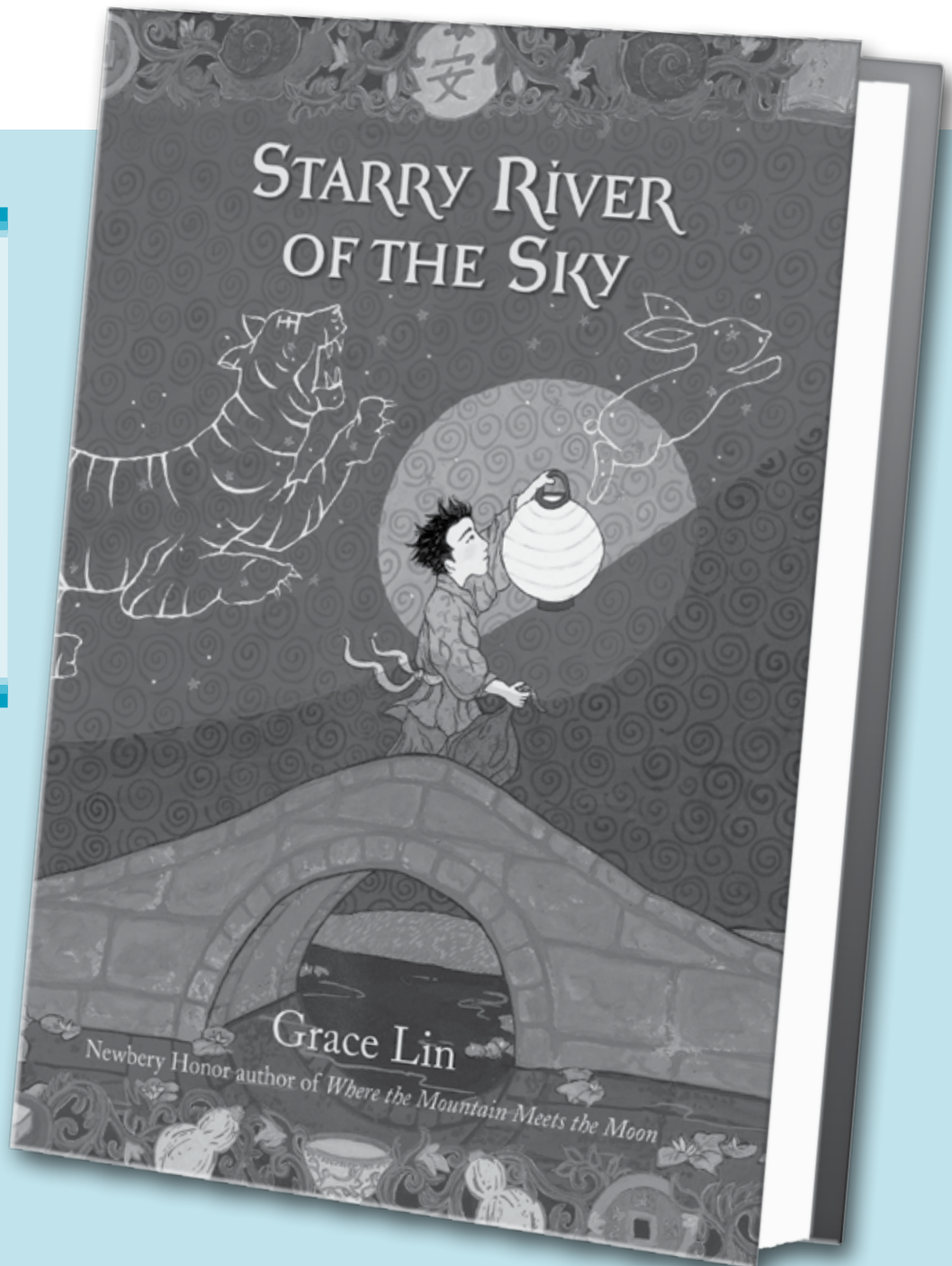


STARRY RIVER OF THE SKY

Curriculum connections

- ❖ Family
- ❖ Loyalty
- ❖ Traditions
- ❖ Folklore

Ages: 8 - 12



by
Grace Lin

BUILDING BACKGROUND

The Day of 5 Poisons

The 5th day of the 5th lunar month was traditionally considered an unlucky time in Ancient China. It fell at the beginning of summer when many poisonous animals were active and diseases were quickly spreading. People tried to protect themselves by drinking realgar wine, wearing special charms, or drinking wine mixed with cinnabar (the mineral mercury comes from). Having a basic understanding of these practices builds a foundation for students as they begin reading *Starry River of the Sky*.

