

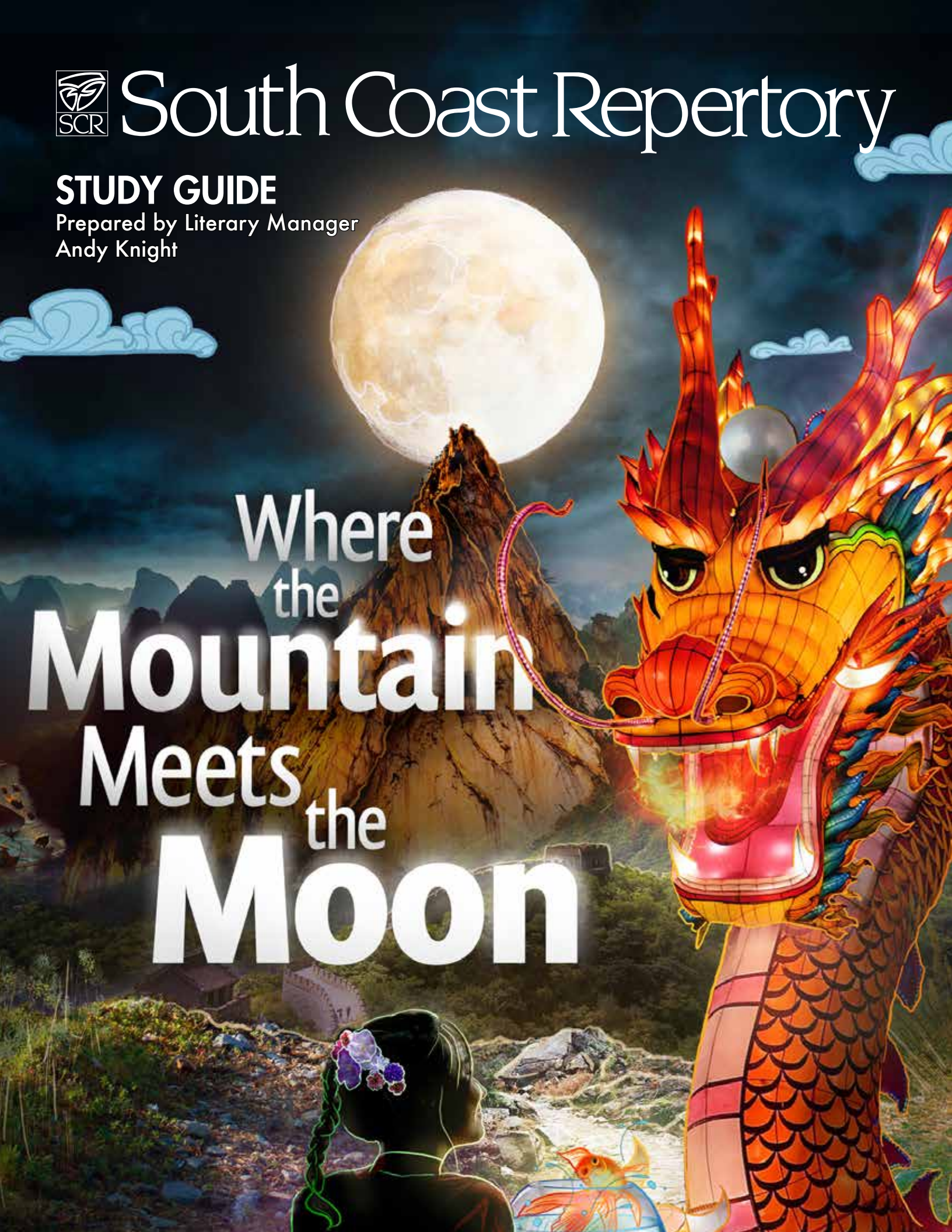


# South Coast Repertory

## STUDY GUIDE

Prepared by Literary Manager  
Andy Knight

# Where the Mountain Meets the Moon



# WELCOME TO THE THEATRE

**T**heatre is an art form that depends on both the artists and the audience. A performance is influenced by an audience, just as an audience is influenced by a performance. With this play, the artists and staff of South Coast Repertory have created a special new world for you. Sometimes that world is so exciting that you can barely hold still. But remember: once the play begins, you are connected to all the other people in the audience, as well as to the actors on the stage, because you're all in the same room. The actors can see you, hear you and sense you, just as you can see, hear and respond to them. Your attention, involvement, responses and imagination are a real part of each and every performance. The play can actually be made better because of you!

