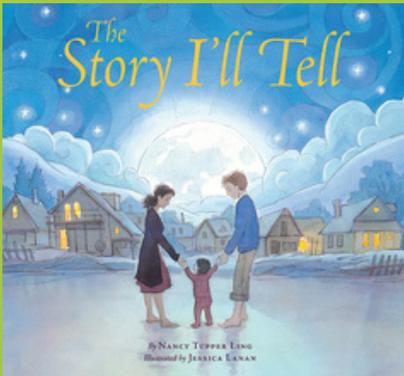


TEACHER'S GUIDE



LEE & LOW BOOKS

The Story I'll Tell

written by Nancy Tupper Ling
illustrated by Jessica Lanan

About the Book

Genre: Fiction

*Reading Level: Grade 3

Interest Level: Grades K–4

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points: 3.5/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD670L

*Reading level based on the Spache
Readability Formula

Themes: Adoption, Biracial/
Multiracial Interest,
Biracial/Multiracial Families
(Mothers), Childhood
Experiences and Memories,
Cultural Diversity, China,
Dreams and Aspirations,
Identity/Self Esteem/
Confidence, Parent-Child
Bond, Multiethnic Interest,
Bedtime Stories, Asian/Asian
American Interest

SYNOPSIS

“Someday, when you ask where you came from, I’ll tell you a story.”

And so a mother recounts to her young son the journey to bring him home.

“I might tell how you came from a land far away in a hot air balloon. The basket slowly drifted down like a feather into our yard. I dropped the firewood I was carrying and ran to you. ‘You’re home now,’ I said.” Or maybe it was a lark—and not a stork—that brought the child to the mother. Or perhaps he was rescued from a dragon! Each lyrical and fantastic tale contains a small kernel of truth that pieces together the baby’s journey across a wide ocean into his new mother’s arms.

Beautifully illustrated by Jessica Lanan, *The Story I’ll Tell* is a gentle and moving story of adoption and parental love that is sure to touch the hearts of readers everywhere, no matter how they came to be a family.

Awards and honors for *The Story I’ll Tell* include:

- **Best Books of the Year, Honorable Mention, *The Huffington Post***
- **Highly Recommended Title for Young Readers, Boston Authors Club**
- **Starred Review, *Publishers Weekly***
- **Starred Review, *Booklist***



BACKGROUND

Adoption: Adoption refers to the process of legally transferring parental rights and responsibilities from a child's birth parents to a new parent or parents. A child can be adopted within the same country where s/he was born; this is called a domestic adoption. An international adoption between countries involves considering additional laws. The Department of State says, "Although the process can be intimidating, families from the United States adopt thousands of children in need of permanent and loving homes from other countries each year" (<https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionabroad/en/adoption-process/what-is-intercountry-adoption.html>). This pamphlet has a great deal of information on United States' process for adopting internationally: https://travel.state.gov/content/dam/aa/pdfs/Intercountry_Adoption_From_A_Z.pdf. American families adopt children from countries all over the world. There are different age requirements, travel requirements and other regulations depending on the country of adoption.

Talking about adoption at school may be sensitive, especially if you have an adopted child in your class. This list from the American Academy of Pediatrics gives advice about language to use when discussing adoption: <https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/family-dynamics/adoption-and-foster-care/Pages/Respectful-Ways-to-Talk-about-Adoption-A-List-of-Dos-Donts.aspx>. This blog post (<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/talking-adoption-part-1-talking-0-5-year-olds/>) and this one (<https://creatingafamily.org/adoption-category/talking-about-adoption-part-2-talking-with-6-12-year-olds/>) suggest developmentally appropriate answers to children's questions about adoption that could be adapted for classroom conversations.

Adoption from China: Between 1999 and 2015, over 76,000 children were adopted from China to the US. 87% of those children were female. The vast majority were under two years of age (<https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html>). China only allows adoptions by American parents. Prospective parents must be 30 years old. At least one adoptive parent must travel to China to bring the child home. (More information about Chinese adoption requirements and process can be found here: [\[information/learn-about-a-country/china.html\]\(https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionabroad/en/country-information/learn-about-a-country/china.html\).\)](https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionabroad/en/country-</p>
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Yunnan Province: Located in southwest China, it is known for its majestic mountains. The region is popular for climbing and hiking and is home to a wide variety of plant and animal species. The Meili Snow Mountain is worshiped by Tibetan Buddhists. For more information see <http://en.ynta.gov.cn/Item/2900.aspx> or <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/05/travel/05explorerer.html>.

August Moon: Also known as the mid-Autumn Festival, the August Moon is the second largest festival in China after Chinese New Year. People celebrate the moon, supposedly at its fullest and brightest at this time of year and eat moon cakes. People in some regions perform dragon and lion dances. (See <https://www.travelchinaguide.com/essential/holidays/mid-autumn.htm> for more information.)