To help students prepare for reading, discuss these cultural practices and introduce the idea of the “5 poisons” or the “5 noxious animals.” Historical documentation refers to these animals as the snake, scorpion, centipede, toad, and spider. Occasionally, the lizard replaced the spider. Show photographs of ancient charms designed to protect wearers from the 5 poisons, and then have students design their own. The website www.primaltrek.com shows many examples of charm artifacts and www.asianart.org has photographs of a jade talisman depicting the 5 poisons on a tiger. Have students study the examples and then create their own 5 poisons charm design. Students may wish to use clay or other mediums to take their designs from idea to finished creation.

VISUALIZATION

Realia Similes

Realia, everyday objects used in teaching, are often used to teach vocabulary to students learning another language. They allow students to connect the familiar (the object) with the unfamiliar (the name of the object). Grace Lin uses similes throughout *Starry River of the Sky* that are extremely descriptive, but in many cases culturally significant.

To truly understand the similes, have students bring in examples of “realia” to illustrate the similes. Begin by identifying similes in the story, such as “compressing him like meat in a dumpling,” or “muscles as soft as uncooked tofu,” or “a face as friendly as an angry tiger.” Then, challenge each student to bring in an object that helps explain the simile. They might bring in a dumpling, or uncooked tofu, or find a photograph of a roaring tiger. Have each student explain a different simile using realia. Then, discuss together how the similes used in the story reflect the culture and personal experiences of the characters in the story. How does this give the story more depth? Why would these similes be less effective if they compared things outside of the experiences of the characters, such as “tall as a skyscraper?” As a variation, students may want to present their realia, and then have the class guess which simile it is supposed to represent or explain.

VOCABULARY

Define it, Draw it, Act it, Own it

Starry River of the Sky is full of rich vocabulary. Choose several words from each chapter (or have students choose the words) and challenge the class to add the words to their vocabulary. They can begin by reading how the word is used in the book and then discuss its possible meanings with a partner. Next, they can look up the meaning in a dictionary and draw a visual representation or act it out. The final step is to use the word in a new sentence. The drawings, definitions, and example sentences could be collected and displayed on a vocabulary bulletin board. Students should be encouraged to use the new words every day until they feel comfortable with, and “own”, the words.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

Connecting Books

Starry River of the Sky is a companion novel to *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*. While it is not necessary to have read *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon* in order to enjoy this story, it can lend depth to both stories when read together. For students who have already read *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, have them discuss the characters found in both books. What objects are the same? How does the story about the white tiger and the origins of the rice bowl connect the two books? Who might be the ancestors of MinLi? Have students create a graphic organizer to show the connections.

SUMMARIZING

Summary Box

As a culminating activity to assess comprehension, have students think about the main events and main characters in the story. Then, have them create a “summary box” filled with items that help explain the story. For example, they might include a picture of the moon, a drawing of a mountain, a toy toad, and a snail shell. These all represent an aspect of the story. Then, they should attach an explanation to each object discussing why they chose the item and how it relates to the story. Summary boxes should have at least ten items. The explanations should clearly link the item to the story. These summary boxes could also be shared with other classes that have not yet read the book. The items could be shown (without the explanations) to generate interest in the book and help other classes make predictions.

WRITING

Wishful Thinking

Rendi mentions the Mid-Autumn Festival in his story about how Magistrate Tiger ended up with the white rabbit rice bowl. One of the most important festivals in China is the Mid-Autumn Festival. On the night of the full moon, people whisper their secret wishes to the Moon Lady. Ask students to think of their own secret wish. Then, have them write a description of their secret wish. They could either describe the wish itself, or create a story about what happens when their wish comes true.

