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Activity One

Biography: Pearl S. Buck

The Author: Pearl S. Buck won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1938. She won this prize “for her rich and truly epic descriptions of peasant life in China and for her biographical masterpieces.” (www.nobelprize.org)

During interviews, she said that she wrote about what she knew, and she knew China. Some of the questions that caused controversy included the fact that she wrote from the perspective of a Chinese Man. Finally, some people felt that she wrote with no emotion, about very emotional issues.

Research: Find out about Pearl’s life, to find the answers to the following questions:

Part One: Why CHINA? Where did she live in China? Plot the places she grew up, and where she lived as a young married woman. Where does the story *The Good Earth* take place? Put in any details from the novel on your map: the village where Wang Lung lives, the city to the south, where they flee during the Famine, the city where Lotus used to live, the ‘desert to the north’ which causes the drought.

Part Two: Why a Farmer? Who did Pearl marry, and where did they live? What kind of work did he do? During her time with her husband, was she happy? What interaction might she have had with women or local men during this time? Speculate as to why she would write from the perspective of a man.

Part Three: Why so Negative about Christian Missionaries? Research into some of Pearl S Buck’s political writing, particularly after 1945. What were her views on much of the work done by western missionaries in China and why did she hold these views?

Part Four: Personal Causes: Why did Pearl Buck include the topic of children sold into slavery and mentally handicapped children in her novel? How do these two groups of people figure in her real life?

Part Five: Other Interesting Facts: From your research, note what else you find out that is interesting about her life.



Pearl S. Buck, circa 1938

Present your findings in a one page fact sheet to share with the class.

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Activity Two



Beauty is in the Eye of the Beholder

In the novel *The Good Earth*, the central character, Wang Lung, claims that he cannot love his wife O-Lan because she is ugly. When he first married her, he said, that although her face was plain, her body was beautiful. The one part of her he always thought of as ugly was her large feet.

Our concept of 'beauty' changes as we change, and it changes for society over time as well. Compare 'Beauty' in 1900s China to 'Beauty' in this day and age.

Descriptors	China 1900s	China today
Skin color		
Skin markings/condition		
Hair color and style		
Facial features		
Make up		
Size and shape of body		
Size and shape of specific body parts (which body parts are objectified?)		
Popular adornment		
Behaviors		
Attractive activities and hobbies		
What kind of clothing do beautiful women wear?		
One word: Women must look _____		

Some information on what Wang Lung's society considered beautiful is in the novel, but you may need to do research. You can find information by looking at pictures/photographs from the 1900s as well as looking at magazine photos and media pictures today.

"That was then...This is now", and "You've come a long way baby", were both ad campaign slogans used to suggest that Women are no longer governed by the restrictions of society's norms. Create your own one page collage to highlight the differences in the concept of beauty as a result of your research.

Bonus Point: Research into the current day concept of Beauty in your area of the world. How does it compare to the concept of Beauty in China? Other countries?



Activity Three

Lights, Camera, Action!

In 1937, a movie was made based upon the novel *The Good Earth* by Pearl S. Buck. The film was shot in China, in the Beijing area, the actors dressed in period clothing and wore typical hair styles from China of the 1900s, but the main characters were not ethnic Chinese. The storyline in the film was adapted from a play written from the novel, and it does not stick strictly to the storyline in the novel. The film technology of the time meant that the movie was shot in black and white. It was a huge success, making almost 3 million dollars at the box office, and winning 2 Oscars at the Academy Awards.

Plan out a modern version of the movie *The Good Earth* on a Storyboard.

The Characters: Who would you cast in the leading roles: Wang Lung? O-Lan? Lotus? Cuckoo? The uncle and his family? Wang Lung's father and children? Ching?

The Storyline: What would you highlight to create drama and intensity in the film? What would you be willing to let go? Create a Storyboard: Start by making a list of key events from the novel starting with Wang Lung preparing for his wedding, and ending in him walking the fields with his sons who are planning on selling the land. Decide on the key events to keep: Organize those in a Storyboard: (see example below) In each square you note the event in the scene, location, special effects/music. If you can, a quick sketch of what the camera would see. For a novel of this size, you would want at least 16 squares in your Storyboard, perhaps 20.