VOCABULARY

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 4)

(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

The story contains several content-specific and academic words and phrases that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students' prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary below. Encourage a variety of strategies to support students' vocabulary acquisition: look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, create a specific action for each word, list synonyms and antonyms, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

Content Specific

hot-air balloon, firewood, horseman, stallion, postman, satchel, angel, lanterns, marble, lark, birch tree, patch of cabbages, tiger lilies, pollen, Mountains of Yunnan, August Moon, lion dancers, fiddles, float (in a parade), silk blanket

Academic

drifted, silky, silent, wisps, sparkled, announced, cradled, fluttered, freckles, eyebrows, distant, plucked, raise (a child), cooing, tiptoed, rescue, cave, tale, fool, brightest, truth, gathered, dawn, smoothed, hummed, received

BEFORE READING

Prereading Focus Questions

(Reading Standards, Craft & Structure, Strand 5 and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Before introducing this book to students, you may wish to develop background knowledge and promote anticipation by posing questions such as the following:

1. What does it mean for a person to be adopted? What might an adopted child wonder about?
2. What country do you live in? What are some other countries in the world? Where is China on the map? How would a person travel from [your country] to China?
3. Does someone at home tell you bedtime stories? What makes a good bedtime story? Are bedtime stories real or imaginary? How might they be both?

Exploring the Book

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strand 1, Craft & Structure, Strand 5, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 7)

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1 and 2)

Talk about the title of the book. Then ask students what they think this book will most likely be about and whom the book might be about. What do they think might happen? What information do they think they might learn? What makes them think that?

Take students on a book walk and draw attention to the following parts of the book: front and back covers, title page, author and illustrators' dedications, and illustrations.

Setting a Purpose for Reading

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)

Have students read to find out about:

- what bedtime story the mother tells her son
- how the bedtime story is both imaginary and informative

Encourage students to consider why the author, Nancy Tupper Ling, would want to share this story with young people and why she would tell the story from the mother's perspective.



AFTER READING

Discussion Questions

After students have read the book, use these or similar questions to generate discussion, enhance comprehension, and develop appreciation for the content. Encourage students to refer to passages and/or illustrations in the book to support their responses.

To build skills in close reading of a text, students should cite evidence with their answers.

Literal Comprehension

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 1–3)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. Who is the narrator of the story? How do you know?
2. On the first page, what are the mother and son doing? What time of day is it? What kind of story will she tell him?
3. When the mother is carrying firewood, what does she see? What does she say to the boy?
4. How does the horseman bring the boy?
5. How does the angel bring the boy?
6. What sound does the mother hear? What does she see when she climbs the tree?
7. What is Grandma's story about where the mother came from? How does she change the story for the boy? What does the mother notice right away about the boy? To what does she compare his eyebrows?
8. What happens in town on the August moon? What do the mother and the boy do?
9. What do the parents see on the beach? What about in the second version of the beach story?
10. What does the mother think the boy will say when she tells all her tales?
11. What will the mother say when she tells the boy the truth?

Extension/Higher Level Thinking

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas & Details, Strands 2 and 3 and Craft & Structure, Strands 4 and 6)
(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strand 4)

1. What aspects of the mother's imaginary stories are realistic? Which ones are obviously fictional?
2. Which of the mother's imaginary stories are related to China, the country from which the boy was adopted? Which stories are related to the mother's own culture?
3. How do the mother's stories make the boy feel safe and protected? Give specific examples.
4. How do the mother's stories make the boy feel loved? Give specific examples.
5. Why do you think the mother considers the truth "a beautiful story too?" How did the boy actually get to his new home? How did he react when he arrived?
6. How do the illustrations contribute to the mood and tone of the story? What emotions do the characters' faces and body language convey?
7. In this interview with Lee & Low Books, the author says, "My hope is that *The Story I'll Tell*, this work of fiction, will create a conversation between adoptive parents and their child, or teachers and their students" (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2909/interviews>). What kinds of conversations might this book create? Why do you think Nancy Tupper Ling wants these conversations to happen?
8. What do you notice about the illustration of the family on the page when the boy is brought home? What might be the author's message about the definition of a family? How does the illustration support the author's message?
9. What might be challenging for an adopted child? Why might an adopted child "Cry for things lost and new," as the book says?
10. Why do you think the author tells this story from the perspective of the mother?



★“Laced with Chinese-flavored splendor throughout. . . . It’s an unabashed love letter, one that many families will treasure.”

–*Publishers Weekly*, starred review

★“[T]his is a particularly well-done example of an adoption fairy tale that is sure to be a comforting resource to parents and children alike.”