Powerful Poetry

In the story about Tiwu and the old sage, Tiwu proudly writes a poem about his accomplishments. The ability to capture powerful moments in writing is a skill highly revered in many cultures. Review or introduce several different poetry forms and share examples of famous poems or songs written in response to historic events. Then, have students choose an important event in their life or in history, and write a poem commemorating it. Share the poems with the class, and talk about whether or not this was an easy or difficult assignment. What was most difficult? What was the easiest part?



SOCIAL STUDIES

Dragon Boat Festival Brochure

The 5th day of the 5th lunar month was long considered an unlucky day. Today, it has special significance in Chinese culture. It is the day of the Dragon Boat Festival. Divide students into research groups, and have them learn about the Dragon Boat Festival. Then, have them pretend they are an advertising team, hoping to convince tourists to attend their festival. They should include the history of the festival, pictures of the dragon boats, and at least three activities attendees can enjoy. Students may want to make a brochure, slide show, or poster to share their knowledge.

Rain Dances and Culture

Duke Zhe and his men ridiculed the various ways the peasants tried to make it rain. They shared examples of the dog wedding, burning smoke in front of statues, and throwing dirt on dragon figures. Traditional practices to “make” it rain are found in many cultures. Begin by discussing why rain was (and is) important. Then, have students choose different cultures from around the world, learn about their “rainmaking” rituals and present their findings. They may want to investigate Native American rain dances, the Bulgarian paparuda, or African rainmaking rituals. What is the same about these rituals? What is different?



SCIENCE

Fireflies

Madame Chang captures the light of the fireflies and makes lanterns. Fireflies are fascinating insects, but their population is dwindling around the world. Scientists think it is due to pesticide use and human encroachment. Have students research fireflies and create a project to show what they learned. They could design a backyard habitat to attract fireflies, write a persuasive letter designed to encourage communities to save fireflies, create a poster showing the different types of fireflies, demonstrate how fireflies communicate, or write a poem that shares facts about fireflies. Students should submit documentation and references to show where they got their information.

Moon Colony Proposal

The moon has captured the imagination of people throughout time. Some people today believe we should colonize the moon. There is even an international treaty that says no nation can claim sole ownership, so any colony would require international cooperation. Working in groups, have students pretend they are going to colonize the moon. What major obstacles would they face? What are the benefits? What are the disadvantages? Then, have them create a proposal for their moon colony. Their proposal should show a clear understanding of the atmospheric conditions on the moon, awareness of the obstacles they would need to overcome, and have ideas regarding how basic human needs would be met. They should also include a diagram or illustration of what their moon colony might look like. As an extension, students can write a persuasive letter explaining why their moon colony should be funded and supported.

Jumping Fish Science

Magistrate Tiger is able to train his fish to jump when he plays the qin. Ask students if they think this is possible. Could someone really train animals to jump when they hear music? Are fish smart enough to learn tricks? Give each student an index card. Have them write on one side whether or not they think it would be possible for Magistrate Tiger to train his fish as described in the story. Then, have students research how animals are trained using clickers, conditioning, and rewards. How does the process work? Could it work for fish? As an extension, the class might try training a fish of their own. There are commercial fish-training kits available that take scientific research and put it into practice. After research and experimentation, ask students again if they think it would have been possible for Magistrate Tiger to train his fish. How did their research help explain why the fish jumped when they heard the qin?

ART AND MUSIC AND GAMES

Qin Visualization Drawings

Magistrate Tiger learns to play the qin and impresses Duke Zhe with his dancing fish. The ability to play the qin well (or guqin as it is often referred to today) was considered a sign of refinement in Ancient China. The qin was also very symbolic, each string representing one of the elements. Give students the opportunity to hear qin music, and have them draw or paint as they listen. After paintings or drawings are complete, have students share their artwork and talk about what they visualized while listening. Some recordings by qin masters, along with additional information about this culturally significant instrument, may be found at

<http://www.philmultic.com/home/instruments/guqin.html>

Riddle Me This...