## STUDENT TIPS FOR THEATRE TRIPS

- Stay with your group at all times and pay attention to your teachers and chaperones.
- Take your seat in the theatre *before* going to the bathroom or getting a drink of water.
- Make yourself comfortable while keeping movement to a minimum.
- Do not stand up, walk around or put your feet on the seat in front of you.
- Absolutely no chewing gum, eating or drinking in the building.
- No backpacks, cameras or electronic devices are permitted in the theatre.
- Feel free to talk quietly in your seats before the show.
- Show your appreciation by clapping for the actors at the end of the play.
- After the lights come back up, wait for the ushers to escort your group out of the theatre.

## THEATRE VOCABULARY

- **Backstage** The space behind the acting area, unseen by the audience.
- **Blocking** The movement onstage designed by the director and performed by the actors.
- **Box Office** A windowed space at the front of the theatre building where tickets are sold.
- **Choreography** The art of creating and arranging dances onstage.
- **Cue** The last words or action of an actor immediately preceding the lines or business of another actor.
- **Downstage** The part of the stage closest to the audience. At one time, stages were raked, or sloped, with the lower (“down”) part closest to the audience, and the higher (“up”) part farther away.
- **Green Room** A room near the stage where actors await entrance cues and receive guests. The room’s name comes from Elizabethan times, when actors waited on a real “green” (or patch of grass).
- **Matinee** A morning or afternoon performance of a play.
- **Props** All the hand-held items and stage furnishings, including furniture, that are physically used by the actors.
- **Rehearsal** Time used by performers to practice privately before a performance in front of an audience.
- **Script** The text of the play, including dialogue and stage directions, all written by the playwright.
- **Upstage** The area of the stage farthest away from the audience and nearest to the back wall.



# THE PLAY

## THE STORY OF *WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE MOON*

**Y**oung Minli lives in the Village of Fruitless Mountain with her Ba and Ma. The mountain is barren—nothing grows on the hard, dry soil—and the villagers are very poor. To explain their hardship, Ba tells Minli the story of Jade Dragon, who used to bring rain to keep the land lush and fruitful. The ungrateful villagers of the past, however, didn't appreciate the bounty that Jade Dragon brought them and, eventually, she punished them with a drought. Seeing how the villagers suffered, Jade Dragon's children flew down to Earth and transformed themselves into the four great rivers. Jade Dragon, moved by her children's sacrifice, wept and then joined them on Earth as the Jade River. But Fruitless Mountain, the broken heart of Jade Dragon, remained desolate—and will remain so until the heart of Jade Dragon is reunited with at least one of her children.

Minli loves Ba's stories and wishes she could change her family's fortune. One day, she receives advice on where to begin from the most unlikely of characters—her pet goldfish. In exchange for her freedom, the goldfish tells Minli to ask the Old Man of the Moon for advice and gives her directions to Never-Ending Mountain, where the Old Man lives. Determined, Minli leaves her parents a note and sets off in the night.

In the forest outside her village, Minli meets and befriends a dragon with a pearl on his head. Dragon was born out of a painting created for the pompous and greedy Magistrate Tiger, whom Minli remembers from many of Ba's stories. The painter, Chen, using magic ink made from the stones of Fruitless Mountain, painted the dragon eyeless, flightless and with a pearl on his head to teach Magistrate Tiger a series of lessons. But Magistrate Tiger considered the painting merely unfinished—and added the eyes himself. Suddenly, Dragon came to life and, in doing so, destroyed Magistrate Tiger's home. Many years have passed, but Magistrate Tiger, whose spirit transformed into the evil Green Tiger after he died, still hunts for the dragon who wronged him. Although Dragon is unable to fly, Minli asks him to join her on the journey to Never-Ending Mountain.



Did you know that *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is based on a children's novel written and illustrated by Grace Lin? First published in 2009, it received a Newbery Honor in 2010. The musical adaptation was written by Min Kahng (book, music and lyrics) and premiered at Bay Area Children's Theatre in 2014.