–*Booklist*, starred review

“A heartwarming conclusion ties the mother’s fanciful stories to the parents’ real flight. . . and acknowledges that “the truth is a beautiful story too.””

–*Kirkus Reviews*

Reader’s Response

(Writing Standards, Text Types & Purposes, Strands 1–3 and Production & Distribution of Writing, Strands 4–6)

Use the following questions and writing activities to help students practice active reading and personalize their responses to the book. **Suggest that students respond in reader’s response journals, essays, or oral discussion.** You may also want to set aside time for students to share and discuss their written work.

1. The illustrator’s dedication in this book reads, “To my grandfather, who loved beautiful books.” What might be considered beautiful about this book?
2. In this interview with Lee & Low Books, author Nancy Tupper Ling discusses her process for researching this story by saying, “I made a point of listening anew to my friends’ adoptive stories. It was clear that each story was both universal and unique” (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2909/interviews>). What does she mean? How is *The Story I’ll Tell* both universal and unique?
3. Parents often lovingly notice tiny details about their children. What tiny details does the mother notice about her son during the story? What tiny details do your parents or family members notice about you? Think of something or someone you love (for example, a sibling, cousin, or pet.) What tiny details do you love about him or her?
4. If you were the boy in this book, which of the mother’s answers to the question, “Where did I come from?” would you most want to hear? Why?

ELL/ESL Teaching Activities

(Speaking & Listening Standards, Comprehension & Collaboration, Strands 1–3 and Presentation of Knowledge & Ideas, Strands 4–6)
(Language Standards, Vocabulary Acquisition & Use, Strands 4–6)

These strategies might be helpful to use with students who are English Language Learners.

1. Assign ELL students to partner-read the story with strong English readers/speakers. Students can alternate reading between pages, repeat passages after one another, or listen to the more fluent reader.
2. Have each student write three questions about the story. Then let students pair up and discuss the answers to the questions.
3. Depending on students’ level of English proficiency, after the first reading:
 - Review the illustrations in order and have students summarize what is happening on each page, first orally, then in writing.
 - Have students work in pairs to retell either the plot of the story or key details. Then ask students to write a short summary, synopsis, or opinion about what they have read.
4. Have students give a short talk about their family heritage or favorite bedtime story.
5. The book contains several content-specific and academic words that may be unfamiliar to students. Based on students’ prior knowledge, review some or all of the vocabulary. Expose English Language



Learners to multiple vocabulary strategies. Have students make predictions about word meanings, look up and record word definitions from a dictionary, write the meaning of the word or phrase in their own words, draw a picture of the meaning of the word, list synonyms and antonyms, create an action for each word, and write a meaningful sentence that demonstrates the definition of the word.

- Practice oral storytelling with students by retelling the individual stories from the book or other similar stories. Explicitly teach storytelling vocabulary and language structures and practice speaking expressively.

INTERDISCIPLINARY ACTIVITIES

(Introduction to the Standards, page 7: Students who are college and career ready must be able to build strong content knowledge, value evidence, and use technology and digital media strategically and capably)

Use some of the following activities to help students integrate their reading experiences with other curriculum areas. These can also be used for extension activities, for advanced readers, and for building a home-school connection.

English Language Arts

(Reading Standards, Key Ideas and Details, Strands 1–3, Craft and Structure, Strands 4–6, and Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strands 7 and 9)

(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strands 2 and 3 and Production and Distribution of Writing, Strand 4)

- The synopsis of the book says “Each lyrical and fantastic tale contains a small kernel of truth that pieces together the baby’s journey across a wide ocean into his new mother’s arms.” Create a chart listing each story and the “kernel of truth” it might contain. Have students experiment with writing stories that are fictional but contain a “kernel of truth.”
- Some experts suggest using “life books” to honor an adopted child’s personal story. (See a sample student-friendly explanation here: <http://wiadopt.org/Portals/WIAdopt/Tipsheets/Youth/LifeBooks.pdf>.)

Decide on a format appropriate for your students and ask them to create life books that share details about their families and personal histories.

- Read other books about adoption, such as *Bringing Asha Home* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2367>) and *Journey Home* (<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2416>). Compare and contrast the experiences of the characters. This blog post has ideas for additional discussion questions: <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2014/11/20/books-to-teach-about-adoption/>.
- Explore the genre of bedtime stories (For example, *How Far Do You Love Me?* <https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2818>). What are some common characteristics and themes?

Social Studies/Geography

(Writing Standards, Research to Build and Present Knowledge, Strand 7)

(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

- Have students research the process of adopting from China. Explore the graphs and statistics on the Department of State website to compare information about adoptions from China with adoption from other countries (<https://travel.state.gov/content/adoptionsabroad/en/about-us/statistics.html>).
- Ask someone who is adopted or who has adopted a child from another country to come and talk to your class about his or her experiences. Consider inviting a parent (if the child and parent feels comfortable sharing) for a class discussion to explore the adoption process, including the joys and challenges. As a group, generate questions to ask in advance.