Rendi and his sister are given three questions to solve. Solving riddles is one of the activities traditionally enjoyed as part of several Chinese celebrations. During the Lantern Festival, celebrated at the end of Chinese New Year, riddles are attached to the lanterns. Explore Chinese riddles and challenge students to develop their own. Collect the riddles and make a book of riddles, or read one riddle each day and try to solve them as a class.

CHARACTER EDUCATION

Secret to Peace Survey

Mr. Shan eventually reveals the secret to peace, but there may be many other ideas about the secret to peace. Conduct a class “Secret to Peace” survey, by having each student ask at least five other people (of all ages) what they believe is the secret to peace. In addition, they could consult the writing of poets and philosophers to see what scholars and thinkers throughout time believed was the secret. Compile all of the results and display them. Then, have students choose the idea that makes the most sense to them and write a brief reflection telling why they think it is the secret to peace. Discuss as a class why peace is something to strive for as human beings and as members of a global community.

Secret to Peace Survey

Kindness, truthfulness, humility, and courage are all character traits and qualities most cultures value. Discuss different positive character traits as a class, and then choose three or four to highlight.

Have students find examples of characters in *Starry River of the Sky* who exemplify these traits. Students should use details from the story to explain how each character's actions demonstrate a particular trait. Share as a class. Did any of the traits apply to more than one character in the book? Was everyone's evidence the same? Why or why not?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Chapters 1-3

What does the stowaway, Rendi, realize is missing?
What specific details help him draw this conclusion?

How do Peiyi and Rendi feel about each other?
Explain your answer using evidence from the book.

Why did Peiyi's great grandfather want to move a mountain? What was the result of his efforts?

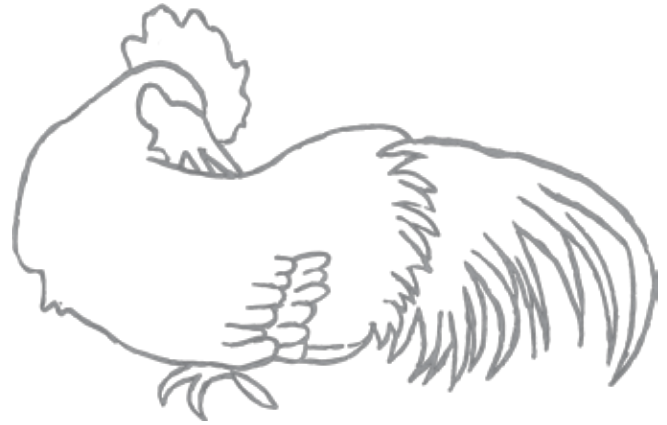
Chapters 4-6

Rendi seems to be more than a simple chore boy.
What clues help you infer this?

Peiyi and Rendi are intrigued by their new guest.
What is she like? What impression does she leave on Peiyi and Rendi?

In the story of "WangYi and the Six Suns," who do you think shows heroism? Is it WangYi or his wife? Why do you think this?

How did MeiLan and Jiming become friends?
Why is the jade bracelet so special to her?
What does MeiLan say will not happen without her bracelet?



Chapters 7-9

What is the lesson behind "The Story of the Rooster's Song?" Why does Madame Chang tell this story?

Peiyi says, "Everyone else leaves. Why won't you?" Why do you think she says this? How does Rendi react?

How does Rendi feel about the toad at first? How do his feelings change? What evidence from the story supports your answer?

Chapters 10-12

How does seeing the Chao family's shrine room help Rendi understand Peiyi better?

In "The Story of the Old Sage," Tiwu is taught a valuable lesson. What lesson does he learn? Why does Madame Chang tell this story?

Chapters 13-15

Rendi sees his reflection in the well and is reminded of his father. Given the details in the story, what is his father probably like?

In Rendi's "Story of the Jumping Fish," how does Magistrate Tiger trick Duke Zhe?

Duke Zhe says, “If a listener truly understands, he can hear what others cannot. Sentiment and sound cannot be separated.” What does he mean by this?