Perhaps the Old Man of the Moon can help Minli's family and give Dragon the gift of flight.

In the City of Bright Moonlight, Minli and Dragon search for the Borrowed Line, a secret key to reaching the top of Never-Ending Mountain. Minli believes she's found it when the king of the city gives her a page from the Book of Fortune; its message—a single line of text—can only be read by moonlight. Dragon believes he's found the Borrowed Line in a piece of red string given to him by a lion statue on the outskirts of the city. Neither is sure who has the real thing.

After they're attacked by the Green Tiger and then rescued by the kind citizens of Moon Rain Village, Minli and Dragon finally arrive at Never-Ending Mountain—with both their Borrowed Lines intact. A series of unsuccessful attempts to reach the top lead them to realize that they both have the Borrowed Line, and they create a kite using the string and paper. When the paper reaches the Old Man of the Moon, Minli is granted the ability to use the red string as a bridge of sorts to journey to the mountain's top.

Once Minli reaches the Old Man of the Moon, she's disappointed to learn that he will only answer one question. Thinking of her friend, Minli decides to ask why Dragon cannot fly. Upon learning the answer, she returns to the bottom of the mountain and removes the pearl from Dragon's head; it was painted there by Chen to teach Magistrate Tiger how his greed weighed him down. Suddenly, Dragon can fly.

Dragon and Minli fly home to Fruitless Mountain, and as they arrive, the land around them transforms into green, fertile earth. Dragon—who was created using ink from the stones of Fruitless Mountain—is, after all, a child of Jade Dragon and has been reunited with his mother by entering the village. Minli is also reunited with her parents and, in light of their good fortune, Ba renames their home *Fruitful* Mountain.

**Minli costume design by Anthony Tran.**

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

## BEFORE THE SHOW

1. Have your students read Grace Lin's *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* on their own—or read it aloud as a class. After reading, ask your students to:
  - a. Recall the plot's main events.
  - b. Identify the story's themes and underlying messages
2. Ask the students to identify other books, films or television shows that feature a central character who goes on a quest or journey. What did they find exciting about these stories?
3. Discuss the power of stories in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. How did the many stories help Minli on her journey? What did they teach her?
  - a. Ask the students if they had a favorite story in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. If so, which one and why?
  - b. Ask the students to connect the tradition of storytelling to their own lives. Do they have a family member or a friend who likes to tell stories? If so, what kind of stories do they tell?
4. Many of the characters and events in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* were inspired by the Chinese folk stories that author Grace Lin read during her childhood (and then rediscovered as an adult on her trips to Hong Kong, China and Taiwan). Have the students do research on Chinese fairy tales and share their favorite one with the class.
5. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* is full of author Grace Lin's colorful and intricate illustrations. These were inspired by actual places she visited on her travels. (For more about Lin's inspiration, see the "Behind the Story" section at the end of her book.) Have the students research photographs of ancient Chinese architecture and then use those images as inspiration as they illustrate their own scene from *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*.
6. When Minli reaches the Old Man of the Moon, she's only allowed to ask one question and faces a difficult decision. Ask the students what they would ask the Old Man and why.
7. Discuss the difference between fiction and drama and explore what it means to "adapt" a book into a play.
8. Discuss the different jobs involved to bring a production like *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* to life. Have the students research the occupations on this list and share what they find with the class:
  - a. Actor
  - b. Director
  - c. Playwright
  - d. Composer
  - e. Music Director
  - f. Designer
  - g. Stage Manager
  - h. Stage Crew



## WORDS, WORDS, WORDS!

Match these words with their definitions and then listen for them during the performance.

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|---------------------|--|
| 1. Reverie          | a. A bad situation or condition  |
| 2. Pompous          | b. The state of being lost in thought especially about positive things                 |
| 3. Brazen           | c. Behaving in a way that shows you think you are better than other people             |
| 4. Prosperous       | d. A piece of personal property handed down in a family from one generation to another |
| 5. Stern            | e. Very strict and serious   |
| 6. Prestidigitation | f. Acting in a very bold and shocking way without shame                                |
| 7. Benefactor       | g. To have understood something incorrectly  |
| 8. Heirloom         | h. Showing success, health and good fortune  |
| 9. Misconstrued     | i. A cleverly performed magic trick or deception                                       |
| 10. Plight          | j. Someone who helps another especially by giving money                                |

Answer key on p.9 of this study guide.

