

The Legend of Auntie Po Educator Guide

SLC's Educator Guides bring you a go-to set of curated resources, lesson plans, and author insights to help you introduce and share quality literature with your students and teachers. Books are selected by SLC's editing team based on advanced copies of the titles and reviews from their school librarian reviewers.

Set against the backdrop of the Chinese Exclusion Act, on a logging camp in the Sierra Nevadas in 1885, *The Legend of Auntie Po* by Shing Yin Khor (Penguin Random House 2021) follows the story of Mei, the daughter of the head camp cook and a gifted storyteller. Through Mei's friendship with Bee, the daughter of the camp foreman, the experiences of Mei's family and other families on the camp, and through Mei's storymaking, the narrative explores what it means to remake a myth that reflects more fully the experiences of marginalized peoples.



To help you make the most of this title in the library and classroom, we're sharing these resources:

- Curriculum ideas and recommended book pairings below
- [Author Q&A](#) with Shing Yin Khor
- "[Chinese Exclusion Act](#)," a **student activity** from ABC-CLIO's *American History* database that explores the factors that led to the passage of the Chinese Exclusion Act.

Curriculum Ideas & Book Pairings by Danielle Hartsfield

Blending a historical setting with fantastical stories of Po Pan Yin, a tall tale figure dubbed the "mother of all loggers," *The Legend of Auntie Po* offers teaching opportunities across the curriculum in the middle and secondary grades.

Social Studies

Mei and her father are cooks in a logging camp employing many Chinese workers. Early in the story, one of the camp's Chinese employees is attacked during a trip to town, and later, Mei's father loses his job when the camp overseer faces pressure to fire Chinese workers. These events in the story could support social studies teachers with facilitating conversations about the discrimination faced by Chinese Americans in the latter 19th century, which included the passage of the [Chinese Exclusion Act](#) in 1882. Teachers might ask students to discuss how the experiences of the Chinese characters reflect the broader patterns of nativism, xenophobia, and anti-immigration sentiment that pervaded the United States in the late 1800s and early 1900s. Such discussions might also extend to the present as students consider how the treatment of Chinese Americans in the 19th century compares to the troubling rise of hate crimes against Asian Americans occurring today.

As the story closes, Mei, an avid reader with a keen imagination, expresses her aspirations to attend a university when she's older. This moment in the story could prompt students to engage in research about the challenges that Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) faced in obtaining an education, particularly in the era before the Supreme Court's *Brown v. Board of Education* decisions in 1954 and 1955. As one example, students might examine primary and secondary documents about the life of Mamie Tape, a Chinese American student whose family challenged segregation practices in San Francisco schools in 1885 through [Tape v. Hurley](#). Teachers could also pair *The Legend of Auntie Po* with Linda Sue Park's *Prairie Lotus* (Clarion Books 2020), a historical fiction novel that tells the story of Hanna, a half Chinese and half white teen living on the frontier in the 1880s. Hanna perseveres in pursuing her educational and professional goals despite the prejudice she experiences. Reading the books together could deepen students' understanding of the ways racism impacted the lives of BIPOC in the days of westward expansion in the United States.

Language Arts

While *The Legend of Auntie Po* may be shared in social studies classrooms, it also affords teaching opportunities for teachers of English language arts. Mei's stories about Auntie Po and her blue buffalo Pei Pei, which are reminiscent of Paul Bunyan and his ox Babe, can

support students in considering the functions of stories such as tall tales, myths, and legends. Students could investigate why these stories exist and how they have changed over time. For teachers in states that have adopted Common Core State Standards, this learning activity could support students across grade levels in mastering the Reading Literature standard.

MLA CITATION

Hartsfield, Danielle . "*The Legend of Auntie Po* Educator Guide." *School Library Connection*, June 2021, schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/LiteratureLesson/2264901.

<https://schoollibraryconnection.com/Content/LiteratureLesson/2264901>

Entry ID: 2264901

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