Art

(Reading Standards, Craft and Structure, Strand 4)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strand 2)

1. Discuss how the author's descriptive language in the various arrival stories evokes mental images for the reader. Read sections of the book without showing the illustrations and ask students to sketch their own mental images. Share responses with partners and compare students' images with the book illustrations.
2. Read this interview with illustrator Jessica Lanan: <http://blog.leeandlow.com/2016/04/26/illustrator-jessica-lanan-takes-us-behind-the-art-of-the-story-ill-tell/>. Have students create family portraits using a simplified version of her process (e.g., pencil sketches followed by watercolor).

School-Home Connection

(Reading Standards, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, Strand 7)
(Writing Standards, Text Types and Purposes, Strand 3)
(Speaking and Listening Standards, Comprehension and Collaboration, Strands 1–3)

1. Sharing the Chinese-themed stories from this book with families as examples, ask students and families to work together to compose a list of imaginary "arrival" stories that reflect their own ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds.
2. Ask students and families to mark on a world map from where their various family members came. Students can draw planes, boats, etc. to show how family members traveled to the United States.
3. Ask families to share their favorite bedtime stories. Collect the class's favorites into a class book or have a family pajama party and share them at school.

Additional titles to teach about adoption and the parent-child bond:

Bringing Asha Home written by Uma Krishnaswami, illustrated by Jamel Akib
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2367>

Journey Home written by Lawrence McKay, illustrated by Dom Lee and Keunhee Lee
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2416>

A Song for Cambodia written by Michelle Lord, illustrated by Shino Arihara
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2510>

How Far Do You Love Me? written and illustrated by Lulu Delacre
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2818>

Love to Mamá: A Tribute to Mothers written by Pat Mora, illustrated by Paula Barragán
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2424>

Arrorró, mi niño: Latino Lullabies and Gentle Games written and illustrated by Lulu Delacre
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2356>

In Daddy's Arms I Am Tall: African Americans Celebrating Fathers written by various poets, illustrated by Javaka Steptoe
<https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2408>



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nancy Tupper Ling is the winner of the *Writer's Digest* Grand Prize and the Pat Parnell Poetry Award, and is the founder of Fine Line Poets, a website for poets who live in New England. She was inspired to write *The Story I'll Tell* by the multicultural background of her own family and the experiences of friends who have adopted children from all over the world. Ling resides in Walpole, Massachusetts, with her husband and their two daughters. Visit her website at <http://www.nancytupperling.com/>.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Jessica Lanan has been in love with illustrated books since an early age. A Colorado native, she received her B.A. in art from Scripps College and was the recipient of the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship, which granted her a year to travel through Asia. Instead of taking pictures, she illustrated her experiences in a journal. She currently lives in Boulder, Colorado, where she enjoys thunderstorms, crunching autumn leaves beneath her feet, and leaving footprints in freshly fallen snow. Find her online at <http://jessicalanan.com/>.

ABOUT LEE & LOW BOOKS

LEE & LOW BOOKS is the largest children's book publisher specializing in diversity and multiculturalism. Our motto, "about everyone, for everyone," is as urgent today as it was when we started in 1991. It is the company's goal to meet the need for stories that children of color can identify with and that all children can enjoy. The right book can foster empathy, dispel stereotypes, prompt discussion about race and ethnicity, and inspire children to imagine not only a world that includes them, but also a world where they are the heroes of their own stories. Discover more at leeandlow.com.

ORDERING INFORMATION

On the Web:

www.leeandlow.com/contact/ordering (general order information)

www.leeandlow.com/books/2909 (secure online ordering)

By Phone: 212-779-4400 ext. 25

By Fax: 212-683-1894

By Mail: Lee & Low Books, 95 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016

Book Information for *The Story I'll Tell*



\$17.95, HARDCOVER

978-1-62014-160-1

32 pages, 9-1/8 x 9-5/8

*Reading Level: Grade 3

*Reading level based on the Spache Readability Formula

Interest Level: Grades K-4

Guided Reading Level: N

Accelerated Reader® Level/
Points: 3.5/0.5

Lexile™ Measure: AD670L

THEMES: Adoption, Biracial/
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China, Dreams and Aspirations,
Identity/Self Esteem/
Confidence, Parent-Child Bond,
Multiethnic Interest, Bedtime
Stories, Asian/Asian American
Interest

RESOURCES ON THE WEB:

[https://www.leeandlow.com/
books/2909](https://www.leeandlow.com/books/2909)

All guided reading level placements may vary and are subject to revision. Teachers may adjust the assigned levels in accordance with their own evaluations.