthur's (p. 274)? Why do you think she does this?
6. *Ms Zenadoo had taught the class about respecting people of all cultures, religions and nationalities, and the class was made up of children from different backgrounds.* (p. 41) What does 'respect' mean? What actions show respect?
7. What is the role of humour in this book? Were there any parts you found especially funny?
8. Who is your favourite character in the book and why?
9. What does the word 'folklore' mean?
10. What aspects of traditional Chinese culture are represented in the book? Make a list, using headings such as 'Food' (e.g. congee, Kung Pow chicken, glutinous rice ball, red tortoise cake), 'Objects' (e.g. bagua symbol above door, Chinese New Year lanterns, changshan robe), 'Folklore' (e.g. Jiangshi, Ox-Head and Horse-Face, Moon Maiden).
11. What is the Hungry Ghost Festival? When, where, why and how is it celebrated?
12. In the book we see many expressions that contain the word 'heart', e.g. *being heartless* (p. 22), *a girl with a big heart* (p. 80), *with all my heart* (p. 87), *wholehearted support* (p. 90), *a kind-hearted person* (p. 91), *Mei's heart sank* (p. 164), *shook his hand heartily* (p. 174). What other phrases or expressions with the word 'heart' can you think of? List as many as possible! (Tip: some dictionaries, such as the *Macquarie Dictionary*, list these under 'heart'.)
13. How would you describe Katy Jiang's illustration style in *Little Jiang*?
14. Which is your favourite illustration in the book and why?

### Creative writing

1. Write the next chapter of *Little Jiang*. What happens next?
2. Make up another type of potion that might be found in *Big Bao's Book of the Dead* (like Insta-Jiang and Insta-Stop). Name it 'Insta-\_\_\_\_\_' and decide what its magical powers will be. Now write a short story around the use of this potion!
3. Write a completely new short story that centres on the adventures of the Peony Princess in Ghostland.

### Art

1. Illustrator Katy Jiang has practised Chinese ink painting (also known as Chinese brush painting). Research this art form and view some paintings in this tradition. Use your research to create an artwork of your own in the Chinese ink painting style. Make sure your subject choice is suitable, too – for example, a natural landscape. Use Chinese brushes and ink if the school is able to provide these, or otherwise use paintbrushes and black watercolour.
2. Illustrator Katy Jiang has also practised Chinese Baimiao drawing. Research this art form and view some paintings in this tradition. Use your research to create an artwork of your own in the Chinese Baimiao tradition.

## INTERVIEW WITH THE AUTHOR

### ***Where did you get the idea for your book Little Jiang?***

My mother use to tell me all sorts of stories about ghosts and monsters when I was little! The ones about the hopping vampires was my favourite. Not only were they scary, but the idea that they could only hop to get to you was also really funny. Me and my sister used to have breath-holding contests to see who would best survive a jiangshi invasion. I knew that one day I would have to write my own take on this legend.

### ***How did you decide to incorporate traditional Chinese legends, such as Ox-Head and Horse-Face, into this story?***

There is a special theme park in Singapore called Haw Par Villa. When you are naughty, your parents will take you there and through the ten realms of the underworld. Each realm has colourful statutes showing what punishments befall you if you do bad things like lie or steal. It's like Disneyland ... if Disneyland was super scary. The image of the Ox-Head and Horse-Face statute standing at the entrance of the theme park is forever seared into my mind. In time I lost my fear of Haw Par Villa and I saw the humour in those characters. I mean, they have human bodies and animal heads. I knew they would just be really awesome and funny in my book.

### ***Who was your favourite character to write and why?***

I liked writing Dr Heckyll the best because bad guys are the most fun! I liked making him do really bad things, then realise the error of his ways and try to make things right in the end. That is very human and relatable to me. Plus I liked making him do funny things like shampoo the top of his scalp even though he has no hair.

### ***What was the process of working with illustrator Katy Jiang like?***




Working with Katy was so much fun! At first I was worried how anyone could understand all the strange imaginings in my mind, but as soon as Katy showed me her draft pencil drawings, it was like watching my world come to life! She also put her own spin on things, which made everything even more unique. My favourite drawing is the one of the fox doing the big kung-fu kick. It was Katy's idea to put her in a karate outfit and I really loved that.

### ***What do you hope readers will take away from your book?***

I hope that they become really interested in Chinese mythology and folklore as there is so much to explore! I also hope that they take away the idea that sharing stories and artwork with people from different backgrounds and cultures can be such a worthwhile and enriching experience. That we have so much to learn and gain from each other.

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