## AFTER THE SHOW

### Discussion About the Theatre

Hold a class discussion when you return from the performance and ask the students about their experience attending live theatre

1. What was the first thing you noticed about the theatre? What did the stage look like?
2. Discuss the technical elements of the production—the sets, costumes, lights and sound. Ask the students what they liked best and why. How did these elements help tell the story of Minli and her fantastical journey.
3. Discuss the ways in which this musical was surprising. Was the story told in the same way that you imagined it would be?
  - a. How did the songs add to the storytelling?
4. How is attending a live performance different from attending a movie? How does your experience change when you know that the story is being performed live and that the actors can see and hear you?

### Discussion about the Play

1. What was your favorite moment in the play? What was the funniest? What was the most surprising?
2. Did you have a favorite character in the play? If so, who and what made them interesting to you?

3. Did you notice any differences between the book and the musical adaptation? How did that change your understanding of the story?

4.

Many of the stories in *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* are interconnected through character and the clues they offer Minli about how to change her family's fate. How many of the stories do you remember, and what did each one reveal?

5. Like Minli, Ba and Ma also go on a journey of sorts. What did Ma and Ba learn while Minli was gone?



Goldfish costume design by Anthony Tran.

# ACTIVITIES

**Write Your Own Myth:** A myth is a traditional story, especially one about the early history of a people or that explains something about nature and how the world works. A myth often involves supernatural beings or events. *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* begins with Ba’s story of Jade Dragon, an origin myth that explains the hardship on Fruitless Mountain. If you were writing a novel full of myths, what story would it begin with? Think about your own origin myth and write it down in the space below.

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## LETTERS OF THANKS

**G**ive the students the opportunity to write letters of thanks to SCR describing the most memorable aspects of attending a performance of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, and what they enjoyed most about their visit to SCR.

**South Coast Repertory  
Attn: TYA  
PO Box 2197  
Costa Mesa, CA 92628-2197**

**Draw Your Own Dragon:** Dragon tells Minli that he wasn't "born the way most creatures are" but, instead, is a painting that came to life. Here's your chance to draw your own dragon. Think about the detail with which Painter Chen created Dragon—with no eyes and a pearl on his head. What features does your dragon have?

(And don't worry if your dragon doesn't come to life—it's hard to find magic ink!)



# RESOURCES

## More about the Author Grace Lin

Grace Lin's official website: <https://www.gracelin.com/>

Grace Lin's blog: <http://www.gracelinblog.com/>

Grace Lin on the Penguin Random House website: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/authors/17673/grace-lin>

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## More about the Adaptor/Composer Min Kahng

Min Kahng's official website: <https://www.minkahng.com/>

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## More about Director Jennifer Chang

Jennifer Chang's official website: <http://www.changinator.com/>

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## More about *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*

Educator's Guide for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* (novel):  
[https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/MIDDLEGRADE\\_WHERETHEMOUNTAIN\\_EDGUIDE.pdf](https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/MIDDLEGRADE_WHERETHEMOUNTAIN_EDGUIDE.pdf)

Activity Booklet for *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* (novel):  
[http://www.gracelin.com/media/file/wtmmtm\\_activitybooklet.pdf](http://www.gracelin.com/media/file/wtmmtm_activitybooklet.pdf)

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## Miscellaneous Resources

"Read Globally: 9 Folktales, Fables, and Stories That Introduce Chinese Culture and History to Kids" from Brightly: <https://www.readbrightly.com/stories-that-introduce-chinese-culture-history-to-kids/>

"14 Most Beautiful Small Towns in China" from touropia.com (images):  
<https://www.touropia.com/small-towns-in-china/>

Chinese Fairy Tales, Folk Tales and Fables from fairytalez.com: <https://fairytalez.com/region/chinese/>

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## Vocabulary answer key:

1.b, 2.c, 3.f, 4.h, 5.e, 6.i, 7.j, 8.d, 9.g, 10.a

Green Lion costume design by Anthony Tran.