Madame Chang says, “It is better to light a lantern than to bemoan the darkness.” Soon after, she shows the literal meaning of this, but there is also a deeper meaning. What does she do that illustrates the literal meaning? What is the deeper meaning of this quotation?

Why do you think Rendi can hear the wailing sky so clearly, when it seems nobody else can?

Rendi asks Madame Chang if Tiwu ever found the secret to peace. What do you think?

In “The Story of WangYi’s Wife,” what happened to WangYi as the years passed? Why do you think this happened to him? What happened to WangYi’s wife? How did swallowing the pill change her? In what ways did she remain the same?

Chapters 16-18

Using details from the book, describe Mr. Shan. What is Rendi’s opinion of Mr. Shan?

In Rendi’s “The Story of the Three Questions,” the boy in the story is told his father lies and deceives for him. Do you think this is true? Why or why not?

The final riddle in “The Story of the Three Questions” is unsolved. How does Mr. Shan help solve this riddle? In what ways could the answer to this riddle change the lives of Master Chao and Widow Yan? How might it change Peiyi’s life?

Chapters 19-21

Why does Peiyi’s initial excitement dim after talking to MeiLan? Why is solving the snail problem not enough to help MeiLan and Jiming?

Why does Peiyi think the newest guests are superstitious?

When Rendi hears he is serving the Duke of Zhe, he is horrified. Why do you think he has this reaction? What could this mean?

Chapters 22-24

Why does Madame Chang tell “The Story of the White Tiger” to Duke Zhe and his men?

While Rendi walks Mr. Shan home, he is filled with questions. What are some of these questions? What happens to disrupt his thoughts?

Liu and Fang seem to disagree about Rendi. There is some evidence that makes them think Rendi is a chore boy, but some evidence that makes them doubt that. What are their arguments for and against thinking Rendi might be the missing boy? What do you think?

Why do you think Peiyi tells the guests about the Noxious Toad? How does this affect them?

Chapters 25-27

How have the storytelling experiences, encouraged by Madame Chang, helped prepare Rendi for facing Fang and Liu?

After thinking about leaving the Village of Clear Sky almost daily, Rendi is faced with the possibility that he will be forced to leave. How does he feel about this? What is he worried about? What does this show about his true character?

How did Peiyi, Mr. Shan, Madame Chang, MeiLan, Widow Yan, and Mr. Chao work together to save Rendi? What did each person contribute, risk, or sacrifice to help Rendi?

Chapters 28-30

Madame Chang says, “Sometimes the best decision is a painful one, but it is never one made out of anger.” What does she mean by this? Do you think Madame Chang is right? Explain your answer.

Folktales usually offer a moral and an explanation of something that happens in nature. “The Story of WangYi’s Dream” teaches a lesson and offers an explanation for a natural occurrence. What is the moral lesson? According to the story, why does the moon wax and wane?

As Duke Zhe and his men leave in a cloud of dust, Rendi feels a mixture of relief and disappointment. Why do you think he is disappointed? Why do you think he is relieved?

In “The Story of Magistrate Tiger’s Son,” the boy draws the conclusion that his father cares more for the porcelain gang than for him. Why does he think this? How does the boy react to this knowledge? Who do you think is the boy in the story?

Chapters 31-33

Why does Rendi decide to do something about the crying he has been hearing?

As Rendi travels across the Stone Pancake, the setting seems familiar. What does he recognize from Madame Chang’s story? What is slightly different?

Why is Son Wine called “Son Wine?” Do you agree with Rendi that the name should be “Daughter Wine?” Why or why not? How did the arrival of the new baby boy change Magistrate Tiger? How did it change life for the boy’s mother and sister?

When Rendi first told Madame Chang that he could hear the crying of the sky, she referred to his story about the jumping fish. She said, “You must understand in a way none of us do.” What does the toad want? Why does Rendi understand?

Chapters 34-36

How does Rendi help the toad? What was making the toad so uncomfortable?

In what ways are the White Tiger from Madame Chang’s story and Jiming similar and different? In what ways are Rendi and Jiming alike and different?