Wang Lung prepares for his wedding	O-Lan gives birth to a baby boy	They buy land from the House of Hwang	Drought and famine, suffering
Music: Purple Bamboo melody (Chinese traditional)	Music: Joy	Music: Song of the plum	Music: Revitalizing joss sticks (Chinese traditional)
Quick sketch of him walking across the fields carrying a basket	Sketch of baby wrapped with O-Lan in bed	Sketch Wang Lung planting rice	Sketch skinny ox, black crows in the sky, Wang Lung crouched down in the soil

Bonus Question: Watch the classic movie and compare it to the novel. How are they similar? How is the storyline different? Based upon the similarities and differences, what does the storyline in the film emphasize?



Activity Four

The History of China

China is a world power. It has the largest population in the world today and because of that fact, one of the largest and fastest growing economies in the world. It has had a stable government for over 50 years, but this wasn't always the case. In the novel, Wang Lung says near the end of his life, that he was curious about war, as he had heard of it all his life, but had never seen one.



The Modern History of China: A Visual Timeline

Step One: Research into the major events in Chinese history during Wang Lung's lifetime. Make sure that your events are in Chronological order, starting from approximately the time that Wang Lung was born in 1858 up to and including the Mao Revolution. For each event that makes your list, note down in point form the background causes and instigating incidents that caused the event.

Step Two: Gather images that show key places or events for each of the main events.

Step Three: Build a timeline. For each date, add the name of the event, the background causes and inciting incident and a picture.



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Activity Five

Creative Writing: Write a Ballad

Ballads are songs that tell a story, often written about the emotional turmoil faced by people. The characters in the novel face everything from unrequited love, betrayal, humiliation, starvation, theft, to death of a child; all great topics that would make a song.

Step One: Brainstorm a list of the possible topics about which to write a song.

Possible Topics:

Step Two: Decide on the meaning of the poem/song. What is your message about the topic you have selected?

Step Three: Write down the details of what happened before, during, and after the situation you will highlight in your ballad. Plan on one stanza or verse per main factor in the development of the story situation for your ballad.

Step Four: Write the song. Start with the chorus; this is the refrain that will be repeated, so it should encapsulate the main message about your topic. Continue by developing the stanzas: decide on the rhyming pattern, if any, the meter or number of syllables to be used in each line.

Present your song to your teacher. If you are musical, sing it!

**You can listen to or study poetic examples of Ballads to give you ideas for writing your ballad.*

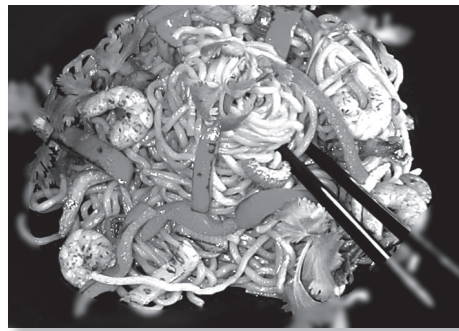
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Activity Six

Chinese Cuisine: the Ultimate Restaurant Menu

In the novel *The Good Earth*, a great deal of the story mentions food. Wang Lung is a farmer, who grows wheat, rice, corn, beans and garlic. The crops are for sale and for his family's consumption. There are two famines, where food is in shortage, and then when Wang Lung is in the big city, he sees many different types of foods on sale. Finally, as Wang Lung becomes more wealthy and he has money to spend on luxuries, he begins to consume more foods that are exotic and special.



Chinese cuisine is famous for many reasons: the history, the variety and the regional differences. In Imperial China, the emperors became very demanding about their food. Some emperors demanded that no dish is repeated in a year of meals, others required that the food be served looking like works of art. There were special foods that were cultivated only for the royal family and it was forbidden for others to try them. China is a large geographically diverse country, which produces a great variety of foods. There were few cultural taboos restricting certain foods that could not be eaten. In addition, China has had a practice of trading with many other nations for food, so the food of China uses a large variety of foods. Finally, the regional differences traditionally reflected both the geographic location, and the cultural practices and meal plans.

Create a Menu that shows the great history of Chinese Cuisine, the extreme variety of foods consumed in China, and finally the regional differences in Chinese Cuisine.

Research into the forbidden foods of China, the foods eaten by emperors, the unusual foods consumed and at least 4 different regions. Plan the menu to include traditional appetizers, main courses and special treats, as well as typical drinks. Pictures would be great too!