What happens when Jiming and Rendi roll the moon over the bridge? How does Mr. Shan help? What does Mr. Shan find?

Chapters 37-39

Mr. Shan agrees to guard the moon, and his eyes seem to be much brighter. He no longer seems confused. Using evidence from the story, tell who you think Mr. Shan might be.

Madame Chang says, “Sometimes people must leave.” How does she explain this statement to Peiyi?

How does “The True Story of the Mountain That Moved” differ from Peiyi’s first version of the story?

Chapters 40-42

What happened when the Mountain Spirit became angry? Madame Chang says, “Instead of losing his unhappiness, he lost himself and the things he held dearest.” What does she mean by this? Why would this be an important story for Rendi to learn from?

Rendi asked Madame Chang why she wanted him to tell stories. She explains that people share things about themselves when they tell stories. Looking back at the stories Rendi told, what do they tell you about him? How did storytelling help Rendi learn about himself?

Chapters 43-45

Rendi has many questions as he goes in search of Mr. Shan, but these become swirling thoughts when he falls into the lake. What thoughts does he start to put together?

How does Rendi save the wedding party and wedding guests? What clues help him draw the conclusion that he must lead the parade away from the Stone Pancake?

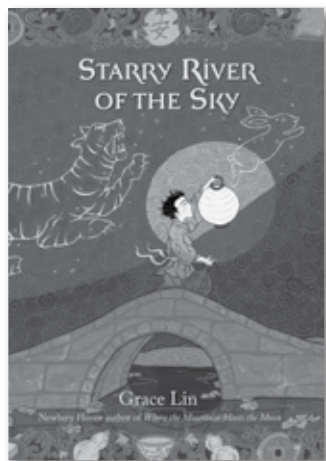
Did Madame Chang keep her promise to Peiyi? Explain your answer.

What does Rendi give Peiyi when he comes to say goodbye? What does he suggest she do with the gift?

Reflection:

Holding onto anger caused many characters in *Starry River of the Sky* to change. In what ways did anger affect the characters in this story? Choose at least three characters and describe and discuss how they were changed by anger. How did letting go of their anger transform them?

about the book



STARRY RIVER OF THE SKY

by Grace Lin

978-0-316-12595-6

The moon is missing from the Village of Clear Sky, and only a young boy named Rendi seems to notice! Rendi, who has run away from his distant home, disdains this poor village and its peculiar inhabitants. But one day a mysterious lady arrives at the village inn and begins to tell astonishing tales—stories that may have more to do with Rendi than he knows.

This second enchanting fantasy from Grace Lin takes place in the world of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, and follows a young boy's journey to return the moon to its place in the Starry River of the Sky.

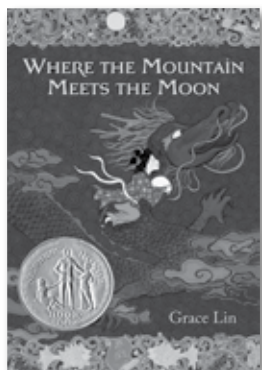
about the author



Author photo by Vigor Photo Studio

Grace Lin is the award-winning author and illustrator of *Where the Mountain Meets the Moon*, *The Year of the Dog*, *The Year of the Rat*, *Dumpling Days*, and *Ling & Ting*, as well as picture books such as *The Ugly Vegetables* and *Dim Sum for Everyone!* Grace is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design and lives in Massachusetts. Her website is www.gracelin.com.

other books by Grace Lin



WHERE THE MOUNTAIN MEETS THE MOON

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LING & TING

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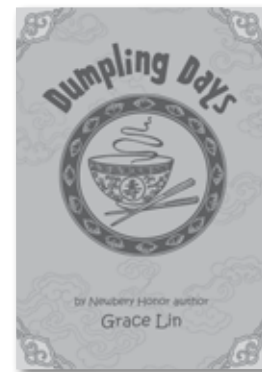
YEAR OF THE DOG

HC 978-0-316-06000-4
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YEAR OF THE RAT

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DUMPLING DAYS

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